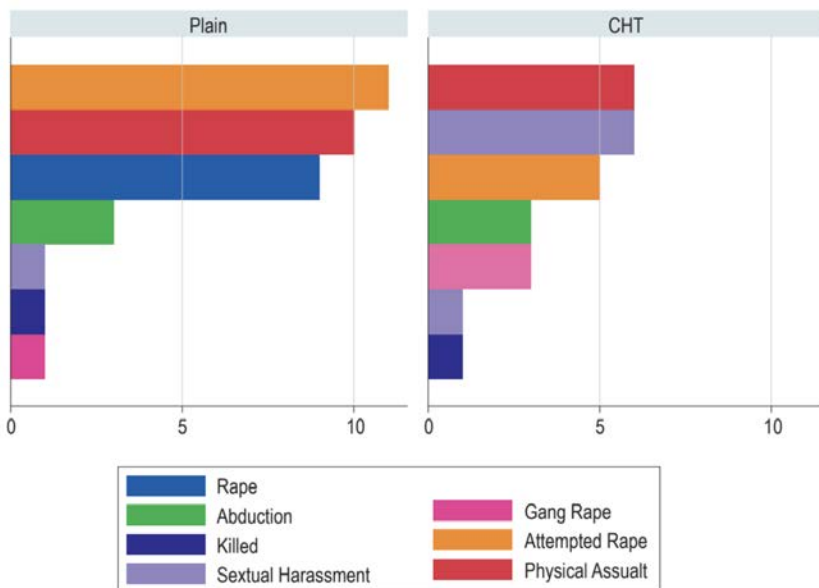


Fact Sheet: Violence against Indigenous women and girls in Bangladesh

Indigenous women and girls frequently experience violence in Bangladesh. A report published by Bangladesh Indigenous Women Network (BIWN) found that from January to June in the year 2021, 37 indigenous women became victims of violence in 33 incidents, of which 17 were in the plains and 16 were in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). Rape and attempted rapes were the most reported incidents in the CHT.¹

In 2020, there were a total of 61 violent incidents against Indigenous women and girls aged 11-30 — 36 incidents took place in the plains and 25 in the CHT. Attempted rape (11), physical assault (10), and rape (9) were the most reported incidents in the plains, whereas physical assault (6), rape (6), and attempted rape (5) were highest in the CHT.² These three types of violence — namely physical assault, rape, and attempted rape — continue to pose the biggest threat to the safety of Indigenous women and girls in Bangladesh. All three types of violence saw an upward trend in 2020 compared to immediate previous years.³

Figure: violent incidents against Indigenous women and girls in 2020 (Kapaeeng Foundation)



1 Bangladesh Indigenous Women Network (BIWN) (2021). Bulletin no. 2, Jan-Jun 2021, p.2.

2 Kapaeeng Foundation (2020). Human Rights Report 2020 on Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh, p.xiii.

3 Kapaeeng Foundation (2020). Human Rights Report 2020 on Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh, p.31-32.

Justice delayed, justice denied

Cases of violence against Indigenous women and girls in Bangladesh are often under-reported due to a combination of social stigma and fear of isolation from the victims' communities. A 2016 Amnesty International report observes — citing a study conducted by the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission in 2014 — that 95 percent of victims of sexual and gender-based violence in the CHT feared stigmatization, and 60 percent chose not to pursue legal actions.⁴

Indigenous women experience multiple levels of marginalisation and face discrimination due to various factors such as poverty, patriarchal social structures, living in remote areas, and their identities as indigenous and women. A report by Indigenous Navigator published in October 2020 found that the largest percentage of perpetrators of violence against Indigenous women and girls are non-community members (17%), followed by partners (13%), and community members (9%).⁵ However, a culture of impunity remains rampant — although a case was filed for most rape cases in 2020, just above 50 percent of these cases led to arrests.⁶ For victims and their families, legal procedures can be time-consuming, expensive, complex, and marred by delays.

Case study: A culture of impunity for sexual abuse, abduction and physical assault of indigenous women

On January 22, 2018, security forces allegedly attacked two Marma teenage sisters in Orasori village in Bilaichari, Rangamati in the middle of the night. They raped one of the sisters and sexually assaulted the other. The two sisters were admitted to Rangamati General Hospital. On February 15, 2018, members of the security forces abducted the two sisters from the hospital in the name of handing them over to their parents. They physically assaulted Rani Yan Yan, adviser to the Chakma Raja, and her volunteers who were looking after the welfare of the two sisters when they tried to prevent the abduction. The two sisters were then taken under the custody of a former member of the Rangamati Hill District Council, at his residence in Rangamati town, against their will. Following the attack, the security forces continued to intimidate the girls and their family and instead of providing them with the legal and emotional support that is needed by survivors of violence, the security forces kept them under their strict surveillance. Moreover, Rangamati Superintendent of Police (SP) publicly released the names of the victims and made a presumptuous statement that the allegation of rape of the victim may not be proved. Till date no actions have been taken to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Source: CHT Commission's press statement, 18 February 2018.
https://www.chtcommission.org/backend/product_picture/1093doc.pdf

⁴ Amnesty International (2016). Bangladesh submission to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. 65th Session, 24 October - 18 November 2016, p.6

⁵ The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2020). Indigenous women's realities: Insights from the Indigenous Navigator. p.27.

⁶ Kapaeeng Foundation (2020). Human Rights Report 2020 on Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh, p.43.

Justice delayed, justice denied

- To accurately reflect the disproportionate level of violence experienced by Indigenous women and girls, the Bangladesh government should provide gender-disaggregated and ethnicity-disaggregated data, including age, socio-economic background, the nature of the violence, and the status of police report.^{7,8}
- The government must “effectively investigate all reports of gender-based violence against indigenous women related to land grabbing and take steps to bring those responsible to justice,” as was urged by the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2016.
- In order to bring the perpetrators of violence to justice, victims and their families should be given access to legal counsel and be protected from harassment and intimidation. Institutions involved in collecting proof of sexual abuse should avoid procedures (e.g., physical examinations) that are humiliating and re-traumatizing for the survivors. Access to legal counsel should be free of charge and with interpretation, if necessary.
- If Bangladesh is to meet the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), — of which gender equality is one — the government must ensure the rights of Indigenous women and girls and involve them in its plan to implement the SDGs.
- The government’s Gender Budget should also include a separate allocation for Indigenous women and girls.

⁷ Amnesty International (2016). Bangladesh submission to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. 65th Session, 24 October - 18 November 2016, p.8

⁸ Khan, Maliha (2017, August 11) No country for indigenous women: Indigenous women suffer discrimination on multiple fronts— as women and as minorities. The Daily Star.