

Impact of Women's Empowerment on Different Types of Intimate Partner Violence: A longitudinal Cohort Study among Female Garment Workers in Bangladesh

| Ruchira Tabassum Naved¹, Jannatul Ferdous Antu¹, Tanjina Akter¹

¹icddr,b

Introduction

- Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a serious public health and human rights concern.
- The prevalence of lifetime physical and/or sexual IPV is double in Bangladesh compared to the global prevalence (54% versus 27%) [1-2].
- Power imbalance between men and women lies at the core of IPV [3]. Cross-cultural evidence shows IPV is higher in contexts where gender imbalance in power favours men.
- Compared to their non-working peers, the female garment workers (FGWs) are in an advantageous position in terms of income-earning, a widely recognized dimension of empowerment.
- However, FGWs do not constitute a homogeneous group, and variations in the level of empowerment may influence their risk of IPV.

The prevalence of lifetime physical and/or sexual IPV is double in Bangladesh compared to the global prevalence (**54% versus 27%**).

Study Objective

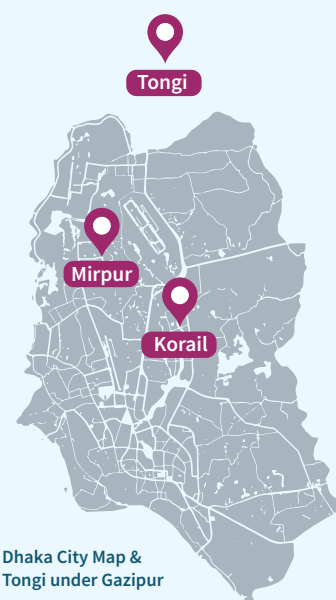
To examine the impact of different dimensions of women's empowerment on different types of IPV among FGWs in Bangladesh using longitudinal data.

Methods

Study setting and participants

Data for this study came from a cohort of FGWs residing in three urban slums: **Korail, Mirpur, Tongi**

Between 2022 and 2024, participants were interviewed five times at six-month interval. The study initially included 778 women aged 15-27, and 600 were successfully followed up in the fifth round. These 600 women were included in the current analyses.



Dhaka City Map & Tongi under Gazipur

Measurement and analysis

Outcome variables (from Round 5):

Exposure to the number of acts of **emotional, physical, and sexual IPV** in the last 12 months, measured using the modified conflict tactic scale (CTS2) [4]. Higher IPV score reflects exposure to higher number of IPV acts.

Exposure variables (from Round 1):

Empowerment in **decision-making, voice and mobility** was measured using the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey and Women Agency Scale-61 [5-7]. Higher empowerment score reflects greater empowerment.

Analysis

Linear regression analyses were used. The models were controlled for confounders based on the Directed Acyclic Graph (DAG) to address over- or under-controlling.

Findings

Background characteristics of FGWs

Approximately 90% of the FGWs were aged 20-27 years (Table 1). Overall, education was low, with a mean of 6 years. Child marriage was high in the sample (68%).

Table 1: Background characteristics of FGWs, n=600

Characteristics	Mean / %
Age, %	
15-19 years	10
20-24 years	55
25-27 years	35
Mean years of education (range)	6 (0-15)
Age at marriage, %	
Before 15 years	19
15-17 years	49
18 years or older	32

Empowerment of FGWs

The empowerment scores (0-18) were divided into tertiles. Most of the FGWs (81%) fell into the category of moderate decision-making agencies. Almost no FGW had high agency in mobility or voice.

Table 2: Empowerment of FGWs by dimension and tertile, n=600

Dimensions	Tertiles (%)		
	Low	Moderate	High
Decision-making	8	81	11
Voice	53	47	0.0
Mobility	51	49	0.3

Four in five FGWs experienced emotional IPV, one in three – physical IPV, one in two – sexual IPV and two in three – physical and/or sexual IPV during the last 12 months (Figure 1).

The results show the following impacts of different dimensions of women’s empowerment on different types of IPV among FGWs (Table 3).

- Increase in **decision-making** score reduced the risk of emotional IPV.
- Increase in **voice** score reduced the risk of sexual IPV.
- Increase in **mobility** score reduced the risk of physical IPV.

Figure 1: Prevalence of different types of IPV among FGWs, last 12 months, n=600

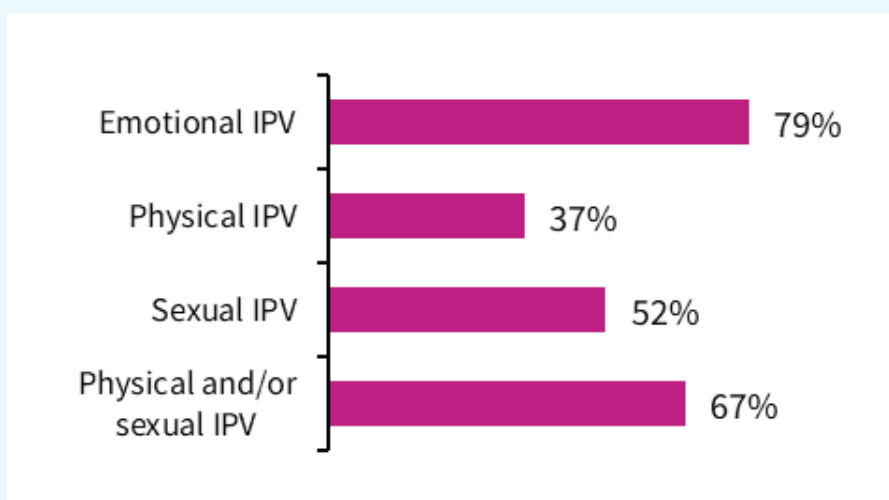


Table 3: Causal impact of different dimensions of empowerment on different types of IPV, n=600

Variables	Different types of IPV, Coef (SE)		
	Emotional	Physical	Sexual
Decision-making	-0.06 (0.02)**	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.07 (0.01)**
Voice	-0.05 (0.03)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.05 (0.02)**
Mobility	0.01 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.02)**	-0.02 (0.02)

**p-value<0.01; *p-value<0.05

Discussion and Recommendation

- IPV prevalence was higher among FGWs compared to the national prevalence.
- Different dimensions of women’s empowerment impacted different types of IPV differently.
- Each dimension of empowerment examined provided protection against at least one type of IPV.
- In order to reduce IPV policies and programmes should be designed to empower female garment workers.

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Advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (AdSEARCH) by icddr,b
68, Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Sarani, Mohakhali, Dhaka 1212

Email: adsearch_official@icddr.org | **Website:** adsearch.icddr.org

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