



## Adolescent bodily integrity and freedom from violence in Chittagong, Bangladesh

Policy and programming implications from the GAGE baseline findings<sup>1</sup>

Authors: Khadija Mitu, Muhammed Ala Uddin, Laura Camfield and Jennifer Muz

### Introduction

Most Bangladeshi adolescents have experienced at least one form of age- or gender-based violence. Levels of corporal punishment remain high, in schools and in homes, and boys are at risk of physical violence from peers and adults. Sexual harassment and assault is endemic, and one of the most influential factors shaping girls' lives. While child marriage appears to be declining, this is uneven, and increasing fears for girls' safety could potentially reverse this trend, as has happened in the Rohingya refugee camps.

Reducing adolescents' vulnerability to these threats depends not on legal frameworks, which already exist, but on more effective law enforcement. The trust that adolescents and their families have that the law will be upheld is threatened by the increasingly politicised nature of the legal system, particularly in slums, where mastaans (gangsters) mediate access to services (Devine and Wood, 2017).

This brief discusses adolescents' experiences of gender-based violence, child marriage, sexual harassment, physical and sexual violence, psychological and emotional violence, online violence, corporal punishment and bullying. It draws on evidence from GAGE (Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence) – a unique longitudinal mixed-methods research and impact evaluation study focused on what works to support the development of adolescents' capabilities during the second decade of life (10–19 years) (GAGE consortium, 2019 forthcoming).

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## Research methodology

GAGE employs a mixed-methods research approach in order to explore its research questions. In Chittagong, the quantitative sample focused primarily on in-school adolescents in Grade 6, making the sample almost entirely adolescents aged 10–12. A small sample of out-of-school adolescents and adolescents with disabilities were also surveyed. Overall, 1,769 quantitative interviews were conducted, alongside qualitative interviews with 36 adolescents and their families (parents and older siblings, to capture age-related differences) and communities. Baseline data collection took place in March to June 2018.

## Research sites

Quantitative research sites in Chittagong were based on the locations of 39 government schools that were selected for inclusion in the approved World Bank/government of Bangladesh Health Support Project, and covered the districts of Brahmanbaria, Chandpur, Chittagong, Cox’s Bazar and Rangamati.

In Chittagong division, Chittagong, Cox’s Bazar and Rangamati districts were selected for the conduct of surveys at private schools and madrasas nearby the targeted government schools, to enable a comparative study of school types. In addition, three sites were chosen for the qualitative research: one in Cox’s Bazar district (Community A), one in Chittagong district (Community B, in the district capital) and the other in Rangamati Hill district (Community C, also in the district capital). These were chosen to capture different kinds of locations (urban/peri-urban), school types and access to services and NGO programming.

## Physical violence

Physical violence perpetrated by family members, relatives, neighbours, teachers, employers, peers and other adult males is a common experience for most adolescents, particularly boys.

### Physical punishment at school

According to the survey data, 84% of adolescents in

Chittagong experience corporal punishment at school, and this is consistent across the sites (range 83–86%). This compares with 83% of children experiencing physical punishment in educational institutions nationally (MoWCA, 2013), although earlier studies suggested this figure was declining (Ahmed et al., 2005). In Chittagong, corporal punishment is more common in madrasas (94%) and at private schools (86%) compared with government schools (77%). Across all school types, girls are less likely to experience corporal punishment than boys; the greatest disparity is seen in government schools, where girls are 25% less likely to experience it than boys. Teachers and other adults participating in the qualitative research said that this could represent a factor in school dropout.

In qualitative interviews, adolescents across the three sites said their teachers beat them if they did not study properly and did not bring books to class. Teachers administer punishment if adolescents do not complete their lessons or their homework or fail to follow the rules. Girls and boys said that teachers pulled them by their ears, beat them with bamboo sticks and canes and slapped them.

Corporal punishment occurs less frequently in Community B. The difference may be that, here, because of their central location, teachers are more concerned about breaking the law, or that parents with more education in urban centres are less comfortable with their children being beaten; however, this was not explicitly mentioned by respondents in qualitative interviews. In Communities A and B, students in government and private schools (old-style private schools rather than the newer English-medium schools) enjoy more freedom than those in English-medium schools. In Community C, there are few private schools, although this number is increasing. Practices of physical punishment have not changed in *madrasas*, however, and the qualitative researchers observed different-sized canes used to beat students (e.g. on the hands in Community A).

For the most part, teachers beat boys more frequently than they do girls. An adolescent girl in Community C said, ‘If we don’t do our lesson teachers scold us and stand us up over the bench holding the ears.’ Both parents and students said that, if adolescents did not study, it was okay

**Table 1: Research sites**

Name	Location	Households	Social and physical infrastructure	Access to services
Community A	Cox’s Bazar, peri-urban	88,391	48 km from division capital, vulnerable to cyclones and tidal bores, some migrants	Reasonable access to educational and health institutions, NGO services
Community B	Chittagong urban centre	65,671	District capital	Excellent access to educational and health institutions, NGO services
Community C	Rangamati, peri-urban	26,872	District headquarters, mixed Bengali settlers and indigenous people (Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Pangkhao, Lushai)	Good access to educational and health institutions, NGO services

to beat them. According to girls in the government school in Community B, some teachers did not beat them but reduced their marks if they did not study well, quarrelled among themselves or did not listen to their teachers. In a madrasa in Community A, young adolescent boys said their teachers also beat their students because they believed was *'necessary to beat the students when they don't do well. Otherwise they don't learn well.'*

Given that the government of Bangladesh has forbidden the beating of students at school, teachers risk punishment in carrying out corporal punishment. One teacher from Community A said that, while they used to beat students routinely, *'If I beat a student [now], then he will inform his guardian, then it goes to head teacher and management. Then management will call me and I may get punishment for this.'* Participants of a female focus group in Community B confirmed this, saying that, if teachers beat students at schools, this was reported in the newspaper. This may also explain why only 24% of schools in Chittagong reported using any form of physical punishment for discipline.


According to the head teacher of a Community A high school, the rate of physical punishment has decreased significantly. Teachers and parents confirmed that teachers now kept students under control by encouraging them, advising them and teaching morality. A school teacher in Community B said, *'If needed, we can call the guardian and talk to them.'* This is not necessarily the case in *madrasas*, where physical punishment is still used and girls as well as boys are beaten. Participants in a focus group of girls in a Community C *madrasa* said that, while they were only scolded for not doing their homework, they were beaten if they *'talk [among] ourselves in during class'*.

Besides corporal punishment from teachers, adolescents (largely boys) said they were often bullied and physically assaulted by peers when they were at school and in the community. This is supported by the quantitative data: boys' Peer Violence Scale scores are about 60% higher than those of girls.

### Physical violence at home

Across the sites, parents discipline adolescents physically for behaviour such as going out without permission, skipping school or not studying properly, using slang, fighting with others, being disobedient or not respecting older persons. A parent of a young boy in Community B said in this regard, *'I used to beat them if they disobeyed, didn't listen to me and fought with others.'* The mother of a young boy in Community B explained that parents *'beat for the better'*.

In the survey, 42% of female primary caregivers and 15% of male primary caregivers reported punishing their daughter or son by shaking, hitting or slapping. This is consistent with analysis by the United Nations Children's

 If we don't do our lesson teachers scold us and stand us up over the bench holding the ears.

(An adolescent girl in Community C)

Fund (UNICEF) of 2012–2013 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) data, which suggests that 77% of urban parents do this (BBS and UNICEF, 2015), and with Ministry of Women and Children Affairs analysis, which found that 77% of mothers and 18% of fathers (82% overall) said they physically punished their children (MoWCA, 2013). The difference in prevalence between female and male parents is likely to relate to the more frequent contact of mothers with their children.

Mothers in our qualitative sample said they would administer everyday punishments and involve the father only in more severe cases. For example, according to a mother in Community B, they beat their children for small offences, such as breaking something, not going to the shop to fetch salt or vegetables, etc., but if it is something serious, they do not beat them. In such cases (in the case of boys but not girls; see below), their father beats them, and no one interferes. Once children reach 10 or 12 years, parents do not like to beat them, because they think it may have negative psycho-emotional consequences and tend to scold verbally instead.

Many parents in our sample and in other studies feel that physical punishment is not the best approach. Female caregivers in rural areas in Chittagong are almost twice as likely as those in urban areas (65% in rural areas compared with 34% in urban areas) to believe children need to be punished to be raised properly, and most forms of punishment are more common in rural areas.

As in schools, the use of physical punishment by caregivers varies by gender. Within our sample, girls were 57% less likely than boys to have been beaten badly in the previous 30 days by their female caregiver. Nonetheless, physical violence is a common fear, experienced by most adolescents in all three sites. In the quantitative data, 96% of adolescents reported experiencing or witnessing violence at home. Younger adolescents participating in the qualitative research said they experienced violence primarily from family members, relatives, other adult males and teachers. One adolescent boy from Community A said, *'My mother beats me sometimes, if I don't follow her instructions.'*

Usually, girls are scolded for their mistakes or offences, and fathers do not beat their daughters. In serious cases, girls are beaten by mothers, or sometimes an elder sister. A young girl with a disability in Community C said of her elder sister that, *'She beats me every day. She scolds me too.'* Elder brothers, sisters and cousins regularly beat their male siblings, but this rarely happens to girls.

## Sexual and gender-based violence (including child marriage)

Sexual and gender-based violence appears to be common in all sites, and adolescent girls and boys, as well as adults, said that public spaces were unsafe for girls. Accounts of harassment and sexual violence experienced by girls were related in most of our qualitative interviews. This is supported by secondary analyses, which show that violence against women and girls is widespread and closely linked to the low status of women in Bangladeshi society (Stavropoulou et al., 2017). This experience is also reflected in the GAGE quantitative data, with girls 7% less likely to report feeling safe walking in the community during the day.

In one study (Chowdhury et al., 2018), out of 87 respondents in Chittagong, 57.5% reported experiencing domestic violence by their husband in the previous year. While Chittagong has the lowest rates of partner physical violence (42.5%) and the second lowest reported rates of sexual violence by a husband (23.7%) after Sylhet, by contrast it has the highest rates of controlling behaviour and emotional violence (BBS, 2016).

In qualitative interviews, adolescents described how girls were often teased ('teasing' was used to encompass all forms of unwanted verbal and physical contact directed at females by males, regardless of severity), and that this was particularly acute when girls were outside. This experience fits with secondary data showing that 42% of women in urban areas reported experiencing violence outside the home (BBS, 2016) (the survey data from Chittagong supports the idea that girls feel safer in rural areas). In many cases, girls obtain support in dealing with harassment from their parents and family; however, parents' anxiety about their safety can lead them to restrict their mobility. Adolescents (boys and girls) and adults reported that public spaces were unsafe, particularly for girls.

While analysis of the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) suggest early marriage is declining, data from the 2014 BDHS shows that 71% of women are married by the age of 18. The median age of first marriage among women aged 20–49 in Chittagong is 16.8, and 50.9% of women aged 18–22 in Chittagong were married as children (the highest rate in the Chittagong sample was 57% for Cox's Bazar). In Chittagong, female caregivers who had attended government schools were least likely to have experienced child marriage, and those who had attended madrasas were most likely, suggesting a relationship between child marriage and either poverty or religious

conservatism. There are differences in the national data by socio-economic status as women with no education marry on average five years earlier than those who have completed secondary education (NIPORT et al., 2016).


When BDHS analyses focus on young women only, it is easier to see change. Between 2011 and 2014, marriage before 18 years declined to 59% from 65%, and median age of first marriage increased to 16.1 years from 14.4 years. In Chittagong, the percentage of girls marrying before the age of 15 is 16.9%. This is an important change, as young married adolescents are at risk of pregnancy-related deaths, babies with low birth weights and HIV infection, and have less say in decision-making regarding family planning (UNFPA, 2005; BBS and UNICEF, 2015).

While none of the adolescents in our quantitative survey had ever been married, early marriage still exists across the three sites. According to participants in the qualitative research the rate of early marriage has significantly decreased, particularly in Communities B and C. The situation has also been gradually changing in Community A. A school teacher in Community A said in this context, *'It's a ground-breaking change. I've been here for about two years. There are no cases of early marriage. Yes, it is still happening, but in my area I don't see any.'*

In the past, across the sites, girls were married off when they were in Grade 4 or Grade 5. Now, most parents want their daughters to pass at least the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) (Grade 12) examination, although there are some variations in rural areas (one parent of a young boy from Community C said that in the villages girls were married at 13 or 14 and boys at 15 or 16). Parents who support education are motivated by the example of educated girls locally who have been able to secure employment.

In village sites in Community C, adolescent girls used to be given in marriage at the age of 17 or 18; even now, girls are sometimes married before this age, and even as young as 12 or 13. An older Bengali girl from Community C said, *'My elder sister was given in marriage at the age of 12, when she was in Grade 5.'* In another focus group, male respondents in Community C said child marriage was still going on but many people did not recognise it as such, because nobody knew the exact ages of the brides and grooms: *'Child marriage has been taking place by hiding the original age.'*

Across the sites, parents and teachers said that in their time the rate of child marriage had been higher. In our quantitative data, 45% of primary female caregivers reported being married before the age of 18. According to a teacher from the government high school in Community A, factors that have contributed to reducing the rate include changing social norms, better facilities and the government stipend for female students; a teacher in Community C said the same. Nonetheless, these beneficial changes may be

 It's a ground-breaking change ... There are no cases of early marriage.

(A school teacher in Community A)

## Case study: Safety concerns limit girls' access to education

Sometimes, in spite of girls' aspirations to access higher education, families do not send their daughters to colleges that are far from home due to concerns for their safety. A 17-year-old girl from Community B wanted to attend a good college that sends many of its students on to university but that was far from her home. Her mother had encouraged her daughter's studies but, because she could not ensure her safety while travelling or afford the transport costs, decided to send her to a nearby college instead. When the girl's college teacher tried to persuade her to aim to apply to a university rather than to a less prestigious women's college, her mother said this would not be possible. The girl was angry with her mother but her mother responded, *'I provide for you to study at a women's college. When you have kids, you let them study in Chittagong University. What was my experience [of education]? I provide you with more than that. So, you make [your children] more capable [than you were].'*

largely among school-going adolescents: adolescents who were out of school were 1.5 times more likely to have been married by the age of 18.

Besides government initiatives, including the stipend for female secondary school students discussed under economic empowerment, there have also been cases of community protests against early marriage in Communities A and B. This suggests that both adults and adolescent are conscious of the consequences of early marriage. According to women in Communities A and B, if they hear of such cases they talk to the families involved and try to convince them not to marry off their daughters so early, especially if they are studying. Teachers in Communities A and B stated that some government (Ministry of Health) and NGO programmes raised awareness at schools on this issue through interventions such as seminars and speeches.

Head teachers in the high schools in Communities A and B said that at the demand of the government they sent some students on awareness-raising programmes, such as on climate change, disaster management, child marriage, etc. Sometimes, officials visit schools and take part in discussions on social issues to raise awareness among students. In a community mapping exercise in Community B, girls also mentioned a BRAC programme.

A teacher at a Community C government girls' high school said efforts were made to prevent early marriage among students. As she said, *'Everyone is told if they hear about any early marriage of their classmates they should inform the school administration instantly and the school administration is told to take steps with the help of the sub-divisional administration.'* Other organisations, such as Transparency in Bangladesh and the Anti-Corruption Commission, also help prevent early marriage. However, a female *madrassa* teacher in Community C said that other *madrassa* teachers in her community encouraged early marriage for girls. The rationale she gave was that a good marriage was the ultimate goal for a female student and it was better to get married early rather than face sexual harassment.

Adolescent girls and their families fear sexual harassment and its effect on the family. Sexual harassment

is common and puts both girls and their parents at risk, given its negative impact on the victim's family rather than the perpetrator's. Adolescent girls and their families fear the reputational effects of mild ('eve-teasing') to severe sexual harassment (rape), which reduces the likelihood that they will seek justice or inform the police. As a result, many incidents remain unreported. Existing social norms do not support the victims; as a result, the whole family suffers. And in most cases, the perpetrator remains unpunished. According to a focus group of men in Community A, sometimes perpetrators are so influential in society that they are not even charged. Most often, the victim and her family have to face legal as well as social complications. If the offence is published in the newspaper, the situation becomes even more complicated, with victims often either isolated from society by their families or they leave the area. On some occasions, communities have organised against harassment: a female school teacher in Community C described how, *'Some girls [walking to school] were disturbed by stalkers and they went to the headmaster of the school instantly; they all got arrested.'*

According to an education officer in Community A, incidence of sexual harassment in his community is high: *'In 16 days, three child[ren] [girls aged 10–15] have been raped.'* Female participants in a focus group in Community B said that women and girls were not even safe at home: *'A 60-year-old man can rape a baby [girl aged 9–10] who still wears half pants.'* In Community A, a mother of a young girl stated that even girls of three or four years of age were raped: *'I worry if she goes somewhere.'* According to adults in all sites, fear of rape is the biggest concern. The prevalence of rape and other forms of sexual harassment makes parents anxious about the security of their daughters.

In terms of sexual harassment, eve-teasing is the most common across the sites. Adolescent girls, especially in Community A and Community B, reported that they faced eve-teasing (being called names such as *pakhi* (bird) or the name of a porn actress, or being sung, coughed or snorted at to attract their attention) in the streets. A family planning officer in Community A said that, *'Before child marriage was*

*common, but this is not common now. But there was no eve-teasing before, which is now common. It may happen before, but it wasn't visible.'*

Although girls experience some peer violence at school, they are safer there than when they are going to and from school, especially when they are alone. According to a high school teacher in Community C, it is even unsafe for girls to cross police lines, because police also tease school girls, particularly indigenous girls.

According to a focus group of women and female school teachers, sexual harassment in Community C is not common, as indigenous boys do not have a tendency to harass girls in the streets. However, according to these respondents, Bengali youth do, and security personnel in the area (who are Bengali) also do – not only in remote areas but also in towns and, again, even at police lines, which girls identify as a place where they feel at risk.


In consequence, parents and girls fear security forces. Even if they go to school with two or three other girls, they face teasing by security personnel. Women in Community C described how, as houses were scattered across the hills, and security forces were everywhere, girls did not feel safe even in their own homes.

Nevertheless, sexual harassment is less common in Community C, which a teacher from the government girls' school attributed to cultural diversity: *'Perhaps it is because of mixed culture. Mixed culture influences them.'* On the plains, Bengalis see Bengali women and girls dressed according to the Islamic dress code (although this is not always strictly followed); in the hills, Bengali settlers see people from different ethnic backgrounds with their own culture, customs and dress. Non-Bengali women may wear trousers and do not usually cover their heads; however, they would not expect sexual attention as a result of this, which key informants thought may have shaped the expectations and attitudes of Bengali men.

In an attempt to address harassment, use of the veil has increased among women and girls in all sites, particularly in Communities A and B. Muslim students wear the veil and the *hijab*, whereas Hindus (in Community B) cover their face with masks (flexible pads held over the nose and mouth by elastic or rubber straps) to protect them from dust and to deter male attention. This enables girls to move in public places without being harassed.

Parents in all sites expressed concern about children's romantic relationships and premarital sex. Parents of *madrasa* students were less worried, as there are almost no reports of premarital relationships/sex in this group. Such children come from a restrictive/Islamic background that socialises them not to think about premarital relationships; the response would likely be severe punishment or early marriage.

Community B parents were less worried than those in Community A, since the former are always with their children

 Where a girl elopes with her boyfriend, everybody humiliates her family members.

(A father in Community A)

and either accompany them to and from school or send them with other students. In Community A, in most cases, mothers stay at home while fathers work (far from home/schools and often in another district). In Community C, parents of indigenous children are not as concerned as Bengalis.

Across the sites, parents particularly fear unwanted pregnancy, elopement and early marriage. Elopement is a disgrace to the family: in a focus group of fathers in Community A, one participant said, *'Where a girl elopes with her boyfriend, everybody humiliates her family members.'* In Community A, parents said they felt pressure regarding their children, especially adolescent girls. A teacher from a BRAC school in Community A described how, *'At this time, sometimes they are involved in illegal relationships. Sometimes they have a physical relationship and become pregnant.'* In Community C, an older girl said: *'Many [girls in this area] have boyfriends; some get married, often eloping with boyfriends. So boys think that I am also that kind of girl. But when they realise that flirting with me is of no use, they stop.'*

Parents, teachers and other adults in Community A felt that decreasing moral standards had had an impact on children's lives through greater prevalence of sexual harassment, eve-teasing, etc. In a community timeline exercise in Community A, respondents said that the situation had changed over the past 20–30 years: *'Before the situation was not so bad as today. Now adolescents are going to school colleges more than before. But these days girls are becoming victim of eve-teasing while going to school.'* They also felt that the situation had further deteriorated in the past five to six years: *'Adolescents are doing well in education, but they have lack of morality and they are not that social'* because they prefer to spend time on their phones and/or using the internet.

### Experiences shaped by gender and location

Older adolescent girls in Communities A and B reported sexual violence more often than adolescents in Community C, which key informants attributed to the effects of cultural diversity/pluralism. Nonetheless, although indigenous girls do not fear indigenous boys/youth, they do face sexual harassment from Bengalis, including members of the security forces, according to respondents.

Across the sites, there are many unsafe places for girls. In a community mapping exercise in Community A, older adolescent girls said they did not like the market because boys teased them there and so it did not feel safe. To indigenous students, police lines or check points are not safe. Adolescent girls also mentioned some safe places,

for example schools. Students in Community B mentioned a library that was very close to the government high school.

### Change strategies

A range of government initiatives and awareness-raising programmes exist in government high schools in Communities B and C, including seminars and workshops involving students. In Community B, the Red Crescent Society and Robert Scouts implement awareness-raising programmes on disaster management and social issues. Sometimes, national or district health authorities visit schools and organise sensitisation on issues such as early marriage and adolescent health.

For example, a school teacher in Community B described how, *'We have done the Ghashful programme for one year that was about problems of students ... teaching them about many things ... We did those, against eve-teasing, sexual harassment, etc.'* This has raised awareness among adolescents: one in three knew where they could obtain support if they experienced violence. This awareness varies according to whether adolescents are in school: out-of-school adolescents in Chittagong were 25% less likely to know where to get support after experiencing violence. It also varies according to where they live: awareness is higher in the Chittagong region, although, while 34% of adolescents in Chittagong district and 59% in Rangamati district knew where to get support after violence, only 16% in Cox's Bazar did.

Other respondents suggested, however, that adolescents had to protest against violence. Otherwise, everyone would take advantage of them. Participants in a community women's focus group in Community C said that, *'They have to understand that, if anyone misbehaves, they must protest.'* Supporting this, the sibling of a girl said the problems many girls faced could be reduced *'by increasing social awareness.'*

Parents and teachers also suggested that parents should be aware of physical and sexual harassment, both at home and outside. As a preventive measure, parents should be watchful of their children – whether they go to school, who they are friends with, etc. At the same time, parents and teachers should talk with boys about morality and help them understand the difference between good and bad deeds. School teachers in Community A said they talked with their students about such issues, which were also covered in text books. Teachers tried to motivate boys towards respectful relationships and to convince them not to harass girls. *'We tell them, "You also have a sister. If someone disturbs your mother or sister what will you do?"'*

## Key actions to accelerate progress

### 1. Ban corporal punishment in classrooms

Policies banning corporal punishment in classrooms should be enforced and monitored by education authorities and school management committees (which include representatives of parents). Teachers and students can jointly develop plans for good classroom management that do not involve corporal punishment. The National Education Policy 2010 states that corporal punishment is not allowed in educational institutions. Disciplinary measures can be taken against teachers for using it.

### 2. Prevent violence against adolescent boys in the workplace and public spaces

Violence against adolescent boys in the workplace and public spaces should be prevented and redressed through awareness-building among employers and actors promoting child rights to bodily integrity. For example, the 109 and 999 toll-free numbers could be promoted more heavily and labour inspectors could be increasingly vigilant in their inspections of the working conditions of working children. National policies in this area include the National Children's Policy 2011, the Criminal Procedures Code, policies against hazardous child labour and labour policies, which promote decent working conditions, with labour inspectors supposed to enforce implementation.

### 3. Use education and media campaigns to promote non-violent forms of discipline

The prevalent culture of violence can be challenged through education and media campaigns, which promote other forms of discipline and child-rearing. The consequences of violence for child development need to be highlighted in parents' gatherings and through social mobilisation. Convention on the Rights of the Child provisions on child protection and the promotion of well-being support different parenting practices.

### 4. Use various methods to tackle sexual harassment of girls

Girls and female adolescents need to be protected from violence and sexual harassment and abuse in the home, public spaces and educational institutions, through:

- community mobilisation
- community awareness of risks and impacts on adolescents through media and public education
- campaigns to familiarise people with help through the 109 and 999 toll-free numbers
- complaints mechanisms in educational institutions to be set up by school authorities involvement of local government authorities and

- self-defence training for girls at school rather than advice on how to behave 'properly', which frames avoiding sexual harassment as their responsibility.

The National Adolescent Health Strategy has provisions against violence towards and abuse of children. Other relevant policies include the Domestic Violence (Protection and Prevention) Act 2010, the High Court Guidelines Against Sexual Harassment in the Workplace and in Educational Institutions 2009, the National Action Plan on Violence Against Women and the Women and Child Repression Prevention Act (Amendment 2003).

Better lighting and wider streets and pavements could make public spaces safer for everyone. The National Building Code provides specifications on requirements for pavements, passages and lighting, etc., which national and local government authorities must enforce.

#### 5. Increase action to prevent early marriage, through families, communities and authorities

Ensuring the safety and security of girls as well as providing them with education/skills/vocational education or employment opportunities helps delay the age of marriage. Group activities to build girls' self-confidence should be carried out at school and community level.

The National Women's Development Policy and the Child Marriage Restraint Act (revised 2017) provide the policy and legal framework to prevent early marriage. The Birth Registration Act 2004 is also relevant in this regard.

#### 6. Increase public awareness and law enforcement to improve access to justice

There is a need to increase public awareness that the harasser is the one to be blamed and shamed, rather than the victim of the harassment, through media, public education and campaigns.

Law enforcement agencies and community policing can take rapid remedial action to ensure safety and security, of girls and boys, especially in low-income settlements. The phone number for police on the beat should be displayed in the locality so people can call if there is any problem.

Overcoming fear of law enforcement agencies will allow more adolescents and poor women and men to complain in the case of harassment or abuse and to seek justice.

The present Criminal Procedure Code as well as laws on violence against women and girls have provisions against

domestic violence, institutional violence or harassment and harassment or abuse in public spaces.

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