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**TRANSFORMING MEN - SHIFTING
GENDER RELATIONS**

*AN EXPLORATION INTO COVAW'S EXPERIENCE OF
WORKING WITH MEN TO REDUCE DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE*

JYOTI DHINGRA



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Jyoti Dhingra

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Introduction

Bangladesh has the dubious distinction of ranking first in domestic violence. Reports indicate that more than half the married women in the country have been subjected to physical violence by their husbands, at some point in their marital lives.¹ This alarmingly high incidence of violence against women is indicative of a silent epidemic, mutely accepted by the women themselves, and largely ignored by the society. An interplay of socio-cultural and economic factors perpetuates domination of men, and sustain women's lower status within family and society. More than two thirds of men in the country consider violence against women as acceptable, and under certain circumstances even justified.²

CARE Bangladesh's "Cost of Violence Against Women" (COVAW) seeks to change the family dynamics by helping men appreciate the social and economic implications of violence against women on families and society. COVAW, funded by USAID, is a three year initiative, located in three regions in Bangladesh. The project uses a combination of research, capacity building and educational strategies to bring about transformative behavior amongst men and women. CARE Bangladesh's current projects, funded by USAID and the European Commission in Tangail, Dinajpur and Sunamganj, provide an entry point to work with the communities in 24 villages. The COVAW works directly with communities in Tangail. In Dinajpur and in Sunamganj the Society for UDDOG, South Asia Partnerships - Bangladesh (SAP-B), and Jaintia Shinnomul Songstha (JASHIS), are COVAW's implementing partners.

As COVAW reaches the mid way point, it is important for the project to understand the depth and the process of changes taking place at the individual, family and community levels. This proposed study would help document the degree of change at individual level, family and at the community level. The analysis would assist in documenting the process of change for learning, training, knowledge management and campaign purposes.

¹ UN Division for the Advancement of Women; A statistical overview challenges in and gaps in data collection and approaches for overcoming them; Expert Group Meeting 2005

Study Methodology

This qualitative investigation was designed to provide insights into the attitudinal and behavioral changes of selected project participants. The research is expected to help understand the causes of domestic violence, its impact on the abuser and the abused from the perspective of men. Since men are the main focus of COVAW project, it was decided to conduct a study only on selected men, their attitudes and their behaviors. The study would identify the changes manifested amongst the selected male respondents. Additionally, the study was expected to clarify the key elements of the process that were instrumental in facilitating, or obstructing these changes.

The Case Study approach was used to identify the changes amongst selected individuals. It was designed to help re-construct reality as defined and perceived by the individual.

- **Selection of cases:** The study, with the help of the project, identified those men who had demonstrated positive change in their behavior as confirmed by the community volunteers. The experience of these selected individuals would provide useful information for the project to understand how change takes place, and how it is supported, or thwarted, at the individual and community levels.
- **Data Collection:** A case study format was prepared and field tested. For each of the selected individual, informed consent was sought. All respondents were assured of confidentiality. In cases where the selected respondent felt uncomfortable with the process, the interview was abandoned.
- **Validation:** After each interview was completed, the interviewers identified members of the community who could provide additional insights into the respondents' behavior. Members of the various community groups, neighbors, community volunteers helped understand the degree to which the respondent had changed.
- **Time Frame:** The case studies were collected over a period of six weeks between November and December 2010.

The following sections present the 15 case studies on men from the three areas where COVAW is operational. The case studies are grouped under each region. The case studies provide relevant contextual information; describe the changes in each of the respondents and the results of these changes.

The final section of the report provides a synthesis of key findings; drawing commonalities and highlighting unique features of the cases.

TANGAIL

ABDUL GAFUR

**Pathalkaandi Village,
Buapur Upazila,
Tangail**

I used to feel bad after beating her.

Background Information: Abdul Gafur is a small man, about 40 years of age. Abdul has lived in this village for the past 15 years. He has four brothers and three sisters. All members of Abdul's family are illiterate. His father was a day laborer. Abdul himself, and his all his brothers are day laborers as well. All his sisters are married.

Family History: Abdul Gafur has been married for 18 years. His wife is also from Tangail district. She has never been to school. She is a housewife. They have two sons and a daughter. The eldest son is 13. Both sons are going to school. The daughter, who is seven, is not yet going to school. Abdul says he will be enrolling her in school soon.

Economic Status: Abdul and his family live in a one room house with a tin roof. There is no electricity. Water is available from a tube well. The house has a sanitary latrine. Abdul only owns the house he lives in. Besides two cows, Abdul has no other assets. He has only his earnings, which he receives as a daily laborer, to provide for his family's needs.

Association with NGOs: Abdul's wife is a member of the BRAC samity (micro credit group) for the past seven months. It was through her that Abdul got a loan of Tk.5000 to buy a cow. Despite the fact that the loan to buy the cow was received through his wife, Abdul does not acknowledge his wife's contribution. Abdul is appreciative of the economic benefit they have received from being a member of the BRAC Samity. Other than this, Abdul cannot identify any further benefits of being associated with an NGO.

Causes of Domestic Violence: Abdul used to be physically abusive towards his wife. He admits to resorting to violence quite frequently. Any minor thing would have Abdul fly off in a rage, and start hitting his wife. He says he used to beat his wife with his hands, and sometimes also with a stick. Many a times she got injured. Once her arm got cut and started bleeding ("Haat kata geche ek din"). He had to buy medicines for her. Abdul recalls another time when he hit his wife, both her hand and her ear, got hurt.

Impact of Violent Behavior: Abdul says "I used to feel bad after beating her". Abdul's violent actions would lead to physical injuries for which his wife would need medical treatment. His wife's injuries would be severe enough to prevent her from carrying out the daily household activities. Abdul says that the violence would also affect his relationship with his wife. His neighbors around him would treat him as a "bad person". Abdul is able to empathize with his wife's emotional state after being beaten up by her husband. He says that each time he beat his wife her "mon bhenga jai" (her heart would break up). Beyond

the immediate physical and emotional effects of his violent actions, Abdul is unable to identify any lasting negative effect of this violence on his wife. Abdul does not feel his violent behavior had any impact on his children .

Process of Change: Abdus shares that although he used to beat his wife, he has changed in the last few years. He credits COVAW project to this change. The COVAW volunteer helped him understand that the beating of his wife would eventually harm Abdul economically. Abdul recalls that the understanding of the consequences of his violent actions, and the decision to give up violence, was a slow and a gradual process. The discussions with the COVAW volunteer triggered a process of reflection in him. As he started to think over the points raised in the discussions, he began to pay more attention to the implications of violence towards women. After realizing the larger implications of his abusive behavior, he gradually stopped using violence against his wife. “I do not beat my wife now” he says. “Now I try to understand her”.

Abdul attributes changes in his behavior to COVAW volunteers’ work. It was a long process, involving about a year and half of determination to bring about this change. He says “the CARE people helped a lot”. He thinks the process of changing him was not too difficult. But, he would not call it easy either.

Outcomes of Changes in Abdul: Abdul says that process has had various positive outcomes for him. He now feels comfortable discussing his problems with his wife. Earlier, he was unable to discuss these problems with his wife. At that time, he did not think she would be able to understand his problems. Abdul also thinks that his relationship with his wife has improved. There is now intimacy and closeness in their relationship, that was not there before. His family members too appreciate the change in him. Abdul feels his male friends appreciate this change in him. He is not sure if his change has influenced them too. He has not made any conscious attempts to change the behavior of others. Community people too recognize this change in him.

Abdul regards this change in him is permanent. He is confident that he will be able to sustain this change.

Attitudes towards Gender Equality: Abdul considers his sons and daughter to be equals. According to him “they all are his children”. He tries to give them the same treatment to his sons and his daughter. Abdul think he has always considered men and women to be equal. This equality of sexes is not a new concept for him. Abdul feels that the views of the society too are changing. This makes it easier to bring about changes at the family level.

Abdul believes in equal education for both girls and boys. Although his daughter is not in school at the moment, he says she will be enrolled in school when the new school year starts. According to Abdul, it is easier to get girls married if they are educated. He adds that educated women are better able to educate their own children.

Abdul is aware of the legal age of marriage for girls and boys. He is of the opinion that the girls should be married after the age of 18 years. Before this age, girls could have problems during childbirth. Boys should be married after the age of 21 years. This, he says, will be better for their physical health.

Abdul considers dowry as a social evil. Dowry, he says, creates pressure on the girl's family and strains the economic condition of the family. The girl's father can become poor by giving dowry. The system brings unhappiness in the society.

Suggestions for future projects: According to Abdul, majority of the community members want to stop domestic violence. To prevent domestic violence more awareness programs should be implemented at the community level. Abdul says it is hard for some men to change, because they do not understand the negative impact of violence. These men lack of knowledge. If the abusive people realize the problems caused by their violent actions, Abdul thinks they will change.

Shamsur Rahman Khokhon

Rajapur Village, Buapura,
Tangail District

Every one was frustrated by my behavior

Background: Shamsur is about 45 years old. He has lived in this village since he was born. Shamsur is the youngest of three brothers and four sisters. His parents are no more. His mother was a housewife and his father was a “village doctor”. Shamsur’s brothers are all educated. One of them works as a librarian, and the other as a school teacher. His sisters are all married, and are housewives. Shamsur has completed High Secondary Certificate (HSC).

Family Life: Shamsur and his wife have been married for 22 years. His wife is from Rampur, a neighboring village. Shamsur’s wife has passed her Senior School Certificate exam, which must have been unusual 22 years ago, when female literacy in rural Bangladesh was abysmally low. Shamsur and his wife have three children. Their 18 year old daughter is a 1st year student at an Intermediate college. Their two sons are 12 years and 5 years old, respectively.

Economic Status: Shamsur is a farmer, and a wholesale dealer of rice. He cultivates dal (pulses), jute, as well as rice, in his own field. Shamsur owns the home he lives in. It is built of mud and has a tin roof. There is no electricity. The house has a tube well, and a latrine that was installed by Shamsur himself. He possesses a mobile phone. Shamsur owns two bighas of land. He also owns four cows, a goat and some chickens. He is the main provider in the family. With the money he earns, Shamsur is able to provide for the food, clothing and for celebrations during festivals. Shamsur is keen to ensure his children’s education. For this reason he has also hired a house in Buapur, where his wife and children stay during the school term for their education.

Association with NGOs: Shamsur was the Secretary of the Village Development Committee formed by CARE Bangladesh’s SHOUHARDO project. According to Shamsur, the NGO activities help build awareness amongst the villagers, and also provide training on specific topics. Shamsur thinks that the small low interest loans provided by NGOs, and the easy repayment process, make these an attractive option for poor people. Shamsur’s wife has been a member of the Grameen Bank micro credit group. She took a loan of Tk. 5000 six months ago. The money was used by Shamsur to buy fertilizer for his field. He has repaid majority of the loan. Shamsur recognizes his wife’s role in helping him access the loan from Grameen Bank.

Cause of Violence: According to Shamsur, it does not take major issues to cause a man to become violent with his wife. Minor incidents like not finding the food ready on returning home from a hard day’s in the fields, or, if the wife had forgotten to feed the cattle, or the cow ate up the small plants while his wife “gossiped” with the neighbor, could lead to a quarrel. And, sometimes during these fights, the man would end up physically hurting his

wife. Shamsur also recognizes that some men are quick tempered. He also says some men do it because they are not happy with the amount of dowry they have received from their wife's family. These men think dowry is their birth right (joutuker lovira adikore).

In his own case, Shamsur says he would also sometimes physically hurt his wife. Although he does not consider himself to be a short tempered man, but sometimes he would lose his temper and misbehave with his wife. According to Shamsur, his wife is of a domineering personality, and she always tries to impose her opinion on him. This would make Shamsur angry. Sometimes she would get so stubborn, that he would not be able to control his temper, and would end up beating his wife.

Aftermath of Domestic Violence: Shamsur says that in most cases of domestic violence, the wife is not seriously injured. But, there are times when the wife can be severely harmed seriously. In such instances, the husband would have to spend a lot of money for her treatment. Shamsur does not mention if he had to spend money to treat any injuries caused by his violent behavior. In his own case, Shamsur admits that his treatment of his wife was complicating his relationship with his wife and his children. His daughter, and his sons, would be humiliated by his behavior. According to him, they had started to “hate him for ill treating their mother”.

Process of Change: Shamsur feels stopping violence on women is a long term process. It is an awareness building process through which incidence of violence decreases slowly and gradually. He remembers that during SHOUHARDO project, people started discussing this topic. After wards, the COVAW training carried the work forward. The dramas organized by COVAW attracted a lot of people. In Shamsur's view, people are slowly realizing that violence hurts physically, socially and psychologically. Through education and knowledge, men are in the process of changing themselves. This change has come gradually through increased awareness. Shamsur is of the opinion that the villagers and “gonno manno” (respected people) are playing a big role in bringing about this change. Now, if a man beats his wife, people started talking about them. It is humiliating for a man to listen to his bad behavior discussed openly.

In addition to the risk of embarrassment in the community, in Shamsur's case there was another practical factor that compelled him to change. Shamsur feels that in his family his wife takes care of all household responsibilities and also contributes to the family income. He did not want to a long term conflict with her as a result of his behavior. Moreover, Shamsur was mindful of the fact that his continued violence towards his wife would antagonize his children, and they would start going against their father. Every one in his family was getting frustrated by his behavior.

All of these considerations motivated Shamsur to give up violent actions towards his wife. According to Shamsur, he would have lost out if he had not done so. He was mindful of the fact that if he did not stop misbehaving with his wife, his family members and his children would protest. This would be embarrassing to him, and he would lose face in the community.

Outcomes of the Change in Shamsur: Shamsur's decision to give up violence against his wife was accompanied by another change. He started to involve his wife in discussions, and began to pay attention to her opinions. Shamsur is aware that his being attentive to his wife's opinions was a source of amusement for his friends and neighbors. Despite their ridicule, Shamsur persisted in his attempts to develop a more equal relationship with his wife. Shamsur would try and explain to his friends the need to involve their wives. But, sometimes he would just ignore them. Since he is the VDC secretary, he commands respect in the community. People listen to him. He feels he is in a position to influence other men, and convince them not to use violence on women.

Shamsur's Attitudes towards Gender Equality: Shamsur says he has always believed that girls and boys are equal. He feels that these days girls are more responsible than boys. Girls, according to him, work and take care of their families and their parents. He is a strong believer in educating his daughter. Shamsur has noticed that women are doing well in every aspect of life. The Government and the NGOs too are emphasizing women's education. He wants to send his daughter to a Technical Institution to become an engineer. Shamsur has been inspired by his niece, who is an engineer. To ensure his daughter has access to good technical institutions, Shamsur and his family are going to shift to a city. Shamsur is committed to support his daughter's education to the best of his abilities.

Shamsur feels that women are now being considered equal now as compared to the past. Still he thinks that parents feel more anxious about their daughters' safety and well being, as compared to their sons. Social conditions are such that it is not always safe for girls to be outside the home. There are people with bad attitudes who harass girls.

Shamsur feels marriage, at an appropriate age, is important for girls. While he would like to see their daughter get married after graduation, his wife is anxious about their daughter's future. She would like to marry her daughter soon. In Shamsur's view, when a girl is growing up she should marry at the right time; otherwise it becomes difficult to find a suitable groom for her. While he feels education is important and essential, Shamsur thinks that marriage at the right age is equally important. He thinks if girls do not get married at the right age, it becomes difficult to find the right husband for them. He gives an example of his niece who is an engineer. The niece is 30 years and got married only recently. Shamsur says it was really hard to a suitable person for her.

Shamsur is certain he will give dowry when his daughter gets married. There is no doubt in Shamsur's mind about giving dowry. He says, even when his niece got married, her parents gave dowry. There was a demand for dowry, but her parents did not give cash, but gave gifts. Dowry, according to Shamsur, is "gifts by demand".

Shamsur is aware of CARE Bangladesh's efforts to reduce the practice of dowry in the communities. But, he feels that dowry is a deeply entrenched social practice. It is very hard to change people's views. Parents too consider dowry as the means to find a better partner for their daughter. It also helps the young couple's marital life.

According to Shamsur the practice of dowry is on the decline. The awareness programs are helping in reducing the incidence of violence against women. The community is also taking this issue seriously and trying to prevent it. But, his conviction in the practice indicates that he does not think these dowry prevention activities apply to him and his family. Shamsur does not recognize an inherent contradiction in his ambitions to see his daughter well qualified and in his belief in the practice of dowry. Dowry, he says, is his way to ensure that his daughter's life after marriage will be comfortable. The continued existence of these conflicting beliefs highlights how gender equality is being interpreted in the community.

Suggestions for Future projects: Shamsur is of the opinion that women should be made aware on the topic of domestic violence. He feels that women have to learn how to protect and protest. "If she has the awareness then she can prevent violence", he says. According to him, women should know how to raise their voices against violence. COVAW can help them to get this knowledge.

ABDUS SAMAAD

Rajapur Village, Buapur
Tangail

“Women’s education is really important as it makes them more capable”.

Background: Abdus Samaad is a 66 years old man who looks much younger than his years. Abdus Samad has three brothers and two sisters. His father was a farmer who used to cultivate his own land. That piece of land is now a part of a char in the middle of the river. Abdus’s father was also an ‘Imam’ (religious head) of the mosque. According to Abdus’s estimate, his mother is around a hundred years old. Abdus’s brothers have all been to school. His eldest brother, who has completed schooling upto class X, is a farmer and an ‘Imam’. Abdus and his younger brother have studied till class VIII. The younger brother is a shopkeeper. None of the sisters have been to school.

Family History: Abdus has been married for 44 years. His wife is from another village in the same union. His wife is also class VIII pass. She is a housewife, and also helps him in his vegetable cultivation. Abdus and his wife have four sons. The two older sons are construction workers, and live in Dhaka. The third son helps his father with the business. He is married. The three sons have studied until class VIII. The youngest son is studying in Class IX. Abdus, his wife, their sons and their daughter in law live together as a joint family.

Economic Status: Abdus cultivates vegetables on rented land. Abdus says he received training on vegetable cultivation from SHOUHARDO. He says this training has helped him use more scientific methods of cultivation. Abdus, also owns a boat that he uses to provide transportation services. This, in fact, is his main source of income. Sometimes his son manages the boat business for him. As a freedom fighter, Abdus gets Tk. 2000 as an honorarium from the Government. His two sons, who work in Dhaka as construction workers, send money for festivals

The family lives in house made of tin. There are three rooms in the house. There is no electricity. The house has a sanitary latrine and a tube well. The family owns a transistor radio and two phones. Abdus’s house is on rented land. He pays Tk.1200 as rent for the 15 decimals of land he rents. The three bigha land that he owned is now submerged in the river. Abdus owns two cows and eight rams.

Association with NGOs: Abdus is a member of the SHOUHARDO formed Village Development Committee. He has received several trainings from CARE. He appreciates the training he has received on cultivation techniques and the quality of seeds that CARE provided. Through these training programs he has been able to improve his economic condition. He adds that the CARE training has benefitted several people in the community. Abdus has observed several changes in the community in the last few years. He credits CARE with the changes in the community, especially the changes in the cultivation

practices. According to Abdus, people are using more scientific methods now to cultivate land. As a result of these improved practices and better seeds, they are able to increase the crop yield, and enhance their economic condition. Abdus feels that the COVAW project has helped the community change their views about women in the community.

Causes of Violence against women: According to Abdus, many men use violence against their wives. He says there are several causes that can trigger violent reactions against women. If a man is unable to earn money properly, he gets angry. He takes his anger out on his wife by beating her up for minor things. Abdus says some men are addicted to drugs. They pass their days in the haze of drugs, and do not earn much. They too beat their wives. Violence, Abdus feels, can be verbal and physical.

Abdus admits that before COVAW, he too used to use violence against his wife. He recalls that one day on returning home he found that the food had not been cooked the way he liked it. He started shouting at his wife. During this verbal exchange his wife addressed him as 'Tumi' (a term used for younger people), instead of 'Apne' a respectful term used to address an older person) which is the term she normally used for him. Abdus reasoned that since his mother never called his father 'Tumi', but always used the term 'Apne' to address her husband, why should his wife insult him so. This was enough to get Abdus to start hitting his wife.

Aftermath of violence: After physically hurting his wife Abdus says he used to feel bad. His wife did not get physically injured, but her heart was hurt. Abdus cannot imagine that this violence had any effect on other women, or his children, in the family. His sons forbade him to resort to such actions. It is only now he realizes how harmful his actions used to be.

Process of change: Abdus says he has changed only because of COVAW's activities. Through the training he has started to appreciate the role of women and their importance to society. He has begun to understand the negative effects of domestic violence from the COVAW volunteers. Abdus attends the COVAW meetings regularly. Through these meetings and discussions, his knowledge has changed. And this is what has helped him change his behavior towards his wife. Abdus feels that the change took place gradually, and for this reason it was not difficult for him. The change is internal; it is based upon changed knowledge levels. Now he thinks any kind of violence would be bad for the family and society.

Outcome of change: Before this change, Abdus used to frequently abuse his wife. He also used to be verbally abusive towards his wife. He has changed his behavior towards his wife. He is now more intimate with his wife. Now, he feels that both of them are united in caring for their family. Abdus says that now he always takes her opinion. Abdus says he takes decisions in the family after discussion with his wife.

The other members of the family are appreciative of this change. He thinks that this change in him has resulted in positive changes in his wife too. Abdus feels that due to this change, his wife has also become more caring towards him. His friends view the changes in Abdus

positively. He feels that the community people have been supportive of his efforts too. These people used to tell him not to abuse his wife.

Attitude towards Gender Equality: Abdus says that he did not always think that men and women were equals. He has now revised his opinions about women and their capabilities. Now he thinks that women are as capable as men, and can play a significant role in the society. He has also, of late, become more conscious about women's rights. This change in him has occurred slowly and gradually. It was when the COVAW volunteers started to talk about women, and their role in the society, that Abdus began to pay more attention to women's rights and their importance to the society. According to Abdus, these changes in him started about a year ago.

Abdus is convinced that this change in his attitude towards women is permanent. There is no conflict in his mind about women and their roles. In his own mind, Abdus can now rationalize the equality between men and women. After all, men come into this world through women, he says. Without women, men cannot exist. Abdus admits that he did not always think so. It was only through the COVAW training, he started to think like this. Abdus feels that women continue to be in abusive relationships because they have no other place to go to. They have no alternatives, other than to stay with their husband.

Abdus says, "Women's education is really important as it makes them more capable". He believes that even if the resources in a family are limited, girls' education should not be compromised. Now even the government is providing free education for girls. According to him, the community too is now more aware about women's education. If the family supports women's education then it would be easier for women. If the mother is educated then she can take better care of her children's education.

Abdus says girls should be at least 18 years of age at marriage. Before this age, girls can suffer many problems during pregnancy and childbirth. Early pregnancy can cause serious health problems for a young girl. Boys should get married after 21 years of age.

Suggestions for future projects: According to Abdus, education is essential to prevent violence. He feels educated men are never violent against women. Now getting education is easier than before; higher education levels are resulting in a decrease in violence levels against women. Poverty, he thinks is also one of the causes of violence. When a poor man is unable to get any work, then he comes back home frustrated and starts quarrelling with his wife.

Abdus acknowledges the role of COVAW in helping him appreciate the role of women in the society. Abdus feels that to prevent violence in the community, more awareness programs are needed. If people in the community are aware of the harmful effects of violence against women, then episodes of violence can be prevented. Abdus is of the opinion that violence against women is on the decline. He thinks COVAW has made people understand the cost of violence. Abdus is of the opinion violence against women is on the decline.

Md.Abdul Sabur

**Patitapara village, Buapur
Tangail**

An educated man never beats his wife.

Background: Abdul Sabur is a 30 year old man. He has been living in this village for the past 13 years. Abdul is the second of four siblings; two brothers and two sisters. Except the youngest sister who is in class six, no one in the family has studied beyond class three. His mother is non literate. Abdul and his father can only write their names. Abdul's father works as an agricultural day laborer.

Family History: Abdul got married six years ago, when he was 24 years old. His wife is from another village in the same upazila. Abdul's wife has studied until class six. Abdul his wife and two sons live independently. The older son is five years old, and the younger is only two years old.

Economic Status: Abdul is currently working as a truck driver's helper. He says he takes whatever work he gets. He has also worked as a rickshaw, or a van puller. Abdul and his family stay in a one-room house made of straw and mud. It has a tin roof. A small kitchen is attached to the house. A pit latrine is available. Abdul has a cell phone. He, and his brothers, own 13 decimals of land. Besides the cell phone and the jointly owned land, Abdul has no other assets, or livestock. He is the main provider in his family.

Association with NGOs: Abdul's wife is a member of the BRAC 'samity' (micro credit group). Besides getting the money at the time of an emergency, Abdul cannot identify any other benefits of the samity to the community. Abdul's family has benefitted from CARE Bangladesh's SHOUHARDO project. A tube well provided by CARE Bangladesh's SHOUHARDO project, is the source of clean drinking water.

Causes of Violence against women: Abdul feels some men use violence against women, because they do not know any better. There are some men who are unable to control their temper. Some men lose their temper if they find their wife is not at home when they return. Others get angry when they find the food not ready on time. Sometimes violence is verbal, and at times it gets physical.

Abdul says he used to beat his wife. Sometimes he used his hands to beat her. Once, during these episodes, her hand got injured. He had to buy medicine for her hand at that time. Abdul is convinced that men are violent because of their lack of knowledge and understanding of the consequences of these actions. He thinks that "an educated man never beats his wife". It is only the uneducated men who resort to violence. They are ignorant and do not understand the negative effects of violence on their wives.

Effect of violence: After these instances of violent behavior, Abdul would get annoyed with himself for having succumbed to his temper. His wife too would get very upset. She would also be in a lot of pain. She would become very tense. But, according to Abdul, these effects were not long lasting. Since Abdul's family is a nuclear family, there were no other women who would get affected by this violence. But, Abdul is of the opinion that the violence would have a negative effect on the children.

Process of Change: "The CARE people talked to me and other people, about this harmful practice" says Abdul. He says the CARE staff helped them understand the consequences of violence against women on the family and society. Abuse of women causes "unhappiness in the family and the society". He says "when I beat my wife, she needs medicines, she cannot do household work, she cannot cook food for me". "All of these have economic consequences" he elaborates.

Abdul has observed that in the past people used to beat their wives frequently. This practice is gradually decreasing as people have become more conscious of this practice and its harmful effects. The change in the community has occurred due to the trainings and meetings CARE arranged for the community. It was through these steps, that Abdul began to realize that his actions were harming his wife and his family. Once he started to understand the impact of his violent actions towards his wife, he decided to change. The change did not occur overnight. It happened gradually. Abdul states that for him the change started around two years ago, when CARE introduced the awareness building program in the community.

His friends have supported him in his efforts. They have helped him appreciate that a "husband's house should be the best destination for a woman". According to Abdul's friends, women are vulnerable, so they need to be taken care of. There other "good people" in the community who have also told him that beating a wife is a deplorable thing, and advised him to leave it. But, Abdul acknowledges that it is not an easy thing to do. Some can, and some cannot control their temper and change their minds. Proper guidance is needed and most importantly people need knowledge, he says.

Impact of Change: Abdul attributes changes in him to COVAW. He now understands the economic and mental implications of violence. Abdul feels that this change in him has had several positive outcomes for him and his family. He is quick to acknowledge the improved relationship with his wife now. He says "I have a very good relationship with my wife now". He feels they are closer as a couple now, than before. They discuss problems together. Their marital life is happy now. The COVAW process has also helped him see women as capable beings now. He thinks women are capable, like men. Other members of the family also appreciate the changes in him.

Abdul feels he has changed for the better permanently. He says he does not need any more support from anyone as the change in him is an internal change, a result of his own thinking. He does not feel that there is anything that can destabilize this resolution to stay away from violent behavior.

Attitudes towards Gender Equality: Abdul thinks men and women are equal because “both are created by Allah”. Abdul regards “women as the nation’s mother, so they should be respected”. But equality according to Abdul does not mean they are the same. According to Abdul, the duties and responsibilities of men and women are different. Men work in the public sphere, and women work in the private sphere. Women’s mobility is limited; they are not able to go everywhere as men can. When asked about these rules of what men and women can do, Abdul is clear that these are useful as they were created by the society and the community.

In Abdul’s opinion “woman need education to change their situation.” He says that if he had a daughter, he would ensure as much education for her as he could afford. He says that only with education can women become as capable as men. He recognizes the irony in women’s need for education to become independent is, in itself, dependent upon the men in the family.

Abdul feels that women should get married only after they are 18 years of age. Before this, early marriage and pregnancy can harm the girl’s body and affect her health. Pregnancy before the age of 18 years, can also risk the life of the young girl. Abdul feels dowry is a “bad system, especially for the poor”. Some fathers have to even sell off their land to find the money for their daughter’s dowry.

According to Abdul, women continue to be in abusive relationships because they do not have any options. If they were to return to their fathers’ home, it would be a dishonorable thing for them. The neighbors would insult these women returning to their parental homes.

Suggestions for future projects: Abdul feels that more programs are needed to create greater awareness. He does not feel that the judicial process can solve all the cases and all the related issues. It is only people who can do so. He thinks everyone should understand the harmful implications of violence against women.

MAHIRUDDIN

**Pathalkaandi Village,
Buapur Upazila,
Tangail**

If my daughters get education, they will be my biggest resource.

Background: Mahiruddin is forty years of age. He is the fourth of eight siblings. Mahiruddin has studied till class VIII. Mahiruddin's father was a sharecropper. One of his siblings works with an NGO. Mahiruddin's mother is still alive and lives with his brother.

Family History: Mahiruddin has been married for 20 years. His wife comes from a village called Ainapur, which is also in Tangail district. His wife is only able to write her name. Mahiruddin and his wife have two daughters. Mahiruddin's elder daughter is 13 years old. She is studying in Class V. The younger one is eight years old. She is in class III.

Economic Status: Mahiruddin and his family live in a small house made with tin. With his brother's help, Mahiruddin was able to install a latrine in his house. Water is available through a hand pump. He does not own radio, TV or a mobile phone. In case of emergency, Mahiruddin uses his brother's mobile phone. Mahiruddin owns 45 decimals³ of land. The only assets Mahiruddin owns are two cows and five chickens. Mahiruddin is the main earning member of his family. Sometimes his wife contributes towards the income through her work with the Labour Contracting Society formed by CARE Bangladesh's SHOUHARDO project. In case of emergencies Mahiruddin relies upon loans from family members.

Association with NGOs: Mahiruddin was the secretary of the Village Development Committee formed by CARE Bangladesh's SHOUHARDO program. His wife was a member of the Labor Contracting society (LCS) formed by SHOUHARDO program. He received a cow through SHOUHRADO. His wife too was able to get work through the LCS. Mahiruddin is appreciative of the health and hygiene education they have received from the projects. They also got support during the floods. Mahiruddin does not restrict education to formal schooling. He considers training and awareness building through SHOUHARDO and COVAW projects, as important education activities as well.

Causes of Violence Against women: Mahiruddin thinks some people have the patience to solve problems; these men have the courage to control their temper. They don't get violent. Others are not like that. They get violent quickly. Mahiruddin thinks sons learn from their father; they think it the father can be violent towards his wife, so can they. Conflict due to poverty is the main cause of violence according to Mahiruddin. He feels that conflict arising from poverty, has to be removed from people's life, for domestic violence to be eradicated.

³ Landlessness is defined as ownership of less than 10 decimals of agricultural land

Mahiruddin also thinks some men are quick tempered and violent by nature. They get “crazy with anger” on small issues and start beating their wives. Sometimes violence stems from quarrel on family matters. Mahiruddin distinguishes between verbal and physical violence. Verbal violence cause mental pressure, he says. Physical violence causes injury and has financial implications as the men have to take care of the women and pay for the treatment.

Mahiruddin says that when he and his wife quarreled on any issue, he would lose his temper and beat his wife. He would slap her, but he never hit her with a stick or any other thing, indicating that slapping is a milder form of violence. Earlier Mahiruddin used to be frustrated with his family’s social and economic position. Now he feels that his family’s social standing has improved. The increase in household income and assets through CARE’s support, has helped him. This has relieved the tension at home.

Aftermath of Violence: When Mahiruddin would beat his wife, she would cry a lot. She was always afraid of the violence in the family. She was never at ease with him. Mahiruddin now recognizes that she would always be tense and nervous, as she was never sure when he would become violent. His mother and sister would get very annoyed with him, when he used to beat his wife. They tried to convince him to stop this violence against his wife. His daughters were afraid of him.

After the violence, when he would calm down, he would feel ashamed of his behavior. He feels that the way he misbehaved with his wife, was humiliating for his social image. At that time he did not care for his image.

Process of Change: Mahiruddin feels he has changed over the last few years. COVAW has helped him understand the outcomes of violence against his wife. He had not examined the impact of violence against his wife before COVAW. Through the various activities undertaken by COVAW he was able to understand that violence causes economic, physical and social damage, and ultimately harms him too. The trainings and discussions helped him to realize that violence is harmful towards his family life. He also began to see how violence affects his family’s relationships with others in the community. He started to notice that because of his violent nature, other people ridiculed his family.

The change in him was gradual. Mahiruddin says he tried to understand himself, and his wife. He also tried to find ways to control his temper. Mahiruddin acknowledges that change was difficult, but not impossible for someone with determination.

Without the support from CARE, Mahiruddin does not think he would have found the energy to change. Mahiruddin says, his mother and sister too helped him understand why he should give up violence towards his wife. Mahiruddin considers any change brought about by knowledge and understanding as permanent. He says these changes in him are permanent; they cannot be lost or destroyed. Mahiruddin thinks he needs further support and information, so he can continue to make other improvements in his life.

Impact of Change: His family members and relatives are happy with the change in Mahiruddin. He controls his temper now and tries not to misbehave with his wife. Now his relationship with his wife has also improved. His wife is no longer afraid of him. He feels that she has become closer to him. His mother, his sisters and elder brother too appreciate the changes in Mahiruddin's behavior. His brothers had always tried to stop him. Now they are happy that he has changed.

Mahiruddin's friends are not literate. They don't understand the complexity of the situation. Mahiruddin has helped them understand the causes and implications of violence. Some of his friends are learning to control their temper, and their tendencies to be violent towards their wives.

Views on Gender Equality: Mahiruddin has two daughters; he has always thought of boys and girls as being equal. Although he says he would have liked a son, it is not something he is concerned about. His attitude towards his wife has changed since COVAW started working in the village. Knowledge on violence against women has helped him change his mind. Now he knows there are laws on violence against women introduced by the government.

Mahiruddin's father never understood the importance of education, and how valuable it is as a tool for changing people's lives. His father did not appreciate the need for educating his daughters. Mahiruddin's younger sister went to school only after struggling against the family. It was with Mahiruddin's support, that his sister was able to study till SSC.

Mahiruddin is committed to having his daughters educated. He wants his daughters to graduate, "until his last resource finished". "If my daughters get educated, they will be my biggest resource", he says. He says he does not compare his daughters with boys. According to Mahiruddin, girls have more responsibilities than boys. Girls have to manage both household and children, unlike boys who manage only their work.

Mahiruddin feels education should be the same for both girls and boys. He says that these days' women are involved in all types of work, including those considered to be "men's work", such as construction work, and physical manual labor (hard working). His own wife was a member of SHOUHARDO's LCS. Mahiruddin has observed that in the past girls could not go outside the house. But, now with education this has changed. The new thinking on equality of girls and boys has also come from education.

He feels girls should get married at 18 and boys after 21. This is because early marriage can ruin a girl's health. Pregnancy at a very young age can cause serious health problems for the girl and the baby. Although he is aware of the legal age for marriage, Mahiruddin would like his daughters to complete their graduation and find good jobs. Only after that he says, will he think about their marriage. For him education and jobs are more important than marriage.

But, at the same time, Mahiruddin is conscious that parents' honor is linked with the daughter's honor. He says, that it is to protect their daughter's honor that parents want to

marry their daughters at an early age. His own vision of his daughters' future is at conflict with the concerns for their safety.

According to Mahiruddin, in that region, dowry is not a regular practice. Some people give or take it, some do not. But he recognizes the long term negative effect of dowry on a family's economic status. He does not think he will be giving dowry for his daughters.

Suggestions for Future projects: Mahiruddin thinks that by building awareness by discussion , drama, and other activities like the ones organized by COVAW it is possible to prevent domestic violence. He considers awareness building as a very important step of this process. The Government also needs to take steps to stop violence against women, he says.

DINAJPUR

RAFIQUL ISLAM

**Boro Sultanpur,
Katabganj
Dinajpur**

The community makes it hard for parents to treat both sons and daughters equally

Background information: Rafiqul Islam is 38 years old. Rafiqul and his family have lived in this village for the past 20 years. He has four brothers and one sister. Except for his mother, who can only sign her name, the rest of the family is educated. Two of Rafiqul's brothers are highly educated. One of his brothers is a post graduate, and the other is a diploma engineer. Rafiqul himself has completed S.S.C.

Family Composition: Rafiqul has been married for the past 20 years. His wife has studied till class VIII. She was employed by UDDOG, COVAW's partner in Dinajpur. Currently she is working as a change facilitator with COVAW. Rafiqul's wife comes from Thakurgaon district. Rafiqul and his wife have one daughter who is 19 years old. She is studying in class XII. Their son is 18 years old. He is a student of class XI.

Economic Status: Rafiqul is a self employed diesel engine mechanic. He states confidently that he can work on any type of diesel engine. The family owns 18 decimals of land. Both, Rafiqul and his wife, contribute towards the household expenses.

Association with NGOs: Rafiqul's wife has been a member of Grameen Bank for seven years. Rafiqul used the loan from Grameen Bank to buy mechanical parts and sell it to the market. This has helped them expand the business. His wife has worked with UDDOG, and is now a COVAW change facilitator.

Causes of Domestic Violence: Rafiqul cites several reasons for domestic violence. He says, "If a man returns home after seeing beautiful women outside and finds his wife is dirty and unkempt, he becomes angry and beats up his wife". Many a times, he feels, that wives do not pay attention to the husband when he comes back home. This situation too provokes anger and sometimes, violence.

Rafiqul acknowledges that he used to be physically violent with his wife. He said, "I have resorted to violence with my wife. I used to beat her with my hands and sometimes with a stick. She would want me to buy costly goods for her when I had a little money. Then I used to get angry and beat her." Sometime, he says, she got hurt, but it was never a serious injury. Rafiqul puts poverty as the one significant cause of domestic violence. When his wife began to earn money, she started to contribute to the household expenses. As a result, the family's economic condition improved. This resulted in reduction in the cause of domestic violence.

Rafiqul adds that he and his wife got married when he was 18 and his wife only 13 years old. She was too young, and did not know how to deal with her husband. She would demand to go

to her parents' home frequently. She would also want expensive gifts. These demands would lead to quarrels, and he would end up beating her. Her prolonged absences from home would lead to sexual frustration within him. He would take out his frustration by beating her.

Impact of Violence: Rafiqul he says he used to feel very bad after losing control over his temper, and hitting his wife. She would get minor injuries, but she never got seriously hurt. "I felt very bad after being violent", he says. After the act, he would go to her and try to pacify her by speaking to her nicely. "Sometimes she would stop eating; at these times, I would try and feed her. I would not eat myself, till she did not eat" Rafiqul recalls.

He does not think that his violent behavior had any long term effect on her. Rafiqul says he did not know any better at that time. Anger, and lack of knowledge, spurred the violence in him. Although Rafiqul does not think his violent treatment of his wife had any effect on other women in the family, he is not so sure of its effect on his children. He thinks children learn violent actions from the parents. It affects the children emotionally. Father's violent attitude has an effect on his son; the son learns to be violent from the father.

Process of Change: Till three years ago, Rafiqul used to abuse his wife. When his wife started working with PROTIRODH (CARE Bangladesh's program implemented by UDDOG) he started to learn about women, their rights and their capabilities. He got some books on women's rights from PROTIRODH. With the new understanding he developed through books, and the discussions arranged by PROTIRODH, Rafiqul says he started to recognize his own mistakes. At the same time, he also slowly started to understand the negative effects of violence.

Outcome of Changes: According to Rafiqul, once his wife started working with PROTIRODH, she started to change. He feels his wife has become more careful about him and his family. Rafiqul adds that his wife has realized her faults, also perhaps because she is older, and more mature now. He feels that these changes within both of them, are lasting changes.

Through the efforts of PROTIRODH and COVAW, Rafiqul says he has begun to appreciate the capabilities of women. Discussions organized by the projects, and his own observations have confirmed this. He now believes that women are equal to men in status, and are as capable if given the same opportunities for education. This new understanding has helped his relationship with his wife. Now he takes decisions by discussing with his wife.

Views on Gender equality: In the past Rafiqul used to think that women should stay at home. Now he thinks boys and girls are equal in their capabilities. He has continued both his son's and his daughter's education, and pays for their education equally. He will continue to do so. This was not his viewpoint a few years ago. In those days, he did not think women needed too much education. But, now he has changed his opinions. He believes that education for women is essential. It is through education that women can become independent.

Rafiqul believes that women should get married after the age of 18 years because women's health could be affected by early marriage. Childbirth at a young age could put a girl's health, and her life, at risk. Early marriage can also hamper a young girl's growth and development. Men, he feels, should get marriage after twenty five because they cannot earn properly before this age.

Rafiqul is of the opinion that dowry is a bad system because it makes poor people even more poor. According to him, dowry has a bad effect on the community also because it brings poverty at the community level. Rafiqul thinks that dowry is mainly a problem of the lower class families. For the rich people it does not really matter as their wealth status does not suffer if they have to pay a dowry.

According to Rafiqul, "the community makes it hard for parents to treat both sons and daughters equally". The community is used to thinking that women are lower class citizens than men. Sometimes, he says, the community people brings marriage proposal for daughters who are below eighteen. They continue to believe that it is good to arrange the marriage of a daughter at an early age. More education and more awareness program are needed to make them change. Poverty, according to Rafiqul, is a major cause of such beliefs. Most of the poor people think that if girls get married at an early age, the parents will save their money, by paying less dowry.

Suggestions for the future: Rafiqul gives several examples of ways women can prevent domestic violence. He says women should take good care of their husbands. If they obey their husbands, and take good care of them, then domestic violence can be reduced. Besides this, every para of the village needs awareness program to tell people the negative effects of domestic violence. More meetings should be organized to create this awareness.

SHAMSHER ALI

Nafanagar, Shatabgonj
Dinajpur

Money received through dowry is 'haram'.

Background information Shamsher is 75 years old. He is the third in his family of six brothers and sisters. Of the six siblings, only Shamsur and his brother are still alive. Shamsher has lived in this village since he was born. Shamsher's father was a teacher in the village primary school. Shamsher's brother also used to teach in the Government Primary School.

Family Background: According to Shamsher, he has been married for more than 45 years. His wife has never been to school. Shamsher has studied till class V. He and his wife have seven children; five sons and two daughters. All the children have completed some level of schooling. Of all his children, two sons have passed class ten. All sons are employed. Both his daughters are married, and live with their families. Shamsher's sons and their families, all live together as a joint family.

Economic status: Shamsher is a farmer. He cultivates rice and wheat on his land. Shamsher and his entire family live in a house made of bamboo and tin roof. The house has three rooms, a separate kitchen, a sanitary toilet and a tube well. The house has electricity. The family owns a TV and a mobile phone. Shamsher owns 15 acres of land. He also owns six cows. Shamsher regards himself as the primary earning member of the family. His sons help him, especially in times of emergency.

Association with NGOs: Although Shamsher says he is not associated with any NGO, he is aware of the activities of PROTIRODH and COVAW. He describes PROTIRODH activities as those that create awareness on prevention of early marriage and the practice of dowry. He attributes PROTIRODH with helping men realize that they too should help their wives in domestic work. The activities under PROTIRODH helped men understand the negative outcomes of the early marriage.

According to Shamsher, COVAW deals with marital relations, domestic violence and its cost to the family. Shamsher feels that the COVAW activities helped men realize that domestic violence results in economic loss, and also costs the family its reputation (social/cultural loss). Economic loss occurs because people have to spend time to deal with the after effects of the violence. Sometimes they have to go to court for trial. All of this costs money, Shamsher explains. In addition, the relationship between the husband and wife deteriorates. This, he feels, is as damaging as the economic loss. According to him, as a result of activities of these two projects, domestic violence in the community is decreasing.

Causes of Domestic Violence: According to Shamsheer some men get angry if their wives are not able to take care of their domestic responsibilities properly. He feels men get frustrated when they are unable to earn enough money to support their families. Under these circumstances, when the wives pressurize their husbands for necessities also, the men are unable to deal with the stress. At such times, the men get violent. There are other men, who are ignorant, or are hot tempered.

In his own case, Shamsheer says, he would get angry only when he would return home to find that the food was not ready for him. He just could not tolerate hunger; not even for a moment. His wife was careless. She would always be late in getting the meal ready on time. This was the main reason for his becoming violent towards his wife. Shamsheer recounts an incident when he was violent towards his wife. One day he returned from work, and found that his wife had not even started cooking the afternoon meal. He was so enraged, he says, that he could not think. He just started to hit her. He beat her on her legs with a stick. She got badly hurt. Once his temper had cooled off, he went and bought medicines for her. It was after this incident that Shamsheer felt he needed to change. Although his behavior caused him a degree of shame, it was through COVAW that he became more aware of the impact of violence against women upon the family.

Impact of Violence: Shamsheer was aware that his wife would be upset for a few days after this incident. But, after a few days she would be alright. Despite his awareness of the negative effect of domestic violence against women, Shamsheer is unable to perceive any long term effects of the violent episodes on his wife. He does not think that these incidents had any effect on other women or children, in the family.

Process of change: Shamsheer recognizes the role of PROTIRODH and COVAW in bringing about the change in him. He attended their meetings regularly. It was in these meetings that he realized that violence against women is harmful for the family and for the society as well. The last time he beat his wife was six years ago. Till about three or four years ago, Shamsheer says, he used to verbally abuse his wife. But, he has become more conscious of the words he uses with his wife, as he no longer wants to hurt her. Shamsheer says the change was not difficult. He feels that this change is forever. Also, now his daughter in law cooks the food, and she makes sure it is ready for him. So there is no reason for aggravation. Although, Shamsheer is quick to add, that he would not be abusive now, because now he knows the harmful impact of violence. This change in him has occurred gradually and slowly. It did not take place overnight, he says.

Shamsheer feels that there are some situations, especially when the woman is sexually involved with men other than her husband, where violence might be acceptable. He thinks that in such case, the husband's violent reaction might be understandable. But, even then he thinks that instead of using physical abuse, the woman should be made to understand that what she is doing is not appropriate.

Outcomes of the change: Shamsheer says that he has changed as a person after his experience with COVAW and PROTIRODH. Now he discusses with his wife before taking a decision.

Earlier, he used to take decisions on his own. His relationship with his wife too has improved as a result of this. He has also begun to think that through education, women can be as capable as men. His wife too understands him better now, than she did before. Some men do consider violence as a sign of manhood, but Shamsher does not agree with this point of view. His family members and his friends appreciate these changes in Shamsher. He thinks he has been able to help them understand that violence against women is extremely harmful. The larger community made it easier as they appreciate the changes that are occurring in the men.

Attitude towards Women's Equality: Shamsher is quite firm in his view that at present boys and girls are not equal. He gives examples of the limited ability of girls to move around freely. According to him, girls are physically weak and vulnerable to sexual violence. They cannot work like boys do, he says. Girls cannot work in the fields and cultivate land. Girls' education is also affected by their vulnerability. If the school is too far away, or, if the way to the school is not safe, their parents don't send them to school. He says, when girls grow up, they cannot move around like their brothers. This, according to Shamsher, prevents the girls from gaining more knowledge about the society. The deep rooted social restrictions faced by girls, color Shamsher's perceptions of gender equality. Shamsher is also quite clear that women should get exactly the same education as men, because it is only through education that women will be able to work like men. It is only through education, he says that the girls will be able to get jobs, and help their parents and husbands.

Shamsher is aware of the problems girls have if they get married too early. He thinks women should get marriage after 18 years, because before this age girls can suffer physical problems during child birth. Also, he feels, that before 18 years of age, the young girls will not be able to take proper care of their children. Men, he thinks, should get marriage after 22 years, because before this age they can get physically weak due to marital relations.

Shamsher considers dowry an evil system. According to him, dowry brings poverty for the family, and for the society. Dowry, he thinks, is also the cause of domestic violence in many instances. According to him, the rules of Islam do not support dowry. He says "money received through dowry is "haram" (sinful).

Suggestions for Future: Shamsher thinks that it is necessary to make people understand how detrimental domestic violence is for the family and for the society. He suggests meetings should be organized in every para to raise awareness levels.

ANSARUL

Choughata, Boro Sultanpur
Dinajpur

Girls do well in every sphere of life

Background: Ansarul is the second of six children. He is 39 years old. Ansarul's father is a farmer who grows rice on 1.5 bigha land. No one in Ansarul's family is literate. Ansarul's sisters are married. Ansarul is not literate. Ansarul himself is only able to write his name. His mother passed away two years ago.

Family History: Ansarul, and his family, used to live with his parents. For the past seven years they have been living independently. Ansarul has been married for twenty years. His wife has been educated till class V. Ansarul and his wife have two sons. The elder son is 17 years old studying in class X. The younger, a 13 year old, is studying in class six.

Economic Status: Ansarul is a rickshaw/van puller. He is at the local bazaar every morning to find work. He uses his rickshaw to transport goods, or people, in the local bazaar. He is also a sharecropper and grows rice, potatoes and vegetables. Ansarul and his family live in a mud hut with a tin roof. The entire family lives in one room. The remaining space is used for cattle and as a store. The tubewell has been brought with his brother-in-law's help. There is no electricity, and the family does not own TV, radio or mobile phone.

Ansarul owns the 34 decimals of land on which his house is built. He owns three cows, two goats and nine chicken. Ansarul is the only earning member of the family. He feels incredibly lucky in that there have been no family emergencies thus far. He tries to save for his sons' further education. He had used his own savings to buy the land to build his house. Before he bought the land, he used to stay with his father, on an adjoining plot.

Association with NGOs: Ansarul's wife has been a member of ASHA, a microcredit group for the last six/seven years. Each year, she would take a small loan from ASHA. Ansarul has used these loans to expand his work. He says proudly that he has never defaulted, or delayed the repayment of the loans. Although Ansarul is aware of the presence of other NGOs and micro-credit programs in his village, he does not know much about them.

Ansarul says he knows about the COVAW project, and about the BRAC awareness program. His wife is a member of EKATA. According to Ansarul, he has been very busy with his work, and has not been too involved in the discussions conducted by these projects. But, he readily acknowledges, that he has learnt a lot from his wife about the topics discussed in the various groups.

Ansarul says that his economic condition has improved a lot in the last few years. His wife has helped him a lot. She has grown vegetables in the free space in, and around his house. Ansarul has made a tidy profit by selling these vegetables in the local market.

Causes of Domestic Violence: According to Ansarul, some men cannot control their temper. They do not care about their wives, or show respect towards women. In some cases, minor issues can trigger a violent reaction. If a man has worked hard the whole day and comes back home tired, his wife, instead of being sympathetic, starts interrogating him, the man can become irritated. This leads to a verbal quarrel which, sometimes turns violent. Ansarul is clear that violence means physical torture. Verbal fighting is quite common. Use of hurtful language too is common. It is not taken seriously. But, in some cases, the words used can hurt one emotionally. Then, he feels, the situation can become complicated, as emotional hurt is not visible.

Ansarul has been violent towards his wife from the beginning. Initially they used to live in a joint family. But, his parents used to ill treat his wife, and they would also instigate Ansarul to fight with his new wife. He would end up being violent towards his wife. One day his wife had to seek shelter at her parents home to escape from the brutality of her parents in law. The incident blew into a full fledged court case, which after three years and huge expense on both sides, was dismissed. After this Ansarul and his wife decided to get together, and live separately from his family.

Even after this, Ansarul was unable to stop being violent towards his wife. He narrates an incident when one of his friends, a trouble maker, came home when Ansarul was not at home. This friend told Ansarul's wife a fabricated tale of Ansarul's illicit relationship with another woman. This, according to the friend, was the reason why Ansarul would be late coming home and why he would never have enough money to spend on his family. When Ansarul returned home that evening, his wife started quarrelling with him. Ansarul lost his temper and started beating her. His son intervened and told Ansarul about what had transpired in his absence. Ansarul says he was ashamed of his behavior.

Impact of Violence: Ansarul remembers that some times when his wife used to make a mistake unknowingly, he would feel sorry for her. But sometimes, his wife used to take revenge on her parents in law. She would not co-operate with his parents, or help his brothers. He did not realize it then, but now Ansarul feels that his wife was frustrated in those days. And his behavior made it worse.

Once Ansarul hit his wife's head with a stick. She started to bleed heavily, and had to be taken to the hospital. Ansarul also admits to kicking his wife's abdomen. She got so badly hurt that it took her two months to recover from this injury. At another time, during one of their fights, he even broke her hand. Each time, he had to pay the doctors bills. His wife was always afraid of him. She was always afraid of being touched by him.

Ansarul's ill treatment of his wife was a cause of friction between him and his son. His elder son would tell him to stop misbehaving with their mother. Ansarul's elder son would be most

upset with his father He could not even concentrate on his studies. The son told Ansarul that he was ashamed of his father. The son said” “you are getting older now, it is not appropriate for you to shout at my mother and beat her. It makes us look bad”. At times, when they would fight, his son would intervene.

Ansarul was embarrassed at himself and made efforts to stop being violent towards his wife. Ansarul felt his family life was being destroyed. But, once he stopped physically abusing his wife, things started to change. He feels his family life is happy now.

Process of Change: Ansarul has realized violence against women is a bad thing. He has promised himself that never again would he resort to violence against his wife. His wife is a member of EKATA group. She would go to people’s homes and tell them the negative impact of violence. He heard from her, and also watched it on the TV. He could not attend any discussions because of his work, but he became aware of it. This change was difficult. Although he wanted to change after his wife left him, it is only after his son started to protest against his behavior.

Ansarul knows about COVAW activities; the discussions in various people’s homes, the dramas and home visits. He says he has seen the drama, but could not attend any discussions.

Ansarul feels that he was young, immature and not capable of understanding what people told him. Now, he thinks he is more mature. He has heard about different people’s experiences. His knowledge has got richer now. Now, he does not react on all the minor issues. Even now, sometimes when he feels he cannot control himself, he tries to ignore her.

Ansarul says his relationship with his wife has improved. They have a happy family life. He says, he listens to her opinions more now, than he used to in the past. Ansarul thinks she is the one who has made him understand the negative effect of violence. The chairman and the UP member too tried to help him. Ansarul feels that they helped him understand his faults. They also gave him useful advice.

Effect of this change: He says he listens to his wife and discusses all important matters, like education of children, house repairs, buying assets, with her. In Ansarul’s family decision making involves his wife and his older son. He prefers to take his wife’s point of view when it concerns his sons’ education. When it comes to household expenditure also, Ansarul relies upon his wife’s advice. But on issues like assets and house repairs, he takes his elder son’s opinions. He feels his son knows more about these issues as compared to his wife. If there are topics of disagreement, he tries to convince his wife. If she still does not agree, then he counts upon his son to support him.

Ansarul’s decision to give up violence has had an effect upon other members of his family also. His younger brother too was violent towards his wife. Ansarul advised him not to resort to violent actions. Earlier, when Ansarul used to discuss it with his friends, they used to make fun of the topic. But, now, after listening to the discussions and seeing the TV

programs, they are able to understand the gravity of the issue. If people are aware then only the community would be able to stop the violence, Ansarul says.

According to Ansarul some people are not too intelligent. They, he says, do not have the knowledge or the experience, and show no interest in learning. These are the people who are the hardest to change.

Attitudes towards women: Ansarul does not have a daughter. He wanted a baby girl, as in his family a daughter is considered “Lakshmi” (the Hindu Goddess of prosperity). According to Ansarul, girls are easier to manage. Boys are rough and if parents do not take good care, boys can get spoiled, he says. Boys are also careless by nature. They do not mature early. Girls mature at an earlier age. He thinks it is easier to control girls, as they are obedient and listen to their parents. He has observed his neighbors’ daughters take better care of their parents, than their sons

Ansarul regards boys and girls are equal. Now a days, Ansarul feels that “girls do well in every sphere of life”. Sometimes, he thinks they do better than the boys. These changes have come only because people have change. After all “ our prime minister is a woman” he says. Girls are playing important role in different sectors. They can influence people and can do any work that men can. He once saw a women driving pickup van on a main road. He thinks only biological differences remain between girls and boys.

Age of marriage is important according to Ansarul. He thinks it is important for both girls and boys to be able to bear the responsibility of a family, before getting married. He thinks boys should get married around the age of 23 and girls after 18. Early pregnancy harms girls and the child. Girls get weak and can suffer a lot. In case of boys, early marriage is not appropriate. Younger boys are careless, they cannot make their own decisions. This can cause instability in family life and lead to its ruination.

Ansarul says that if he had a daughter, he would have given her a really good education. And, he would have got her married in a very good family. His daughter would have come to see him regularly on all festivals. He is certain that his daughter would take very good care of her parents in their old age.

In contrast to the loving relationship between he envisages between a daughter and her parents, Ansarul’s expectations from his sons seem to be a bit uncertain. He considers the relationship to be more transactional. If he is not able to give them good education, Ansarul does not feel that his sons would take good care of him.

Ansarul’s view point about sons and their relationship with their parents, has crystallized over a period of time. He has seen his own father’s relationship with Ansarul’s grandfather. Ansarul himself, has left his father’s home. He feels his sisters are more affectionate and caring towards their parents, than he, or his brother. His parents too depend more upon his sisters, than upon Ansarul and his brothers.

He has always considered boys and girls as equals. Although he feels that they are equal in all aspects, in terms of safety there is a huge difference. He says, one can send a boy to a far away place, without giving it too much thought. But, sending a girl away will cause a lot of anxiety for the parents. Ansarul has observed how people around him are also changing their views in considering boys and girls. He thinks people are also started to view that boys and girls are equal.

Ansarul has heard discussions on stopping dowry. But, he feels the practice of dowry is increasing. People are using dowry as a means to earn money. If the bride's parents do not agree to give dowry, then their daughter will remain unmarried. There is no way, he thinks, dowry can be eradicated. Some people don't take it. Some people demand it. If the girl is beautiful then dowry will be low. If the girl is not good looking, then the dowry will be high. Parents give dowry, because they would like to ensure a better future for their daughters. Dowry is not given at one time only, he says. After marriage, the bride's husband and parents in law put pressure on her and get more money. If she cannot, the husband and parents in law can turn violent. He considers dowry as a social ill as it causes harm in the society.

Suggestions for future projects: Ansarul considers greater awareness as the only way to prevent violence against women. Community needs to be aware and community needs to act on it together, he says. Unemployment and financial crisis too are the causes of violence. Now a days the community is giving support. They have the knowledge and have positive views. This makes it easier for people to change. In the past it was not so easy to change. When the NGOs first started these discussions, things were hard. Over the last few years, convincing people has become easier.

MOSLEM-UDDIN

**Boro Sultanpur
Dinajpur**

Men are skeptical by nature and do not easily believe everything they hear. That is why it is harder for men to change

Background information: Moslem Uddin is a 30 year old man. He has been living in Sultanpur since birth. His father was a farmer. Moslem Uddin's father had completed primary level of education. His mother had not been to school. Moslem Uddin is the eldest of four brothers and one sister. Both, he and his younger brother, have completed Higher Secondary. His younger brothers and his sister are in school. Moslemuddin's father had completed primary school.

Family History: Moslem Uddin has been married for seven years. His wife is a graduate, with a B.A degree. She is from Shetubgonge which is about five Kms from Sultanpur. She is a housewife. Her father owns a rice mill. Three years ago Moslemuddin left the joint family to set up his own home. He, his wife and his four year old daughter, live separately now.

Economic Status: As compared to others, Moslemuddin is a well to do person in his community. He has multiple sources of income. He owns ten bigha of land. In addition, he has a wholesale business of crops and vegetables. He also owns a stationary shop in the local market. Moslemuddin owns a dairy farm which has eight cows. In addition, he also owns five goats, and a huge number of hens and ducks.

Moslemuddin has built a new house for his family. It is built with bricks and has a tin room. The house has five rooms, two attached bath rooms, and a separate toilet for the guests. The house has electricity. The house has water storage tank on the roof and there is a motor to pump the water to the tank. The family also owns a TV, a radio and two mobile phones. Moslem Uddin is the main provider for his family. He has two insurance policies, and also has savings for any emergencies.

Association with NGO: Moslem Uddin is not a member of any NGO. His wife is a member of CARE Uddog. She is also an EKATA member.

Causes of Domestic Violence: Moslem uddin feels that the mental condition of men who have no work, do nothing and always stay at home, becomes unstable. These men become irritated at small things and become violent with their wives. Those men who go outside, are busy with their work and are able to earn money, are more patient. If the men are satisfied with the money they earn, they are less likely to be violent.

Moslemuddin admits that he used to be violent towards his wife. His parents wanted his wife to be involved in household work. But, his wife was not interested. She did not like to do household chores. Women in the village do this all the time. His wife is highly educated. She had never done any household work at her parents' home. This was a main cause of discord in the family. Since his wife was afraid of him, his mother would ask Moslem Uddin to tell her to take care of the chores. But, his wife still refused. When the verbal quarrel would not quieten her, Moslemuddin would get more angry and beat her.

Once his wife got very upset and left his house to go back to her parents' home. His father in law went to the Union Parishad and lodged a complaint against Moslemuddin. The father would not allow his daughter back to go back to her parents in law's home. The UP Chairman was a friend of Moslemuddin. When the two parties could not come to an agreement, the Chairman called the wife's father and Moslem Uddin's father, to come to his home under the pretext of solving the case legally. When she came to the Chairman's home with her father, the Chairman made her understand that she should go back to her husband's home. Moslemuddin's wife agreed to come back only if he agreed to her conditions. He agreed, and they both separated from his family and set up a new home. This incident affected his family. His younger brother and sister were sad at their leaving the home.

Moslemuddin thinks that sometimes it is alright for a husband to beat up his wife; especially, if she is in the wrong and does not change her point of view. According to him, some men are quick tempered and some are gentle. The quick tempered men are the ones who beat their wives. Children, he feels, learn from their parents. If the father has violent tendencies, the son could also think that it is alright for him to be violent with his wife.

Process of Change: Moslemuddin says his that after his wife left him, he was very upset. For six months he did not eat at home. He realized that he had behaved terribly towards his wife. This realization was the starting of the change. Slowly he started to change. He started listening to others. His friends were supportive. Moslemuddin observes that once people have the knowledge, they understand the negative effects of their behavior. Once people have the knowledge, it will always stay with them. Despite his resolution not to beat his wife, till two years ago, Moslemuddin continued to be physically violent towards his wife.

Moslemuddin is aware of the COVAW discussions organized in different EKATA members' homes. He refers to drama, posters, stories and discussions to increase awareness. He feels posters are most useful in attracting attention. Moslemuddin is of the view that joint discussions should be held with men and women. This allows them to share their experiences and listen to each other directly. If discussions are held separately, then he would not be able to hear women's voices, and neither would they be able to hear his. He thinks these discussions, the training and the drama are helpful for to understand the effect of violence on women. He has heard about the BRAC awareness program, but is not a member of that program.

Impact of Change: Moslem Uddin feels he is more mature now. He got married at a very early age. He did not understand his wife. Now, with age, his understanding has increased. When

his wife left him and his parents in law decided to proceed with divorce, he started to analyze his situation. Now, he pays attention to his wife's opinions, he informs her and consults her. He feels he takes good care of her now. Earlier he did not care for her. He was also unemployed at that time. Now he is earning. He gets to meet different people now. This has made his view point broader. His relationship with his wife has improved now and they have become more friendly.

Moslem Uddin thinks some men are aggressive by nature. They are abrasive in their behavior towards others. These men use crude and abusive language, and shout at the women at home. He says has changed now. His wife has changed also. She is more vocal now. She is capable enough to manage without him. She understands his business problems, and gives him useful suggestions. Moslem Uddin thinks that if women are educated that they get more capable.

In his family, Moslem Uddin is the only one who was physically violent with his wife. His brother has only recently got married, and has not used violence against his wife. Moslem Uddin's friends are all highly educated people of high status. They have not been violent towards their wives. They used to give him valuable suggestions. All his friends have good family lives. This inspired Moslem Uddin too have the same type of relationship with his wife.

Moslem Uddin regards community support essential to help men change. His wife, an EKATA member, can also help influence people to stop violence. Moslem Uddin feels there are inherent differences between men and women. He thinks women are soft natured and emotional, and are therefore easier to change. He says "Men are skeptical by nature and do not easily believe everything they hear. This is why it is harder for men to change". Moslem Uddin observes that cases of physical violence are reducing in the community. But, he feels that verbal violence continues as before. According to him building community awareness is very important in this case. He thinks COVAW has done a lot of work in this area. The government too has taken steps to prevent violence against women. There is a TV program which too has influenced people's behavior.

According to Moslem Uddin, there has been a reduction in the practice of early marriage. He has seen COVAW project stop some instances of early marriages. There are very people who indulge in polygamy now. Moslem Uddin has noticed that people are able to get information more easily now as compared to before. Mobile phones have made it simpler for people to get the information.

Views on Gender Equality: Moslem uddin thinks girls and boys are equal. He feels that if boys can go far, why can't the girls? He has a daughter. He will give her all kind of support and facilities. He did not always think that. He thinks his wife is more educated then him, she is also very intelligent. Moslem Uddin feels that is her advice that has helped him succeed in business. He has made lots of money in his business.

According to him she is also very “cool-headed and calculative”. He counts upon her and her advice on all the matters. They take all important decisions together. The tips provided by his wife have helped him to change his perceptions about equality of girls. It is in the last three years he has changed his views. He wishes his daughter will be like her mother.

He wants his daughter to be a doctor. He will make sure she is able to continue her studies till his resources end. He thinks girls can get married after 18 years of age and boys after 23 years. But, he feels that 25 years is a more appropriate age to get married for both girls and boys. This will ensure that their studies are completed. He also feels that by this time both girls and boys would be mature enough to take the right decisions for their family, and for the children.

Although he feels that boys and girls as equals, he recognizes differences between the two sexes as well. Girls are vulnerable. He will not be able to send his daughter alone to a far away place, but would have no hesitation in sending his son. Everyone is more conscious about girls’ security. Boys are physically stronger too. They have a broader point of view as they interact with a wider world, as compared to girls who have limited exposure to the bigger world. These differences are due to culture. The differences should not affect the education of girls. In the past, girls used to be sent to “Madrasas”, for religious education, and boys to schools. Now things have changed.

Moslem Uddin does not think it is difficult to consider and treat boys and girls equally. He does not think it is unusual of him to think so. According to him the rest of the community too thinks the same. They, he feels, are not so conservative any more. It depends upon the family that one belongs too. Moslem Uddin feels dowry is very common in the society. The brides’ parents are willing to give dowry to ensure their daughters have a happy married life. But, he feels that his demand for dowry is a cause of domestic violence. Moslem Uddin himself did not take any dowry when he got married. This, he feels is the reason for his happy married life. His wife did not bring any dowry so she is always anxious to please him. She takes good care of him. When he gets angry, she gets scared as she feels that he might not stay with her. If she had brought lots of money, she would want special attention and would want all her wishes to be fulfilled. He feels that if the bride’s parent willingly give some thing to their daughter then it is alright. Sometimes dowry has a negative effect upon family relationships. His brother’s wife brought many gifts when they got married. Now she is not interested in household activities. She told her mother in law that “I brought a lot of thing for your son, so why should I do this menial work”? If I had not brought those things then I would work for you”.

Women have changed also, they have become very assertive. Sometimes when women’s demands are not met, they leave the husbands. Some women want to control everything that their husbands have.

Suggestions for future projects

Moslem Uddin feels that if women are not educated, they are unable to handle the complex situation. If their husbands are violent, non literate women do not know they can directly to the UP chairperson or to a UP member, and register a complaint. This, according to him is one reason, why they continue to be in abusive relationships. They think there is no opportunity to change their husband.

If his daughter happens to be in a violent relationship, Moslem Uddin says he will go directly for legal action. He strongly believes that he would choose the best family for his daughter to get married in. In his belief is the implication that the “best family” would be the one where chances of his daughter being ill treated, would be minimal. Since Moslem Uddin would like his daughter to be highly educated, he thinks that would assist her to handle the situation herself too. If his son were to be physically violent, Moslem Uddin says he would punish him.

Md. Elahi Box

**Nafanagar, Bochagonnj
BoroSultanpur
Dinajpur**

Girls' education should be continued till the parents can afford it

Background: Md. Elahi Box, belongs to a large family of 11 brothers and sisters. His father was a farmer. Although Md. Elahi's father had studied till class V, his mother was not literate. One of his brothers is a teacher in a school, another brother is the principal of Sonali bank. Three of his brothers are farmers and another three have their own businesses. Md. Elahi has completed SSC.

Family History: Md. Elahi has been married for 30 years. His wife is from Pirganj in Thakurgaon district. She has studied till class V herself. Her father was a primary school teacher. Md. Elahi and his wife have three sons. Their eldest son has studied till H.Sc and is working in Dinajpur. The second son is a Diploma Textile Engineer and lives in Sylhet. The youngest son is a Diploma Civil Engineer who is working in Dhaka. The older sons are married.

Economic Status: Md. Elahi is a farmer. He grows potatoes and rice. In the boro season, he leases has land. He also works a Branch Postmaster. This post does not give him a regular salary, but he gets an honorarium for the work.

Md. Elahi and his wife live in a brick house with a tin roof. The house has three sections. There are three rooms in one part. The Kitchen is separate and the store and toilet are located in another part of the house. One room is still being constructed. There is no electricity.

Md. Elahi owns one mobile set. He also owns 2 acres of land, two cows and a goat. He has gathered all these assets on his own, through his own earnings. Md. Elahi is the only provider in his family. For the last few years, his son has been sending him some money for festivals. But, in case of emergencies, he can only count on his savings. He had to mortgage his land to his brother in law to pay for his wife's uterus operation.

Participation in NGO activities: Md. Elahi Box was a Shalishkar in the Protirodh forum. Now he is a COVAW member. He says that before joining these activities he was not really aware of violence against women as a major issue. Now he is able to discuss on this topics with others. He thinks everyone should be made aware of this and should know how to prevent violence against women. His wife has not been a member of any group. But, she is aware of the Protirodh activities. She is highly respected in the community and everyone listens to her.

Cause and effect of violence: People who are illiterate, poor, or unhappy with their family life use violence on their wives. In some cases, the problem is caused externally. Other people instigate the husband, or the wife, by telling lies. And the couple, without thinking logically start to fight which leads to violence. According to Md. Elahi some men are aggressive. These men do not treat women respectfully. These men do not behave like human being. Md. Elahi feels that both physical and verbal violence takes place. Physical violence is easier to see. But, people cannot see the mental torture. He considers mental torture to be more harmful than physical. It is also difficult to prevent as people do not take it seriously. Physical violence can be prevented.

Sometimes, when Md. Elahi and his wife would fight, he would shout at her. Occasionally he would slap her. After these incidents, he would be upset with himself. He did not think it was not appropriate to behave like this in front of his son and daughter in law.

He says he has never beaten his wife with a stick. He never hurt her seriously until an incident six years ago. He was a teacher in a school and was in a hurry to get to the school as it was an exam day. As he was getting ready to leave, his wife started to quarrel with him. She started to blame him for being careless towards his family. Md. Elahi lost his temper and slapped her on her ear. His elder son intervened, asking why Md. Elahi was beating his mother. Md. Elahi returned from the school to find out that his wife's ear was bleeding. He immediately took her to the nearby hospital and later to Rangpur. The treatment cost a lot of money. But, sadly, the ear did not get completely cured. His wife still continues to have trouble with the ear. After this incident he was very upset with himself and resolved never to hit her again. For a few years he was able to restrain himself. But, he continued to be under stress. Three years ago, during a fight with his wife, he pushed her.

Impact of Violence against women: Md. Elahi does not consider violence justified under any circumstance. He views mental torture as more harmful, as emotional pain cannot be seen and treated. Preventing violence is not a straightforward case. Sometimes when a case of domestic violence is solved by 'shalish', it seems that situation is under control. But, after a few days violence starts again. A lot depends upon the relationship between the husband and the wife. Violence has an effect on other members of the family too. Md. Elahi thinks that because he was violent towards his wife, his son could also think it was acceptable to be violent towards women. When Md. Elahi would be violent towards his wife, his son would protest. Md. Elahi himself would realize the harm only after the incident. It was only after got involved in the Protirodh committee he became more conscious.

Process of Change: In the past he used to be frustrated with his family life (he does not say why). Through his involvement with PROTIRODH and COVAW, he has realized that problems can be solved. He still gets frustrated, when he sees people resorting to violence. The changes have happened due to CARE UDDOG activities, through which people have become more conscious, more aware of the law, and understand the boundaries better. These activities have helped people to change in a positive way. Md. Elahi feels that this change, because it is coming through greater consciousness, is going to be a permanent change.

Family Life: Md. Elahi feels that most of the decisions are taken jointly by him and his wife. He regards his wife's opinions on children's education, medical issues and their son's weddings, valuable. If she disagrees with him, Md. Elahi says he tries to convince her, but this rarely happens. As far he is concerned, he thinks there would be only one or two times, when he has taken a decision on his own, without considering his wife's opinion.

Attitudes towards Gender Equality: Md. Elahi feels that in the past people did not consider boys and girls equal. Now people have started to think that girls and boys are equal. Md. Elahi is a religious man. He follows the Shariah law, which emphasizes women's rights more than men's rights. He feels that he has always treated his sister and his wife with respect. Although Md. Elahi believes that he has always subconsciously considered boys and girls as equals, in recent times he thinks that his awareness has been raised. Now he has two daughters in law. They are both educated. They are, according to him, highly knowledgeable on family issues.

Md. Elahi thinks that girls and boys are different. The main differences are on security of girls and their physical strength. Men can go anywhere and do anything, he says. But, girls cannot do that. Also the family assets are not divided equally amongst girls and boys. But, now a days people are changing. Girls can also do many things. Md. Elahi thinks, in his village people are conservative and still treat girls and boys differently. But this does not affect their education or responsibilities when they grow up. Although he does not have a daughter, he thinks that "girls' education should be continued till the parents can afford it". If he had a daughter that is what he would do.

Md. Elahi says that the parents should treat both equally, but also make sure that the girls remain safe. Md. Elahi thinks that girls should not be allowed to go too far, alone. Parents, he says, are more anxious about their daughter's security, than their sons. Daughter's safety is related with the parents' honor. It is easy to treat girls and boys as equals, he thinks. But, if the family has only one son, and three or four daughter, then it becomes difficult to treat them equally. In such cases, the parents will treat the boy better, as people think that the son will take care of them in their old age.

According to the law, girls should be married after 18 years of age and boys after 21, but Md. Elahi thinks that both boys and girls should get married at a later age. For girls he thinks 20 is a better age, as then the girls would have a better understanding of family and of children. Also, if the girl is ambitious, and wants to study further, then age should not be the consideration for marriage. If the girl is not interested in studying, or doing anything else, then she should get married. Boys too would have more maturity at an older age to deal with family relationships.

Although many things have changed in the community, and some bad practices have decreased, Md. Elahi feels that the practice of giving dowry has increased. The awareness program and the discussion have not been able to raise the consciousness of the parents, who

give dowry readily to ensure their daughter's better future. Even if there is no demand for dowry from the groom's side, then also the parents give dowry so that their daughters have a comfortable life. Md. Elahi feels "Ain keo dekhe na sobar modhe lalosa take, khushi hoe dae , r lov kore sowal" (Some people demand because they are greedy, some give happily, but no one cares about the law).

Md. Elahi says, that he and the community , took several steps to stop early marriage. They took the help of the UP member and chairman also. A few times the police was called to stop the marriage . Community people also help them now. If any parents want to marry their daughters at a young age, the people inform the 'Shalishkars'. But, parents continue to try. Sometimes they take the girl away to another place, away from the eyes of the law enforcing agents, for the marriage ceremony to be organized.

Earlier the community did not understand and would make it harder for people who wanted to follow the law. But, now he feels it is becoming easier. People are talking about it and trying to follow the rules. Md. Elahi says, he and his family have always supported the community on these issues.

Suggestions for future projects: Md. Elahi thinks that EKATA meetings and COVAW discussions should be organized in different places. These initiative should be arranged in every Thana. The community should also ensure that any one indulging in domestic violence should be allowed to escape from the place. He says they have tried to stop early marriage in their village, but within a week the wedding took place in another village. If these initiatives are taken in all places, then early marriages will not be possible anywhere.

SUNAMGANJ

HariVokto Das

**Dottogram, Vatipara,
Derai, Sunamganj**

Domestic violence exists in all social classes, rich or poor.

Background information: Harivokto is forty years old. He has been living in this village since birth. Neither he, nor his two brothers went to school. All of them can only write their names. Harivokto, like his father, is a farmer and a seasonal fisherman. His mother was a housewife. Both his brothers are farmers.

FamilyHistory: Harivokto has been married for 17 years. His wife is from Palgaon in Vatipara thana. She has had no formal schooling. Harivokto and his wife have three children; one daughter and twin sons. The daughter is nine years old and is studying in class IV. The twin boys are six years old. They are in class one at the local school. Harivokto, and his family, live as a nuclear family.

Economic status: The family lives in one room house made of tin. The house has a separate kitchen. A sanitary latrine has been installed. The family relies upon a neighbor's tubewell for drinking water. The house has electricity. HariVokto does not own a TV, radio or a mobile phone. He owns around 45 decimals of land. He does not own any livestock. Harivokto is the main provider in his family. In times of emergency, Harivokto sells rice that he has saved up.

Association with NGOs: Harivokto's wife has been a member of the BRAC micro credit group for the past one year. The loan she took from the group was used to buy materials for farming. According to Harivokto, this loan helped them by increasing the yield from the field. His wife is also a member of the ARSHI mothers group. Harivokto himself has been associated with COVAW for a year. His wife too is involved with the COVAW initiative.

Causes and effect of violence: Harivokto labels men who use violence as those "who lack knowledge". These men, according to him, cannot control their temper. He gives an example of how a minor issue can provoke a man to violence against the wife. He says, "suppose, a man returns home to find his wife is not at home; or if the meal is not ready, this is enough to cause some men to get angry and beat their wives". According to him, whether the violence is verbal or physical, it is always bad for the society.

At the beginning of their relationship, Harivokto was not violent towards his wife. A few years ago, he had sold a few assets and had some surplus funds. He gave these funds to his parents in law to invest in a business. Unfortunately, the business suffered a loss and his parents in law lost Harivokto's investment. This made Harivokto very angry. He started to berate his wife and would continue to harangue her to get his money back from her parents. She was unable to get the money back from her parents. This would make Harivokto so angry and frustrated, that he started beating her. He would beat her with his hand, or with

a stick. He would beat her at least two or three times in a month. When she would get hurt, he would have to purchase medicines for her.

Aftermath of Violence: After a violent episode, he would feel bad and guilty. He would be upset with himself after these violent episodes. Harivokto says that his wife would become sad after these incidents. Harivokto feels that she was always under tense around him in those days. Harivokto is convinced that violence has a negative effect on the children also. Children learn to be violent if they see violence at home, he says. Harivokto has learnt to control violence by being mindful of the negative outcomes of a violent episode. He feels “domestic violence, exists in all social classes, rich or poor”. But, he feels violence is more amongst the poor as they are under constant stress.

Process of change : Harivokto says he no longer resorts to violence against his wife. The last time he beat his wife was a year ago. Since then he has not hit his wife. He has changed because of participating in activities organized by COVAW. He regularly attends the meetings organized by COVAW. It is through these meetings that he learnt how harmful violence against women is. He has become more aware of the negative impact of violence on the family and society. Besides the immediate financial implications of having to buy medicines for his wife, Harivokto also became aware of the toll of his violent behavior was on his relationship with his wife. His wife was always unsure of what would spark the violence, This realization of the negative outcomes of violence against women, was a result of slow and gradual process. It took several months of sessions for Harivokto to be convinced to give up aggression towards his wife. Harivokto acknowledges that the change did not occur suddenly. But, he thinks his decision to give up violence is a permanent one. Harivokto is quite convinced that there are no circumstances under which violence against women is either justified, or permissible.

Outcome of change: This change in him is also accompanied by a change in his relationship with his wife. Harivokto feels his relationship with his wife has improved. He and his wife jointly take decisions now. His family members too view this change in him as positive. Some men might think it is a sign of manliness to be violent against women. But, Harivokto says, he does not think like violence is a sign of masculinity. He feels his wife too understands him better now, than before.

Now that Harivokto realizes that it was not his wife’s fault that he lost the money, the frustration is no longer there. Harivokto feels that he no longer needs someone to help him maintain this change in him. He is able to think through the consequences of violent actions and that helps him from being violent. Harivokto also says that now when he gets angry with his wife, he tries to understand her perspective.

He thinks his brothers and his friends view this change in him positively. According to Harivokto the community has supported this process in him, because they appreciated this change in him. He recognizes that for some men it is harder to change because they cannot understand the negative effects of violence.

Attitude towards Gender Equality: Harivokto says he considers men and women to be equals. After all, he says, both men and women have been created by “Bhagavan” (God). When he would get violent towards his wife, the anger would take over and there would no other thought in his mind. Harivokto says, he takes care of his sons and daughter equally. He has never thought of treating them differently. In his opinion “women need education because if they are educated then the education of their children is ensured” Harivokto affirms that 18 is the right age for girls to get married. Before the age of 18 years, early marriage and pregnancy can harm the girl’s health. Boys should get married after they are 25 years of age. This way they would be able to provide for their families.

According to Harivokto, women continue to be in abusive relationship because they have no where else to go. If his daughter were to be subjected to abuse, he says he would try and make her husband understand the negative effects. But, he stops at that and does not go further when asked if the violence continued. If his sons were to become abusive, Harivokto says he will make them understand the impact on family.

Dowry, he thinks is a bad system, especially for the poor people. He recounts cases where fathers have had to sell off their land to raise money for their daughter’s dowry.

Suggestions for future projects: Harivokto suggests that more awareness programs should be organized to prevent the violence. He thinks the situations is improving in the community. More meetings and drama would help in raising awareness.

Md. Murad Thakur

**Vatipara Village, Derai
Sunamganj**

Now I share everything with my wife

Background: Murad has lived in this village since he was born. He is the only brother of five sisters. His father was a farmer. Murad is the only person in his family to have been to school. He has completed schooling until class VI. Neither of his parents were literate. His sisters are only able to write their names. All of his sisters are married and live with their own families.

Family Life: Murad has been married for five years. His wife is from Kenarbag in Sunamgonj district. She has completed education till class IV. Her father is a farmer and her mother is a housewife. Murad's wife too is a housewife. They both do not have children as yet.

Economic Status: Murad is a small business man. He buys trees, and sells them in the local market. Sometimes he sells seeds for crops also. Murad, his wife and his mother live together. They live in a mud house with a roof made of straw. The house has three rooms. A sanitary latrine is installed. The family uses the neighbor's tubewell for drinking water. The house has no electricity. Murad has a mobile phone. Besides, this he does not own any land, or livestock. Murad is the sole provider for his family.

Association with NGOs: Murad is not a member of any NGO. But, he says, he attends COVAW's activities regularly. He attends both the meetings and the cultural activities organized by the project. His wife is not associated with any NGOs.

Cause of Domestic Violence: Both verbal and physical violence exists in communities. Murad thinks that violence against women is the worst way to treat them. Murad feels there are several reasons why men are violent towards women. Some men, he says, have no understanding of their actions. They do not realize the consequences of their behavior. Linking poverty with violence, Murad says that poor people beat their wives more than the rich people do. When people are unable to provide for the basic necessities like food, clothing and shelter, they develop an uncaring attitude. These men beat their wives at the smallest of pretexts. A silly reason can cause a man to lose his temper and start beating his wife.

Marriage at a young age is another reason for high levels of violence against women. Murad explains that when a girl gets married at a young age, she is too immature. She does not know how to behave appropriately with her husband, or his parents. In such cases too, small mistakes on her part can cause the husband to use violence. Murad says that he and his wife too got married at a very young age. He was only 18 years old. He was used to spending time in the evenings with his friends. His parents never questioned him and he never felt the need to give any explanations for returning late. After marriage, his wife could not understand why he had to spend so much time with his friends. She would start quarreling with him

because he would return home so late. Not used to this questioning, Murad would lose his temper and start beating her.

One day when he returned home late, his wife started shouting at him. Murad lost all restraint and started beating her with a stick and with his hands. His wife's hand got badly hurt during this incident. He had to get medicines for her hand. Besides the physical injury, Murad's wife also became emotionally tense after this episode. Murad describes this incident and its after effect with shame. He admits that he felt extremely bad after this violent action.

Aftermath of violence: Murad is not able to foresee any long term impact of his violent actions on his wife. He says, "there is no long term effect" on her. He does not think that there would be any effect of this case on another women either. However, if there were children involved, he thinks they would be affected by this. Violence would have a bad effect on the children.

Murad is also quick to admit that when he used to beat his wife, their marital relationship was not happy . Violence would cause him anguish as well. After he would beat his wife, he would not be able to concentrate on his work. His wife too would be tense, unsure of when her husband would become violent.

Process of Change: Murad says he heard about COVAW's activities through the Change Facilitator. He went to their discussions, watched the dramas, and took regular part in their meetings. It was through these meetings that he realized how harmful his behavior was. He was able to understand the negative economic impact of violence and the unhappiness it to the family. Once he decided to give up violence, it took him about three or four months to change. He feels he is able to control his temper now. Now, when he gets angry, he reminds himself of the aftermath of a violent incident. That helps keep his anger in check. Murad says just thinking of these issues is enough for him to help him control his anger. He says the last time he beat his wife was about seven months ago. Since then he has been able to control his anger.

Outcomes of the change: Murad feels that his relationship with his wife has improved. "Now I share everything with my wife" he says. He feels that these changes have brought happiness to his life. He says that he and his wife have become closer as a result of changes in him. "Now we are more intimate than the before". His own views about women and their capabilities too have changed. "Now I think that women are capable" he states.

His family members too view this change as positive. Some people think violence is a sign of being a man. But, Murad is convinced that he does not see it as a sign of being a man. According to Murad, his decision and commitment to give up violence has also had an effect on his wife. He says, that his wife has changed also. She has become more caring towards him. She is more conscious of his needs now and tries to keep him happy.

Murad's friends have witnessed this change in him and they appreciate it. They too are becoming more conscious of the way they perceive women. They have also started to realize that women are capable and contribute to the household and family. This appreciation was lacking before. According to him, the community too is supporting the men who give up violence towards the women.. Murad thinks it is hard for men to change because they do not realize the negative effect of domestic violence .

Attitude towards Gender Equality: Murad says that earlier he did not consider girls and boys as equals. He thought boys were stronger, more capable and superior. Now he has started thinking differently. This change has started to take place due to the discussions organized by COVAW facilitators. Murad points out that the dramas conducted by COVAW too help him realize how limited his thinking was. Earlier he never used to consider his wife's work as real work. He used to think that he was the only one who was looking after their family. Now, he has begun to appreciate that his wife works hard to care for the family. As a result of this changed thinking, Murad feels that girls should get the same type of education as boys.

Murad has perceived a change in the way girls and boys are being treated in the community. He thinks it has become easier to treat both equally, because the government provides free education for the girls. Despite this, not everyone supports education of girls. Murad is quick to point out that there are many types of people in the community. Not all the people are in favor of educating girls. These people's ideology is different. They continue to believe that women should stay at home and not go outside the house to work.

According to Murad, girls should get married after the age of 18 years. Marriage earlier than this age, the girls are not emotionally ready for marriage. Early marriage, according to him can cause the physical damage to the girls. He thinks that pregnancy at a young age can cause problems at the time of child birth.

Murad considers dowry as a bad system, because dowry can cause many families to slide into poverty. Many a times, a girls father has been compelled to sell his land or livestock to pay for the dowry. Murad also thinks dowry can be the cause of separation also, as men who desire dowry might not want to live with a woman if she has not brought adequate dowry. He says he did not take any dowry from his parents in law.

Suggestions for future project: To eliminate the violence against women, Murad suggests more meeting should be arranged at every community. These will help increase awareness within the community. Murad feels the COVAW Change Facilitator should be more active in every area(para) to make people understand the harmful effects of violence. Murad says more colorful dramas with good quality actors should also be arranged.

Suhed Mia

Vatipara, Derai
Sunamganj

Children learn to be violent, if they see violence around them.

Background: Suhed Mia has lived in Vatipara since he was born. He has two sisters; one older and the other younger than him. His father was a day laborer. Suhed is the only one in his family to have been to school. He himself has only studied till class II. Both his sisters are illiterate. Suhed's parents passed away a few years ago.

Family: Suhed has been married for six years. His wife belongs to Jamalgonj. Her father is a day laborer. Suhed's wife can only write her name. Suhed and his wife have two daughters. The older one is three years old, and the younger one is only three months old.

Economic status: Suhed and his family live in a one room hut made of mud and tin. The family uses a pit latrine. Drinking water is available from the neighbor's tubewell. There is no electricity. Suhed has only three decimals of land on which his hut is located. He does not possess any land for cultivation. Neither does he own any livestock or other assets. The family lives on Suhed's earning as a day laborer. He has no savings. At times of emergency, Suhed borrows money on interest from the local money lender (Mahajan).

Association with an NGO. Neither Suhed, nor his wife are associated with any NGOs. His wife is not a member of any "samity" (micro credit group). But, Suhed says he attend the meetings and cultural activities of COVAW. He says he has gained knowledge on women's right from COVAW.

Causes of violence against women: Suhed thinks men use violence against women, because they do not realize the bad effects of their action. He recognizes that violence can be physical and verbal. Suhed says he too used to beat his wife quite frequently. He recounts several times when he became physically violent. If his wife did not do the housework properly, Suhed would beat her. One day, when she cooked food that was "tasteless", Suhed beat her with his hand. She got a little hurt after this incident, he says. Suhed recalls another time when his wife had a fight with his parents over a minor issue. When Suhed got to hear of this, he got angry and started beating her with a stick. Her leg got injured during this incident that Suhed had to buy medicine for her afterwards.

Suhed once pressurized her to borrow Tk.500 from her parents. At her refusal, Suhed got so angry that he started beating her with a bamboo stick. Her hand got hurt during this episode and he had to buy medicine for her. Another time, he remembers that she went to her parents house without taking his permission. He was not in the village that day. ON his return he found that she was not at home. He got so angry that when she returned, he

started to beat her with his hand. This incident, which took place six months ago, was the last time he hit her.

Aftermath of violence: Suhed is not happy at discussing these with a stranger. He is shy and uncomfortable at discussing his behavior. But, he continues to take part in the interview. Suhed says he would feel bad at his actions after each incident. It was only after the violent act that remorse would set in. Suhed says that his wife would get physically hurt by the violence, but he does not think there was any effect on her emotionally. There was no “mental injury”. Suhed also does not think that violence against women can have any negative effect on the other women in the family. However, he feels that violent actions can have an effect on the children of the family. “Children learn to be violent, if they see violence around them”. Suhed thinks the poor are more violent against the women than the rich.

Process of change: Suhed says he began to change about a year ago. According to him, COVAW is responsible for the change in him. The COVAW volunteers helped him understand the results of his actions. The COVAW Change Facilitator and the PDO discussed the negative effects of violence. It was through the cultural program he was able to visualize the harmful outcomes of domestic violence. The changes started a year ago, when he started to understand that violence does no one any good.

Suhed cannot say whether it was easy or difficult for him to change. He acknowledges that it was a slow process that took about a year. It is not that he beats his wife less frequently now. He just stopped beating her completely. When he gets angry now, he reminds himself of the bad effects of his actions. This helps him control his temper. The last time he beat his wife was six months ago. Suhed is quite emphatic that there are no circumstances under which violence against women could be permitted. Only by making people aware of the harmful results of violence, is it possible to prevent it. He thinks meetings should be organized in all the communities to help people become aware.

Outcomes of change: Suhed feels that his relationship with his wife has changed now. He says “I do not beat my wife now. Now I try to understand her”. He realizes that his previous behavior with her was not correct. Now, he says he is able to discuss their problems with her. Earlier he never used to think that she was either capable of understanding his problems, or could give him useful suggestions. He has more confidence in her abilities now. He thinks there is more closeness in their relationship. His family appreciates this change in him. Suhed too is pleased with this change in himself. He feels good about the fact that he has been able to give up violence against his wife. He does not regard violence against women as a sign of masculinity. “Some people might, but I do not”, he says.

Although his male friends view this change in him positively, he does not think it has influenced them. The community helped him he thinks, because they appreciate the change in him. Some men are harder to change, Suhed says, because they do not understand the bad effects of violence against women.

Attitude towards Gender Equality: Suhed says he has now started believing in equality of girls and boys. Till a year ago, he never used to think that girls and boys were equal. Now he feels that women need education as much as men do. Without formal education, women cannot get the knowledge they need to take active part in community activities. Suhed says he know women can work like men, by seeing educated women in COVAW meetings.

Suhed says he now asks for his wife's opinions before taking any decisions for the family. The COVAW meetings and activities have made him change his attitudes. Although Suhed has no sons, he thinks he takes care of his girls exactly like he would of a son. He believes now that even if he does not have enough resources, he will still send his daughters to school for education. Suhed says that girls should not get married at a young age. He says if girls get married too young they can have problems during child birth. But, he is not sure of what would the best age for girls to get married. He thinks anytime between 15-20 years would be appropriate age for a girl to get married.

Suhed considers dowry to be a bad practice. Dowry, he says, can harm the economic condition of the girl's family. He admits to have taken Tk. 6000 as dowry from his wife's parents. But, he says, at that time he was not aware of the negative impact of dowry. Because of the awareness program carried out by COVAW, he now realizes the larger impact of dowry on the community.

Suggestions for future projects: He thinks more meetings and cultural programs need to be organized. To prevent violence in the community people should be made understand its negative effects by the meeting and cultural program.

Sukumar Das

Boro hatti, Dera
Sunamganj

If a wife is abused by the husband, then all her dreams die.

Background: Sukumar Das was born in Borohatti and has lived here ever since. He is youngest son of his father's second wife. His parents are no more. His eldest brother also passed away last year. Sukumar's father was a farmer. He owned a lot of land. Sukumar considers his family to be a well to do one.

Family Life: Sukumar has studied till class seven at the Dherai High School. He has been married for 28 years. His wife, who is from a nearby village, has completed primary school. She too comes from a rich farming family. Sukumar and his wife have five children; two sons and three daughters. His elder daughters and one son are married. The older daughters studied till class V. The sons have completed education till class VIII. The youngest girl, who is 16 years old, is studying in class X.

Economic Status: Sukumar has multiple sources of income. He owns nine bighas of land and also leases land from other people. His two sons help in farming. Sukumar owns a grocery shop. His wife helps out in the grocery shop. Sukumar was not always involved with farming and business. He used to perform in a local folk theatre (Jatra) group. Since his father was well to do, Sukumar did not feel the need to work on the land. It was only six years ago that he realized that he had to ensure that his family were taken care of. It was at that time, that Sukumar opened the grocery shop and also started a duck farm. He owns 50 ducks.

He owns three houses; each house has two big rooms. Sukumar, his wife and his youngest daughter stay in the biggest house. The other houses are used by his sons, and also serve as stores. There is a separate room for a temple. Sukumar's house has electricity. He owns TV, radio and a mobile phone.

Association with NGO activities: Sukumar and his family have several associations with NGOs. His wife is a member of ASHA. It was through her membership, that Sukumar took a loan from ASHA. He used the loan to buy 40 ducks. Sukumar is a member of the SHOUHARDO formed Village Development Committee. He is associated with the COVAW program. His youngest daughter is a member of the SHOUHARDO EKATA group.

Causes of Domestic Violence: Sukumar cites lack of knowledge and inability of men to control their anger. Poverty, according to him, is the main cause of the anger. When people are unable to provide for the basic necessities of life, they get upset. The demands of the family, and their own frustration at not being able to meet these needs, causes men to become violent. Sukumar thinks that men who are able to fulfill the needs of their family, do not get angry, and do not misbehave towards their wives.

In his own case, Sukumar says his wife was against his involvement with the Jatra group. She tried to convince him to get him involved in the family life. But he did not listen to her and started fighting with her. Suddenly he lost control of his temper and started beating her with a stick. She got hit on her forehead which started to bleed. Sukumar had to rush her to the doctor.

The last time he hit his wife was during preparations for a religious ceremony in March. The two of them had a fight. He got angry and slapped her. This was a massive mistake on his part. Since last year, Sukumar says he has not quarreled with his wife, or hit her. When he gets angry he recites the Gita (the Hindu Holy book), or meditates to control his anger.

Aftermath of violence: Sukumar seems to understand the depth of emotional hurt of a woman who has had to suffer physical violence. After all, he says, a wife comes to a husband's home with lots of hopes and dreams. "If a wife is abused by the husband, then all her dreams die" says Sukumar. The sorrow she feels would stay with her for a long time. He sounds ashamed as he tells his own loss of control and his behavior. He says that under no circumstances should a woman be physically hit

Sukumar also seems to understand the impact of violence against women on other members of the family. He thinks a case of domestic violence could cause the elderly members in the family to feel insecure. Violence behavior in the family could also be viewed as acceptable behavior in the family. If a father is violent, then the son might think he could be the same towards his wife. This may lead to it becoming an acceptable practice in the family.

Process of Change: The violent incident when his wife tried to force him to give up his involvement with the Jatra troupe, proved to be a turning point for Sukumar. He realized that he was not being responsible towards his own family. Sukumar regards that incident as a warning from God to start being more caring and responsible. While his intentions were good, Sukumar says, the process of change was not easy. He returned to his family, but could not adjust being at home all the time. It was at this time, that he decided to concentrate on religion.

When the COVAW program started, his neighbor asked Sukumar to join in the discussions. It was through discussions organized by COVAW that, Sukumar says, he started to understand the causes of problems within a family. He has been associated with the project for a year now. Through this association he has come to know about the laws. In the discussions he has also met with several educated people who have given him helpful advice. The COVAW project builds awareness, conducts dramas to communicate messages on violence against women. Sukumar says he has started to control his temper. He also became more religious. Sukumar has a religious Guru now. Sukumar feels he was not always a responsible family man. He led a life that was totally centered around his own needs. He was associated with a drama group and not able to contribute to family income. He was also addicted to marijuana. He sold his wife's gold ornaments to pay for his addiction. Although he has changed and has been caring for his family, he still gets frustrated at himself for

having wasted his youth. The heightened awareness in him and the change in the direction his life is taking is a result of religious knowledge. Sukumar is convinced that knowledge of religion is the only way people can get to know their own selves. The change in him is permanent. Only if he were to deviate from the path of religion would the change in him be unstable.

Outcome of Change: Sukumar thinks that the society considers men to be more powerful and stronger than the women. This the society feels gives the man the right to use aggression against women. But actually men cannot do anything without women. He gives an example of his own wife who he regards as a “strong woman”. Sukumar says he only provided money for the birth of his children. After that everything that had to be done for bringing up his children was taken care of his wife. He feels he listens to his wife more now. His wife too has changed. She tries not to quarrel with him too much. Sukumar has not paid much thought on how his actions might have had an effect upon his brothers in the family. But, he thinks his friends understand him. Although he has spoken to his friends, Sukumar is not aware of any changes in their lives. Some men are different; these men will never change.

Because he was always away from home, Sukumar had to depend upon his wife and mother to assume the responsibilities. Even now, his wife is the main decision maker. When his mother was alive, she used to help Sukumar’s wife in taking decisions. If his wife disagrees with him, Sukumar tries to convince her. If he does not succeed, then he does not listen to her and goes ahead and does what he wants to.

Sukumar actively participates in the COVAW process. Since he is a good singer he is called upon to perform at the COVAW programs. He is also a known face to the villagers. When people come to his grocery shops, he talks to them and gives them suggestions on giving up violence. According to Sukumar, people in the village are illiterate and do not understand what is good or bad for them. COVAW activities are attractive. They provide people with knowledge. The COVAW volunteers also help people realize that violence is not good . Sukumar thinks all of these activities are effective in reducing the incidence of domestic violence in the village. too help

He thinks that about two thirds of the cases of violence have been prevented due to COVAW’s activities. Women he thinks continue to be in abusive relationships because they do not know of any ways to prevent it. If his daughter was a victim of violence then, Sukumar says he would first try to solve it. If he does not succeed, then he would seek legal help. If his son were to be violent against women, Sukumar says he would punish his son.

Attitudes towards Gender Equality: Sukumar says he has always believed girls and boys are equal. He points out that his youngest daughter is already more educated than his sons. He says he learnt to view girls and boys as equals from very young age. Sukumar says his mother influenced him to regard both as equals. According to him, there cannot be a limit on education for girls. It is not for him to decide but for his daughter to determine till when she wants to study. Sukumar says the decision to continue studying will be his daughter’s. He says he will do what he is capable of, to support her.

Although Sukumar knows that the legal age of marriage for girls is 18 years, he thinks that 22 would be a more appropriate age to get married. Discussion of marriage at an earlier age would “distract the girls’ attention from their studies”. Sukumar believes that people have to give scope and opportunities for girls to grow up. But, the society, according to him is too conservative. He says that people think “that marriage is the only destination for girls”. He does not think that it is difficult to treat girls and boys as equals. But, parents are more concerned about their daughter’s safety. This is one reason for early marriage of girls. Sukumar feels, like many other men in this study that the daughters are more attached to their parents and take better care of their parents than sons.

Dowry continues to be practiced in the villages. According to Sukumar the Hindu law does not recognize a daughter’s right to ancestral property. Therefore the parents have to give dowry to ensure security for their daughters’ future. The Hindu law also does not allow divorce. This also compels the parents to give dowry. Sukumar does not think it is right, but is resigned to the practice.

Although Sukumar thinks changes are taking place, he believes that the community thinking on equality of boys and girls has not changed. This makes it hard for the individual families to treat their children equally. He think COVAW has brought some change, but more is needed.

Suggestions for future projects: According to Sukumar, people have to be educated first. Knowledge will help them change. More dramas and discussions, and meetings in all the paras will help in raising awareness in the community.

Lukesh Dass

**Datta Gram, Schoolhatti
Sunamgang**

If a father is violent in front of his children, then his sons too will think it is normal to get behave in a similar manner with their wives.

Background information: Lukesh Dass has lived in Dattagram since he was born. His father was a share cropper and his mother a housewife. Lukesh has only one sister who is younger than him. She is married. No one in Lukesh's family has ever been to school.

Family History: Lukesh got married five years ago. His wife is from Dulbashi, a neighboring village. She has never been to school, but can write her name. Lukesh and his wife have two daughters, a three year old and a one year old. Lukesh, his wife, their children and his parents live together.

Economic Status: Lukesh started to work for a living when he was only 15 years old. His work changes according to seasons. During the dry season, he s a rickshaw puller, and a sharecropper. The area where Dattagram is located, gets submerged under water due to rains for six months of the year. For these six months, Lukesh becomes a fisherman.

Lukesh and his family live in a mud hut with a tin roof. There are two rooms and a kitchen. An open toilet is available for the family. Water is drawn from a neighbor's house. Lukesh owns a mobile phone. He has one cow. But, he does not own any land or other assets. Lukesh is the primary earning member of the family. He is responsible for food, clothing and shelter. Even though Lukesh's father helps him out, he is too old to earn enough money. The parents are dependent upon Lukesh as well.

Association with NGOs: Lukesh's wife is a member of Asha, and EKATA groups. She took a loan of Tk. 9000 from ASHA last April. Lukesh does not know much about EKATA activities. He and his wife are both members of COVAW. Although he is too busy with work, he manages to attend the COVAW meetings because they are sometimes held in the bazaar.

Causes of Domestic Violence: Lukesh feels that in the haor area, poverty is a major cause of violence towards woman. Poverty leads to conflict within the family. If the husband is unable to earn enough to feed his family, then there is frustration in the family. When a man is hungry and there is no food for him at home, he gets angry and expresses his anger by beating his wife and children .

There are individual differences amongst men too. Lukesh says that some men are patient; they can control their temper. These men do not get angry. There are other men, who cannot control their temper; these men get angry quickly and get violent. He says, "if a father is violent in front of his children, then his sons too will think it is normal to get behave in a similar manner with their wives".

Lukesh says that he used to beat his wife in the past. According to him, he and his wife got married at a very young age. He was only twenty when they got married. Neither he, nor his wife, had an understanding of what it meant to be a family and to live together. His wife could not adjust with him and his family. They would fight over really minor issues. And, sometimes he would lose control and hit his wife. His mother would try and stop him, but Lukesh just would not listen. Lukesh says, that three or four times after beating her, he had to take his wife to a doctor for treatment. On several other occasions, because he hurt her so badly, he had to buy medicines for her from a chemist.

Lukesh wanted a son desperately. A year ago, when his 2nd daughter's birth took place, Lukesh was not happy. Whenever he would see his younger daughter's face, he would get angry. Soon after the birth, he started quarrelling with his wife. He started beating her and kicked her on the abdomen. His mother tried to stop him but he did not stop. Lukesh's wife was already weak after having given birth. The kick in the abdomen caused her a lot of harm. She had to be taken to the hospital, where she stayed for two days. She suffered for three months. Lukesh had to spend Tk. 6000 for her treatment..

After math of violence: It is only now that he has given up violence towards his wife, that Lukesh realizes the implications of his behavior. He remembers that his elder daughter would cry when Lukesh would beat his wife. At that time he did not realize that his violent behavior was petrifying for his daughter to witness. Lukesh thinks she is still afraid of him. Lukesh says he never hit his wife with a stick, he only beat her with his hands. While he says the use of verbal aggression is alright, under no circumstances should a woman be physically hit. Women are weaker than men, so people should not use violence against women. He realizes now through his experience that his treatment of his wife had a negative effect on his family and his children.

Process of Change: Lokesh says his mother would try and get him to understand the impact of his behavior towards his wife. She would try and prevent him from beating his wife. Promise. Lukesh recalls, that COVAW people talked to him around the time he hit his wife after the birth of the second daughter. The COVAW staff made him understand the full impact of his behavior. He started to realize that beating his wife, in front of children and his elders, is not good for his image. People would make fun of him and he could lose his reputation. Children too are affected by violence on women. All of these issues made Lukesh feel frustrated with himself.

Before the COVAW people talked to him, he had not understood the complexities associated with his behavior. He had not given it any thought. Once he started to understand the full implications of his behavior that Lukesh promised he will never beat his wife again. He still remembers his promise. He says although the change in him was gradual, the actual realization hit him when he saw the fear in his daughter's eyes.

He has been associated with COVAW for a year now. COVAW arranged meetings to build awareness on violence against women. They arrange drama, "uthan boithok" (discussions)

with women. The project also organized meetings in the bazaar. They had put eye-catching posters in the community on violence against women. Through the meetings he got knowledge and was able to understand his own faults. He is not a regular member at these meetings. According to Lukesh, the change was not too difficult. But, he would not call it easy either. It took time. One year ago he promised that he will never beat his wife again. He has not beaten her since and is trying to live up to that

Outcome of Change: Lukesh feels he has learnt to control his temper now. When he gets angry he goes outside, and tries to keep himself busy to take his mind off the reason that was making him angry. Sometimes he plays “pasha” with his friends. When he returns home at night too, his wife also tries not to irritate him. He tries hard not to get into a conflict with his wife. All these changes have improved his relationship with his wife. Some people think that a man being aggressive is a good sign. Lukesh says he too used to think so. But, now he knows that he does not need to resort to violence to prove he is a man.

Lukesh says he takes decisions after consulting his wife and parents. In case of children he depends on his wife. because he is outside most of the day, his wife is the one who takes care of them. Lukesh feels that his relationship with his wife has improved. He listens to his wife more now. He thinks that she is more knowledgeable on managing family, and bringing up children than him. Lukesh also thinks his wife has become more mature now. She is also more vocal now and voices her opinion more readily than before.

Lukesh says he has had mixed reactions on talking about domestic violence related issues with his male friends. Those who are married, listen to him. The friends who are not married, make fun of him.

Attitudes towards women: Lukesh says that although COVAW people have been telling them that girls and boys are equals, he does not think so. He recognizes that people around him are beginning to consider girls and boys as equals, but not him. Boys can take the responsibility of the family, girls cannot. Girls get married and go to live with husbands’ families. According to him, the society depends more upon boys, who work harder. Boys, Lukesh feels, can go anywhere. There are no restrictions on their mobility. Boys also earn money for their families. Society does not allow girls to go outside their village. Lukesh gives an example of the three girls who work for JASHIS (the partner NGO). He says these girls travel on their own for work, but people talk about them in a derogatory manner.

These differences between girls and boys, however, should not affect girls’ education. Lukesh would like his daughters to be educated well. Lukesh thinks people take special care of their daughter. Some times, they are so conscious of these difference that they give more to a daughter than the son. Although Lukesh is aware of the legal age of marriage for girls and boys, he thinks that 25 years for girls and 30 years for boys is a better age. Marriage at these ages would allow the girls and boys to become more mature and to be able to solve the problems.

Suggestions for future projects: Lukesh thinks that the community is getting aware on this topic. Domestic violence is a difficult area in which to bring about change. People need knowledge to change. He thinks the COVAW effort is appreciable. The project organized meetings in different venues. The drama attracted many people and helped people understand the causes of violence. Lukesh thinks that this type of a program needs to run for a long time people to prevent violence.

CRITICAL THEMES EMERGING FROM THE CASE STUDIES

This section will present the major findings from the review of the case studies. The section will create a holistic picture of the COVAW project, its process and the outcomes, as evident from the case studies.

The section is organized to provide a profile of the men and their families. The findings highlight common triggers of violence and its impact on the women, the perpetrators and their families. The key elements of the process of change provide an insight into the factors that led to the change, and the key players who have assisted the men in their journey towards changing. The relationship between the men, and their immediate environment is explored for its role in promoting or inhibiting change in the men. The decision to give up violence is analyzed against the backdrop of broader family and community level changes. Under each broad category, the specific themes that have programmatic implications are presented separately.

PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

On the whole, the men in the study were willing to talk to the interviewers. Each of the respondents spent close to two hours with the interviewers. The respondents met the interviewers at their homes, at a public place like community centers, schools, or even in the fields. None of the respondents seemed to care about the confidentiality of the information they would be providing. Of all the respondents, two seemed shy and uncomfortable, but even they spoke about their relationships and the causes of domestic violence, with the interviewers. Only in Sunamganj, one of the respondents declined to be interviewed by a woman. The interview was then conducted by a male interviewer.

The men in the study represented a cross-section of the community. From well to do community leaders and Shalishkars to day-laborers, the study captured the spectrum of socio-economic backgrounds. Of all the respondents, three were Hindus. Majority of the men were in the age group 30-50 years. Only two respondents were older than sixty, and two younger than 30 years of age. Of all the respondents, four had never been to school. Not surprisingly, these men also belonged to families where illiteracy prevailed. These men were all engaged in daily wage work as rickshaw pullers, seasonal farmers, or fisherman. Three respondents had completed education upto, or lower than, class V. The remaining respondents had all been educated from the class VI to HSC.

The presence of men from different age groups in this study indicates that change is possible at all ages.

Most men had close association with farming, either themselves, or as share croppers. The share croppers were also more likely to be engaged in other occupations, such as rickshaw pullers and daily wage laborers. The men in Sunamganj also reported fishing for half the year, reflecting the reality of the landscape where the landmass is submerged under water for six months of the year. Only two men owned their own businesses. Of all the respondents, only one man was a skilled worker. This man was self employed as a diesel engine mechanic.

Half the respondents had sanitary latrines installed within their homes. All families in Dinajpur and Tangail had their own tube wells. In Sunamganj, three of the five respondents reported getting drinking water from the neighbor's tubewell. Of all the men, three represent unique features. One of the respondents in Dinajpur, worked as a "Shalishkar" (community based enforcer). In Tangail one of the respondents was also a freedom fighter. This man, was also drawing a freedom fighter's honorarium from the government. Sukumar Das in Sunamganj, had spent his youth as a member of the folk theater group "Jatra".

In each of the regions, there was at least one relatively well off respondent. These well to do men had multiple sources of income, and owned large number of movable and immovable assets. The wives of these men, by their own accounts, also belonged to well to do families.

There was recognition that domestic violence exists in all strata, but might be more visible in the poorer households. Since there is more at stake in the well to do households, there might be a greater tendency in these families to keep domestic violence hidden

Family History

The men participating in this study had been married for five years or more. The two oldest men had been married for more than 30 years. Of all the men, five reported getting married before the legal age of 21 years.

The education levels of the wives varied widely from non literate to graduate levels. Only one of the wives was a graduate. She also belonged to a well to do family. Half of the women had never been to school. There were six women who had completed schooling from class IV to Class VII. One of the women had completed schooling up to SSC. Only in a few cases were the wives better educated than their husbands.

All, except one couple in Sunamganj, had children. More than half the families had two children. The older couples tended to have more children. The oldest respondent had seven children. All the children, regardless of their parents educational status, were enrolled in school, or had received education beyond primary level.

Only two of the families were joint families, with the one or both parents living with the family. Of the remaining families, two had started off as joint families, but broke up due to disputes involving the daughter in law.

More than half the wives, were associated with the micro credit groups of NGOs such as BRAC or ASHA. All of these women had taken loans to support their husbands' businesses. Only two women were working outside the house. One of these was employed by UDDOG, a partner NGO of COVAW project. The other woman was a member of the Labor Contracting Society, formed by SHOUHARDO to undertake civil construction work in the village.

Many of the women, especially in Tangail and in Sunamganj, were associated with SHOUHARDO's EKATA groups. In Sunamganj, some of the women were also associated with the Mothers' group formed by CARE Bangladesh's ARSHI project. Sukumar's (Sunamganj) daughter was old enough to be associated with EKATA.

COVAW's strategy of working with existing projects has provided it an entry point into communities. Although half the women were associated with micro credit groups, this does not seem to have provided them with a protection against domestic violence. The wide reach of micro credit groups, seems to provide a possible platform for scaling up COVAW interventions.

Causes of Domestic Violence

In most cases, the violence would be sparked by trivial issues. Men's impatience with, what they consider women's incompetence to deal with household responsibilities, seemed to be the most common cause. Delay in serving food to their husbands, or not being around when the men returned from a hard day in the fields, would set off a violent reaction amongst their

husbands. In their recall of the causes of domestic violence, the men seemed to imply that women's work was either not as important as their own, or, that the women were not capable enough of even doing the household work.

Only in a few cases, did the men mention very specific reasons for their violent behavior. Lukesh in Sunamganj mentioned that he could not get over his disappointment over the birth of his second daughter. So great was his disappointment, that he started to be violent towards his wife. In his anger towards her, he hit her on her abdomen, just a few weeks after she gave birth. Another man mentions that his wife's parents lost the money he had given them to invest in a business for him. Although the decision to invest was his, the wife had to bear the brunt of his loss. She became the scapegoat for his anger towards his parents in law.

The men in this study recognized there were individual differences that account for the varied reactions to these common frustrations. According to them, some men are by nature patient and even tempered. These men do not find it difficult to control their tempers when they are frustrated. For others, these minor issues stretch their patience to breaking point. Shamsur (Tangail) explained that even those men who claim to be patient most of the time, are driven to violence because of their wives' "domineering attitude".

Some men thought that although violence existed in all economic groups, it was more likely in the poor families. The social stigma attached to domestic violence results in gross underreporting, especially in the upper classes. In the poorer segment of the society, incidence of domestic violence tends to rise during times of economic deprivation. The Context Analysis carried out by COVAW also indicates that the lean periods were associated with higher incidence of violence.⁴

Underlying these overt trigger points are some deeply ingrained traditional and cultural perceptions, which cause these men to use violence against women. Traditionally, men alone are the breadwinners in the family. The respondents in this study referred to frustrations at being unable to provide for the family, as a cause of violence. On the other side of the same coin, was the women's perceived inability to understand the frustration of men at being unable to earn enough. The men in these studies did not think that the women were capable of understanding the problems they face in making a living. Rafiqul from Dinajpur says he would get frustrated when his wife would demand expensive things from him. The frustration, and the lack of empathy and support from the women, seemed to marginalize men in their quest for meeting the family needs. In cases where the family's economic condition had improved, men remarked that the main cause for violence no longer existed.

Men seem alone in their attempts to secure livelihoods. They feel unsupported. Since they believe women will not be able to understand their problems, the men are unable to seek emotional support from their wives.

⁴ Bode, et.al., Political Culture, *Shalish* and Gender Relations in Dinajpur, Sunamganj and Tangail

Marriage at a really young age, when both the girl and the boy are too immature to understand the full implications of marital life, was another cause of violence towards women. The men felt that young girls are not emotionally mature to deal with their husband/parents in law. Murad (Sunamganj) referred to the unwillingness of the young girl to develop physical intimacy with her husband as another cause of aggravation between the couple. Younger girls also tend to go away to their parents home more frequently, and for longer duration, as compared to older women. This too could be a cause of strife between the young couple. In this study, one thirds of the men reported marrying before they were 21 years old. In Bangladesh more than half the girls are married before the minimum legal age of 18 years.⁵ The younger the girl at marriage, the higher is the risk of pregnancy related complications, and domestic violence.

Dowry was considered as a common cause for violence against women. Except for Suhed Mia (Sunamganj), no other respondents admitted to taking dowry. The respondents in these studies remarked that some men consider dowry as the “right of the husband”. Dowry is a double- edged sword for the woman. If she brings a dowry, the amount can be the source of conflict within the family. Dowry can also be interpreted as the woman’s means to assert her authority over the family. Moslemuddin (Dinajpur) says because he did not take dowry from his wife’s parents, his wife cannot take him for granted. According to him, she is always “careful” about Moslemuddin leaving her. On the other hand, if a woman does not bring dowry, she might be constantly berated for it. The study by Bode et.al, indicates that increased attention on dowry might have worked against the women (Bode, et.al, 2009). Unlike earlier where women were sent back to their parents home for not bringing enough dowry, now face the risk domestic violence from their parent’s in law who are fearful of a case filed against them. Some men in this study felt that the practice of dowry had increased in the community.

Only two men, both from Dinajpur, thought violence against women was understandable under special circumstances. According to Shamsheer, if a woman was involved in an illicit relationship with another man, then her husband had a right to use violence against her. But, he thinks that even in this case, the woman should be made to understand that her actions are improper. Moslemuddin thinks that if a woman continues to persist with her point of view, even when she is in the wrong, it would be understandable for her husband to beat her up.

Inability of men to deal with frustrations, whether minor or major, seems to be a common cause of domestic violence. Frustrations stem from poverty, community practices and expectations, that are rooted in traditional beliefs. Immaturity in both men and women, due to marriage at young age, prevents the development of a health marital relationship.

⁵ UNAIDS, UNICEF and WHO. 2002. *Young people and HIV/AIDS: Opportunity in Crisis*; Population Division. 2000. *World Population Prospects, the 2000 Revision* . New York: United Nations

The Impact of Domestic Violence:

These studies show how violence against women has consequences for them and their families. Men reported hitting their wives with their hands, kicking them or using a stick to beat them. Most men said their wives suffered only minor injuries. A few men clarified that they never beat their wives with a stick, implying that this might be a redeeming factor for their behavior.

Many a times, however, the women sustained injuries that were so severe that they needed medical treatment. In a few cases, the woman's hand was broken, or cut, as a result of the assault by the husband. Lukesh says he was so inflamed by the birth of his second daughter that he kicked his wife in the stomach, just a few weeks after she gave birth. She needed to be taken to the hospital where she spent two nights. For some women, the husband's violence resulted in long term injuries. Md. Elahi Box's wife sustained an ear injury six years ago, from which she has still not recovered.

Only a few of the men were able to understand the emotional impact of violence on their wives. As Abdul (Tangail) said that his violent behavior would break his wife's heart. Men also recognized that emotional hurt was invisible, and difficult to perceive. Violence would cause the women to be afraid around their husbands. The uncertainty of what would provoke their husbands to violence caused the women to live under constant stress. Mahiruddin (Tangail) says that his wife would always be tense and nervous around him. After the violent episode, the men noticed that their wives would be sad for several days. Rafiqul (Dinajpur) says his wife would stop eating after being or hurt.

Once the anger would die down, the men would feel ashamed of their behavior. Imploring the wife to have food, not eating until she eats, or buying medicines for their wives, were some of the ways that men tried to make amends for their action. Amongst those men who had a special role in community forums, there was concern that their behavior towards their wives, would hurt their social image.

Some of the men in these studies realized the implications of their violent behavior on the children in the family. Men said the children were scared of their fathers. While some men would be aware of the impact of their behavior on their children, others recognized it only in retrospect. As Harivokto Das said, he was now able to realize that his elder daughter was still scared of him, even after he had stopped being violent towards his wife. Children would get disturbed by their father's behavior and would not be able to concentrate on their studies.

The older children, especially boys, felt ashamed at their fathers' treatment of their mother. According to Shamsur (Tangail) his aggressive behavior was alienating his children from him. Md. Elahi Box's son told him that it did not befit his father to hit his mother. The children were also concerned that their fathers' behavior would make their family a target of ridicule

in the community. Ansarul's son tells his father, 'you are getting older now, it is not appropriate for you to shout at my mother and beat her. It makes us look bad'.

There was realization amongst some men, that violence breeds violence. They recognize that children might begin to consider violence as an acceptable behavior if they see violence in the family. These men were particularly aware of the outcome of their own behavior on that of their sons. They were conscious that their sons too might become violent towards women if they see violence at home. Even when the men were violent towards their wives, they were aware that their families' happiness was getting destroyed by their behavior.

There is some appreciation amongst the men on the effect of violence on their children. Grown up children, especially sons, were ashamed of their fathers' behavior. Children were concerned about the image of their family in the community. For some men, the effect on children seemed to have contributed towards the need for change.

The Process of Change

For the men in these studies, the motivation to changes originates from different sources. For many men, it was the reaction of their wives and their families, and the implications for their future relationship, that were the driving forces for change. In two cases, the wives left their husbands to seek refuge in their fathers' homes. Both Moslemuddin and Ansarul (Dinajpur) had to go through lengthy reconciliation processes to be united with their wives and children. Despite the recognition that his treatment of his wife was harming the family, Ansarul was unable to give up his violent behavior. It was only his elder son's disapproval of Ansarul's violent tendencies.

For the other men, the need to change came from greater awareness of the causes of violence, and its implications for the family. These men began to develop an understanding of the causes of violence from participating in the various activities conducted by COVAW and PROTIRODH.

All men mentioned that change was a slow and a gradual process involving determination on their parts. Once their minds were made up, the men did not think it was hard to give up violence. "Helping men understand through knowledge" was key to the process of change.

The COVAW volunteers spent considerable efforts in helping the men in this study to attend the meetings, participate in the discussions. This commitment seems to have helped the men in getting interested and involved, in activities to prevent domestic violence. The staff from the project provided information to the people and helped people become aware of the laws. The activities and the discussion seem to have helped men understand the causes of violence.

The dramas conducted by COVAW were appreciated by all the men. These were particularly helpful in assisting men visualize the effects of violence at home. Men were able to relate these to their own lives and situations. The identification with the events portrayed in the drama, helped men relate to the situations and have helped in initiating the change. Equally importantly the dramas helped men realize that they too can change, and stop being violent towards their wives.

The availability of different groups in the community are a source of support for both the men and the women. The EKATA groups, the COVAW committees are there to assist the community members. This is in contrast to the lack of any support mechanisms in the community a few years ago. The involvement of the community in the personal lives of the community members is a recent phenomenon. Domestic violence, till a few years ago, was viewed as an internal matter not to be discussed with outsiders; nor was outside intervention considered an option.

The activities conducted by COVAW and other associated projects, have brought this sensitive topic into the public arena. As a result of this, there is increased risk of public embarrassment for the men who are violent towards their wives. The men in this study refer to the threat of public shame as a contributing factor to their need for change.

Even for men like Shamsheer Ali, where violent actions had stopped before COVAW activities started, the project has contributed to a deeper awareness on the role and contribution of women to families. The project has helped these men in reviewing and revising their attitudes towards women.

The combination of increased family pressure, the risk of public ridicule, and increased confidence levels amongst women may be compelling factors for men to change. In some men, the change is also a result of a desire to become a better person. A mix of interventions that include these factors are likely to be more effective than a single intervention.

Outcomes of Changes in the Men and their Wives:

Several positive changes were evident for the men, their relationships with their wives and for their children. Men remarked upon feeling closer to their wives. There was a feeling in some of the men, that their wives understood them better now. This is probably also a result of the changed perceptions of the men themselves. The project has helped men view women differently. Earlier the men did not think that women were capable of understanding the world outside the four walls of their homes. The projection of women as capable people has helped men appreciate their role in the household. As a result men feel they can discuss some of their problems with their wives. Men says they are also being more respected in the

communities now that they have been able to bring about this major change in themselves. The members of the family too appreciate the change in these men. The reaction from the friends is mixed. Some of the male friends compliment the men on their changed behavior and their attitude towards their wives. There are others, especially unmarried men, who make fun of the changed men.

Men are learning to cope with their anger better now. Instead of flying into a rage, the men are trying out different strategies to prevent violent episodes. Walking away from the scene; or ignoring the cause are some of the ways men learn to diffuse their anger. Others say they remind themselves of the consequences of their violent behavior to prevent them from becoming physically aggressive. Sukumar meditates and has resorted to religion to calm himself.

Men reported using different coping mechanisms to deal with their anger now. Helping men increase their repertoire of anger management techniques would help them further. Similarly, women too are learning to recognize signs of imminent violence, and prevent it better.

From the discussions with the men, it seems that the men are not the only ones that are undergoing a slow transformation. The women too are reported as being “more caring now”, as compared to before. The men feel that women look after them better by being there for them. It also seems that the women have also learnt to identify the times when a topic might provoke anger in their husbands. Although men think that most women continue to stay in abusive relationships because they have no where to go, this too is changing. The men in these studies think women are no longer ready to accept domestic violence. In the past women continued to stay in abusive relationships, but now they protest against ill treatment. They are becoming aware of the law, and know where they can get support. As Ansarul says, “Ekhon tara are chup kiore thake na, porishod a doure ase” (now they do not keep quiet, but run off to the Upazila quarters).

The decision to give up violence seems to have led to overall improvement in marital relationships. Men feel more supported by their wives now, than before. Men also articulate positive changes in their wives, highlighting the need for continued strategies to involve both men and women.

The respondents in the study also made a distinction between verbal and physical violence. According to all of them, physical violence was on the decline, but the levels of verbal violence continued to be the same. According to a couple of respondents, verbal violence was harder to see and therefore harder to control.

Attitudes towards Equality of Women

This topic evoked mixed reactions from the men. One group of men stressed that they had always believed in equality of girls and boys. These are the same men, who till a few months ago constantly beat up their wives. Their past behavior with their wives, and their reported belief in equality of girls and boys, brings the contradiction in their attitudes and behaviors into sharp focus. It seems that girls belonging to own families are treated differently from those of others. Fathers believed in the capability of their daughters and wanted them to study as much as boys.

Another group of men said that they did not believe in equality till COVAW, and other projects, started activities in the communities. Their perceptions have changed after being exposed to the new topics introduced through discussions, and in the dramas. These men now say they believe that women are as capable of men. They have reconsidered their attitudes towards the education of girls, and now believe that girls deserve to be educated as much as boys. However, if the resources were a concern, then the education of the daughter might have to be comprised to allow the boy in the family to study further.

A third group of men said they did not believe girls and boys were equal. This group brought out socially imposed restrictions as the reason for not considering girls and boys as equals. According to this group, since girls cannot go out into the world, earn money, work physically as hard as boys, they cannot be considered at par with the boys. Girls had to be protected, because their honor was inextricably linked with the family's honor. In Sunamganj, Lukesh Das says, the community does not have a favorable view of the local NGO female staff who travel alone for work.

A few men also made a distinction between equality and similarity. They clarified that while they thought the girls and boys were equal, they were not the same. To have exactly the same expectations from both would not be appropriate.

The school aged daughters of all the men were already enrolled in schools. A few fathers had high ambitions for their daughters. They wanted their daughters to be highly educated, become graduates, or professionally qualified. As Sukumar said, "It is not for me to decide till when should she study, it is for her to decide". Mahrudin, despite opposition from his own father, had supported his sister to study further. He wanted his daughters to graduate and get good jobs.

Despite their differences in their views on equality of boys and girls, for all the men education of girls was considered most important. All men felt that girls should get the same opportunities and resources for education. An educated girl would be able to look after her family better and ensure education for her children. Education also helps in ensuring better marriage prospects for girls.

On the whole, the men viewed their girls with tenderness and with affection. Those, like Ansarul, who do not have a daughter said they would treat them equally if they had one. .

Mahiruddin and Harivokto seem to have become reconciled to not having sons. Girls, according to the men in this study, looked after their parents better than the boys. The men claim they do not differentiate between boys and girls for anything.

The men in these studies would like to do what it takes to ensure their daughters have a happy future. There is a conflict between their own personal desires for their daughters' future, and larger societal norms and traditional values. Reconciling these contradictions is a challenge for the men.

It seems that men are beginning to appreciate their wives as partners in their life together. Women are being viewed as capable people, who are knowledgeable and support their husbands. Men seek their advice in business matters as well as household issues.

It is in the appreciation of women's contribution to the family and society, that COVAW and other projects, seem to have made an impact. By helping women understand their husbands better, the projects appear to have created a more level platform for both to engage and work together. This is a unifying thread that seems to run through most of the discussions with the men.

Age of Marriage:

The legal age of marriage for girls and boys seemed to be well known by the men. The men were able to give the appropriate reasons for marriage at the right age for girls. The implications of early pregnancy on the health of the girl and her child were the most common reasons. Men who wanted their daughters to study and become qualified said that marriage at the "right age was important" as it was difficult to find suitable grooms for older girls.

There were references to the emotional maturity of the girls and boys as well for marrying at the right age. Some men thought that boys should get married around the age of 25 years as marriage at an earlier age would affect the boys' physical health also. Men also felt that boys should get married at an age when they are able to bear the responsibility of their families.

There is an appreciation amongst the men of the need for both girls and boys to get married after the legal age. Despite their convictions, it might not be possible for the men to adhere to these beliefs. Safety of their daughters and pressure from the immediate community/relatives might compel the men to marry their daughters at a young age. It would be inaccurate to interpret this as a voluntary gesture on the part of the men, especially the poor, who are most susceptible to these external forces.

The Practice of Dowry

Except for a few exceptions, most men felt that dowry was a widely practiced system. Some men even thought that the practice of dowry had increased in recent years. Even men, who want their daughters to be highly educated, said that dowry would be given at the time of marriage. Dowry was considered a way to make the girls married life comfortable. The not so well off men in the study felt that dowry contributed towards poverty in the society, as poor people slid further into poverty after arranging dowry for their daughters. Dowry and early marriage are also linked, as the younger the girl, the less is the expected dowry.

The better off people, justified the need for dowry by saying that it was the girls' inheritance. This was particularly noted in the case of the three Hindu respondents, who said dowry was a girl's inheritance as according to the Hindu law she cannot inherit property. The Hindu law also does not allow for divorce, according to these men. Dowry, therefore, offers a safeguard for girls against an unknown future.

The practice of dowry is a complex issue involving several layers. For the poorer men in these studies, it seems to be a sure way of causing further poverty. This group considers dowry an evil practice. The better off group find several reasons for justifying dowry. As Moslemuddin's case suggests, equating not taking dowry as an indication of enhanced status of women, would be a misinterpretation of the reality. The giving and taking of dowry has to be viewed in combination with other indicators of women's empowerment.

The multiple dimensions of social change sometimes seem contradictory in nature, as is most evident in the case of the practice of dowry. The increased recognition of the need for girls to be educated, coexists with the need to give dowry. Dowry is also seems to be a tool to establish control. It seems to give the women the power to establish their authority in the new family. The men like to control the resources they receive, but do not like the feeling of beholden to their wives for bringing dowry. Eradication of dowry cannot be viewed as an independent indicator of women's empowerment. It has to be related to other indicators of social change to understand the complexities involved.

Contextual Changes in the communities

The changes highlighted by the men in these studies have to be viewed against the background of larger social and economic processes underway in the communities. Several respondents refer to a decrease in domestic violence in the communities. The men recalled changes in the communities that have contributed to the decrease in violence against women in the families. The various CARE projects have organized discussions on topics such as

prevention of early marriage, dowry, and violence against women. All of these activities have encouraged people to think, and to reflect upon their own situations.

From the discussion with the men, it seems that initially there was hesitation in discussing these topics. Even though these issues affected the villagers the most, they had not paid much attention to it. The NGOs, according to the men, were able to focus the attention of the community on these topics. It was a slow and a gradual process. The combined efforts of these projects over a period of five years have now started to bear results. There is a wider appreciation on the need to prevent early marriage, the practice of dowry and domestic violence.

The degree of distinctions between the various CARE projects was evident by the awareness on these projects. Men were aware of the role of PROTIRODH in prevention of early marriage and dowry. COVAW, according to them, helps the community understand the economic and cultural loss that occurs due to domestic violence. For the men in Tangail and Sunamganj, EKATA was a familiar process.

The sensitization and involvement of the Union Parishads and the local Law enforcers (Shalishkars) has helped in making sensitive redressal mechanisms available for women. During the validation process, one old women remarked that men are now careful about using violence against the women, they are afraid women will go seek justice. The EKATA groups have worked in the communities to prevent these crimes. Only two cases of violence had been taken out of the family boundaries. It is not clear the extent to which women got a favorable hearing from the men involved in

Increase in education levels are also causing the men to change. Greater support for education of girls from the NGOs and the Government was also seen as contributing positively towards the situation. Some of the men remarked upon improved communication system. This facility to connect and communicate has also made change possible in the community. Many men mentioned the TV program on domestic violence (a social awareness message from the Ministry of Women's and Children's Affairs). Several men also remarked upon improvement of their economic status. Since poverty is considered as one of the aggravating factors for domestic violence, the reduction in poverty is directly related to domestic violence. Some of the men feel that people are also more aware of the law and know how to seek legal help. This enables the women to reach out for assistance when they need it. Women's awareness of the law also contributes to prevention of violence against them.

There is increased awareness on education of girls and marriage at or after the legal age. But, maintaining the relationship remains a priority for the fathers. Only one father said that, if his daughter were to be abused, he would bring her home. Most men said that they would try to solve the problem personally, or take the help of the Shalish. Going to Court was the last resort.

The discussions with the men and community members indicates that violence against women seems to have entered the “collective consciousness”. Various factors seem to be stimulating the changes. Strategies to address the community level factors that prevent women from being viewed as equal, and respect worthy members of the society, will assist in accelerating change. Ensuring institutions such as “Shalish” are gender sensitive would be an important step in this process.

CONCLUSIONS

The discussions with the men in these case studies shows that changes are occurring at different levels. The men themselves report instances of brutality they inflicted on their wives. Their desire to change may have stemmed from practical reasons, or from a deeper desire to improve themselves. The COVAW initiative, along with other CARE projects, seems to have been the catalyst for some of the men to change. The project might not always have been the key deciding factor for these men to change. But, the COVAW process has helped the men re-create the image of women as productive and valuable half of the population. The men’s stories depict the complexity in determining the cause and effect of change. The manifestation of change varies according to personal experience. Neither is change always experienced as a linear phenomenon.

At the strategic level, the decision of the project to work in the same communities where CARE Bangladesh had an existing presence through PROTIRODH, SHOUHARDO and ARSHI seems to have facilitated COVAW’s work. The existing projects had already built the trust and the confidence of the communities in CARE supported projects. This opened up the doors for COVAW to introduce discussions on sensitive topics. The simultaneous processes carried out by the various projects, also present a challenge to determine attribution of the outcomes to one single project. A more comprehensive examination would help the project develop a picture of the processes underway and their results as observed by the communities.

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