

**Street Harassment in Bangladesh:**  

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**Women's Experiences and Perceptions in Urban Settings**

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**Doctor of Philosophy**

**ASTON UNIVERSITY**

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Tasneema Ashraf Amanee asserts her moral right to be identified as the author of this thesis.

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# THESIS ABSTRACT

Aston University

Street Harassment in Bangladesh: Women's Experiences and Perceptions in Urban Settings

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PhD in Sociology, 2022

This research contributes to the limited body of literature on street harassment in Dhaka. The analysis is based on qualitative semi-structured interviews with forty-five women aged between 18-28 years old residing in Dhaka. The research had three central aims, and achieving those aims forms the unique contribution of this thesis. Firstly, this thesis explores the nature of women's street harassment experiences. By re-engaging with Kelly's (1988) concept of the 'continuum of sexual violence', this research builds connections between ordinary encounters in women's everyday lives to grievous forms of violence which are recognised by society and law and, thus, draws attention to the fact that the socially normalised behaviours like street harassment have a cumulative harmful effect on women and need to be recognised by society and law. By using Kelly's conceptualisation in the context of Bangladesh, this research has advanced the understanding of street harassment beyond the context of the global North where this concept has primarily been used. Secondly, the research investigates women's negotiations and coping mechanisms to prevent or minimise their future risks of victimisation. The thesis also explores the role of women's informal support networks and the factors contributing to the underreporting of street harassment to the police. Finally, the thesis uses the concept of intersectionality to understand how women's varying social identities, like gender, social class, religion, marital status, and age, can influence the frequency and severity of their street harassment experiences. This thesis as a whole makes an important contribution to our understanding of street harassment by producing a new body of evidence regarding the nature and experiences of street harassment in public places and argues that women's accessibility and street harassment experiences need to be understood by intersecting not only with gender but other multiple social identities too, as well as the patriarchal socio-cultural norms which are firmly embedded in the society.

**Keywords/phrases:** Violence against women, intersectionality, Safety, Accessibility, Public spaces, Public Transports, Dhaka

Dedicated

to

All women struggling every day to safely access public spaces

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## **GLOSSARY OF BANGLADESHI WORDS AND CLOTHING**

**Burqa/ Abaya:** A loose outer garment that covers the entire body except for the face.

**Hijab:** A headscarf that covers hair, ears and neck, leaving the face uncovered.

**Niqab:** A form of Muslim veil covering a woman's hair and face, leaving only the eyes uncovered. A niqab can be worn by using one headscarf to cover the hair and the face except for the eyes, or it can be worn by using a separate piece of cloth or veil.

**Salwar kameez:** A three-part outfit of women consisting of a knee-length (or longer) tunic top paired with ankle-length, loose-fitting trousers and a long/rectangular-shaped scarf. This outfit is also referred to as a 'three-piece'.

**Orna/ Dupatta:** A long/rectangular shaped scarf to wear with the traditional daily outfit of Bangladeshi women – salwar kameez.

**Maal:** A derogatory word referring to women as objects.

**Joss:** Bangla slang word for something 'really good' or 'superb'.

**Maghrib:** Muslim call for evening prayer.

**Magi:** Bangla slang word for 'prostitute'.

**Taka:** Bangladeshi currency.

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### CHAPTER ONE

#### An Introduction to Street Harassment: Key Issues and Research Aims

*“Their insult was more horrendous than being raped in the streets in open daylight.”*

The above quote (translated from Bangla) is a suicide note left by an 18-year-old university student Simi, who was repeatedly harassed for a long time by the local boys of her neighbourhood in Narayanganj, Dhaka. This incident took place in December 2001 and drew the immense attention of the whole country regarding the rise of street harassment cases, subsequent aggression like acid throwing, abduction, stabbing, and rape, as well as the sharp increase of the suicide cases of the victims. However, it did not take too long for the news to subside among all the other new topics until another girl died the following year. Trisha, a student in year four in a primary school, was on her way back from school when her harassers chased her and they attempted to kidnap her. Trisha tried to run away but found no other escape route; she jumped into a pond. The harassers looked at and mocked her as she struggled at the pond and left the place when she drowned. These are only two incidents among the hundreds of street harassment cases in Bangladesh that flood the newspapers every year for the last three decades. Even those innumerable reports of harassment in the newspapers are only those that have been either escalated to grievous attacks, suicide, death or reported to the police. At the time of these above two incidents, I was studying in school, and I vividly remember the reporting of those cases. I also remember how my friends and I discussed and related to the harassing experiences of those women and also the subsequent higher caution and restrictions from our parents.

The motivation for this research, hence, largely stemmed from my own personal experiences of street harassment which began in my young girlhood and persisted throughout my adult womanhood in Bangladesh. Like many women in Bangladesh and all over the world, I have been made to feel uncomfortable in public places, verbally and physically harassed and stalked. Even though it is hard to pinpoint one particular incident, my first experience of street harassment was as a pre-teen, when an adult man touched my cheek as he was passing on a rickshaw and I was standing by the roadside waiting to cross the road. I was alone at that time, excited about my newly allowed freedom of quick trips to the nearby corner shop for sweets and snacks. Being shocked and surprised, I immediately shared the incident with my mom on arriving home, and that was the end of my solo ventures to the corner shop, even though the shop was only 100 yards away from home.

By the time I started my undergraduate degree at Dhaka University, I was a veteran at spotting potential harassers as well as formulating suitable coping mechanisms to prevent or minimise the risk of harassment, having experienced all sorts of street harassment throughout my school and college years. Hence, my personal experiences of street harassment have consistently motivated research on this topic. My MSc dissertation also focused on street harassment of Bangladeshi women, albeit on a much more limited scale. Yet, during the fieldwork period of that degree, I noticed the reluctance of the participants to speak about street/sexual harassment but spontaneously talked about ‘Eve teasing,’ the victim blaming attitude of the middle-aged women who were mostly parents of the school-going participants and smirks and disregard from few male participants who did not believe the issue is severe enough to deserve such attention of a research topic. These conceptions, frustrating to me as they were, only strengthened my conviction that my research topic is critically important and deserves further in-depth research. Subsequently, I came across a wide variety of

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sociological and feminist literature on how men's violence acts as social control of women (Brownmiller 1975, Stanko 1985, Kelly 1988, Davis 1993). I was also introduced to literature that explored how intersections of various social identities, including race, class and sexuality, can lead to discrimination and challenges for women in public spaces (Zukin 1995, Haymes 1995, Skeggs 1999). Following this, I carried on exploring the works of bell hooks (1981) and Crenshaw (1999), which unfolded the connections between social classifications and women's oppression. These newfound understandings led me down this path of a PhD, where I was planning to explore the harassing experiences of women of different social identities living in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Overall, my own experiences of street harassment, subsequent introduction to the wide range of literature from the fields of feminism, sociology, and criminology, as well as the valuable experience of conducting fieldwork for my MSc degree, influenced a great deal on how I approached the thesis.

Against this background, this thesis examines the lived experiences of Bangladeshi urban women in public places in Dhaka. One of the primary aims of this research is to provide a new body of evidence regarding the harassing behaviour and practices of stranger men in the streets of Dhaka. Furthermore, through its assessment of the nature and impact of street harassment, the research sheds light on the vulnerability of Bangladeshi women as regular victims of street harassment. Accordingly, the aims of this study are first, to examine the nature of street harassment directed towards women in public places of Dhaka; secondly, to explore the coping mechanisms women employ in response to their experiences of street harassment and to minimise or prevent the potential victimisation; as well as to recognise the presence of formal and informal support mechanism that constrain or facilitate the reporting and disclosing of the victimisation and thirdly, to outline how the women's varying identities with regard to their gender, class, religion and culture, marital status and age influence the frequency and severity of their street harassment experiences.

Using the city of Dhaka as the research case-study area, the research employs individual face-to-face interviews with Bangladeshi women from different professions and social classes. Dhaka was chosen as the research site partly due to my personal awareness of the severity and prevalence of the problem of street harassment as observed while growing up in the city. In addition, Dhaka was also chosen because of the co-existence of women from different professions, classes, and religions, making it an ideal research site to understand street harassment through the lens of intersectionality. This will be explored in greater depth within chapter four which discusses the demographics of the research site as well as the positionality of the researcher.

Ultimately, these understandings, my reflections as well as my reading around the topic drove me to formulate the aim and purpose of this research, the methodology and methods to employ in order to achieve those aims, as well as the determination to present the research in a way that will give the women's voices a chance to be heard.

### 1.1 PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The overarching purpose of this research is to examine street harassment as experienced by women from varying social classes, age groups and other identities residing in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Street harassment has been a ubiquitous social problem for a long time, and there is a rich body of literature exploring the phenomenon from both sociological and criminological perspectives. However, the research is predominantly conducted in the global North, and hence, there is a scarcity of research exploring street harassment in the context of Bangladesh. The originality of this thesis, then, is twofold. Firstly, the thesis offers a unique empirical analysis of women's experiences of street harassment in public places and on public transport in Dhaka, which has not been well investigated

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on a wider scale as yet. Secondly, in order to better understand women's varied experiences of street harassment, I adopted the conceptual framework of intersectionality, which has not been employed before in this context in Bangladesh. This concept of intersectionality has been employed to expand our knowledge and understanding of street harassment and draw out new insights on this topic. Hence, this research contributes to the existing literature by demonstrating that women's accessibility to public places and their experiences and negotiations regarding street harassment are significantly influenced by various factors like patriarchal socio-cultural norms and values. Moreover, the analysis also argues that women's concerns, experiences and understanding of street harassment cannot be generalised based on the category of gender alone, but rather needs to be investigated by exploring its intersection with other social identities.

The following objectives have guided the organisation of this research. As discussed, my aim was to investigate women's varying experiences of street harassment in public places of Dhaka, but my focus was also to explore how women negotiate the risk of harassment in their daily lives and the role of the formal and informal support networks following their victimisation. This led to the formulation of the first two research aims and the third research aim involves the use of the concept of intersectionality in the analysis. Therefore, the three central research aims of this thesis are:

1. To investigate the street harassment experiences of women in public places and public transports of Dhaka city.
2. To explore women's responses to harassment and different sorts of safety strategies and behaviours they employ to navigate safely in public places.
3. To understand if women's multiple social identities, such as gender, class, religion, culture, marital status and age, affect the frequency and severity of their street harassment experiences.

This research employed a feminist research method because I earnestly wanted this research into street harassment to be participant-led, where Bangladeshi women's true and lived experiences are highlighted and 'given a voice,' and I, as a researcher, use my privilege to support their experiences being heard.

### 1.2 OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

In order to achieve the goals of this research, the thesis is broken down into eight chapters. **Chapter Two** situates the thesis in its academic context and reviews the sociological and criminological literature relevant to street harassment in public places. In doing so, the chapter explores not only what I believe to be the gaps within the literature but also the literature pertinent to each subsequent chapter before the empirical analysis. It explores the possible reasons behind the dearth of empirical research by identifying the difficulties in researching the phenomenon of street harassment, the problem of naming and the challenges in defining and identifying harassing behaviours. The chapter also maps out the key concepts which have the potential to assist understanding of existing literature as well as the research findings presented in subsequent chapters, that is, fear of crime and Liz Kelly's (1988) 'continuum of sexual violence'. Furthermore, I also argue for the importance of understanding street harassment through an intersectional analysis explaining how gender, class, religious and

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cultural background, marital status, and age can influence women's harassing experiences in public places.

**Chapter Three** serves three purposes. Firstly, it provides a brief introduction to Bangladesh: its political context at birth and the socio-cultural as well as the political status of women in Bangladesh. Thus, it significantly sets a contextual background which is important for international readers to comprehend the later empirical chapters of the thesis. Secondly, it outlines the social, cultural, and religious background of Bangladesh. This is integral to gaining an overall understanding of the role of patriarchy, social stratification and religion and culture with regard to the misogynistic attitude of men in public and their harassing behaviour. Thirdly, the chapter presents the difficulties of naming and categorising the phenomenon of street harassment which is unique to Bangladesh and South Asian contexts and also highlights the relevant literature on street harassment in the Bangladeshi context.

**Chapter Four** acts as a guide and explanation of the methodology and research design adopted for this research in order to investigate women's experiences of street harassment in public places in Dhaka city. I begin this chapter by discussing Feminist Methodological principles and how these shaped my approach to the research design, ethical considerations, reflexivity, and the overall fieldwork process of this research. I then outline the participant recruitment strategy for this research and the rationale for using the qualitative semi-structured interview method to gather the data. I also explain the data analysis process that was undertaken. Furthermore, I include a discussion on the role of the researcher impacting the research process by exploring my positionality, reflexivity, and the power relations in the field.

The findings from the fieldwork are presented and analysed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 of the thesis.

**Chapter Five** presents the accounts of 45 Bangladeshi women regarding their harassing experiences in public places in Dhaka city. Each of the harassing behaviours the women shared is categorised into-gestures and sounds, staring, sexualised and vulgar verbal harassment, insulting and threatening verbal harassment, physical harassment, following/ stalking, indecent exposure, and public masturbation. Each of this behaviour is explored and analysed by investigating the lived experiences of the women participants.

**Chapter Six** investigates the precautionary strategies women employ in order to prevent or minimise the likelihood of being victims of street harassment. The chapter also explores women's immediate responses when encountering street harassment as well as their disclosure behaviour, turning first to the issues the participants face while considering disclosing their experiences to their family and friends and, secondly, the issues women consider and the barriers they encounter when and if reporting to the police.

**Chapter Seven** investigates street harassment through the lenses of intersectionality and how gender intersects with other forms of identities like class, religion, culture, marital status, and age to reproduce the harassing behaviour and attitude. In doing so, I argued that even though street harassment is a gendered form of violence, it does not affect all women equally, and it is crucial to recognise the unique and varied barriers that women from different backgrounds have to face as they are subject to multiple layers of oppression and violence in the patriarchal society of Bangladesh.

**Chapter Eight** brings together the findings of this thesis, stating how this research has addressed the research aims as introduced before and highlights the original contribution to knowledge that this research offers.

## **Chapter One**

At this point, we turn our attention to chapter two, which has explored the current scholarship pertaining to street harassment and introduces the conceptual framework that will be used when we move forward to the empirical analysis of this thesis.

### CHAPTER TWO

## Framing the Problem: Addressing Street Harassment

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Street harassment as a pervasive social issue has received substantial attention, especially in recent times, from all over the world (Fileborn, 2020; Fernandez, 2016; Dhillon and Bakaya, 2014). However, the problem itself is not a new phenomenon since, in a lawsuit documented as early as 1875, a young woman demonstrated the harassing behaviour by a train conductor and the conductor was convicted of assault (Bowman, 1993). For more than a century, the problem has been viewed as trivial by academics, judges and legislators that does not require proper legal redress (Bowman, 1993) and then gradually, a body of literature was developed only in the last three decades exploring the nature and effect of harassment of women in public spaces. However, there is scant research that brings together the strategies women employ to minimise or prevent their victimisation from street harassment, especially in the context of Bangladesh and hence, I draw heavily on literature from North America and Europe. Furthermore, this thesis aims to explore the nexus between victim blaming and disclosing behaviour, as well as the intersectionality of women's varied forms of identities and how it influences the frequency and severity of their experiences of street harassment. Due to the lack of literature on these contexts, I review what is known about the victim blaming behaviour in violence against women in general and examine the scope of using the theory of intersectionality with regard to street harassment. Thus, drawing upon an extensive selection of literature from the field of sociology and criminology, this chapter explores critically literature pertinent to investigating the problem of street harassment to which this thesis contributes. Through this literature review, one may understand how the concepts discussed are interconnected and how these can be deployed to gain a clearer picture regarding the issue of street harassment in the urban context of Dhaka, Bangladesh.

In order to facilitate understanding, not only the body of literature that specifically considers street harassment but also a wide range of literature related to violence against women will be drawn upon. To this end, the chapter begins by investigating the absence of consensus among researchers on naming the phenomenon of street harassment and the resulting definitional obstacles over the years in studying the problem. This section describes how the issue of street harassment has been named and defined, and at the same time, this section also works as a grounding as well as a connection to the discussion in the next chapter, where the terminological difficulties of street harassment exclusive to Bangladesh are discussed. The next section of this chapter explores the behaviours and practices which are considered street harassment, followed by the section which examines gendered discrimination in fear of personal victimisation and sexual violence, specifically. Research related to women's safety concerns in public spaces is reviewed and contextualised in this section too. Theories related to victim blaming make a major contribution to this body of literature in order to understand the barriers to disclosing and reporting incidents. The chapter concludes by reviewing the theory of intersectionality and how social categories like gender, class, and marital status intersect and contribute to different experiences of women. Therefore, this chapter provides a wider overview of the existing research on street harassment and the framework for the analysis of original fieldwork data that is presented in the subsequent chapters. The thesis is organised in such a way so that the literature related to each chapter is introduced before the empirical analysis.

## Chapter Two

### 2.2 'WHAT'S IN A NAME'? THE STRUGGLE WITH TERMINOLOGY

One of the central themes throughout the ideological spectrum of second and third-wave feminism, as well as intellectual and social movements, was to be able to name women's experiences, and therefore, great importance was given to portraying women's privatised experiences of sexual oppression. In today's world, workplace sexual harassment of women is very commonplace and can have a devastating impact on those who are subjected to it. However, the topic of the sexual harassment of women was unspeakable until 1976 due to a lack of a term to express it (McKinnon, 1987). Women at that time might not be complaining about the sexual harassment issue at their workplace, but that does not mean that the issue was non-existent. It was only through the women's movements during the late 1960s and early to mid-1970s that sexual harassment was finally legally recognised as a form of sex discrimination. Currently, workplace sexual harassment is internationally condemned, and more than 75 countries of the world have enacted legislation that not only prohibits such harassment but also aims to protect workers against it (Hersch, 2015).

The primary objective of opening this section by explaining how workplace sexual harassment became widely and legally recognised is to understand the significance of naming a harm or phenomenon in order to make it visible. For a long time, street harassment remained invisible as harm because it was either socially trivialised or ignored by the victims themselves, their families and society alike (Bowman, 1993). As a result, the invisibility of street harassment and its effects were reinforced socially and hence, the problem was not legally recognised for a long time. Some studies revealed that 90% of women have encountered street harassment at least once in their lifetime, making this problem one of the most common forms of violence against women around the world (Johnson and Bennett 2015). In 2016, a survey conducted by Action Aid found that 75% of women in London, UK have suffered different forms of harassment or violence in public places. In the context of my research in the capital city of Dhaka, Bangladesh, all 45 participants have admitted to encountering street harassment in their everyday lives.

So, the question that arises at this point is – if street harassment has been such a commonplace experience for a long time (Fileborn and O'Neill, 2021), why is the scholarly literature on this topic so sparse? Even though, at first glance, it can appear that there is a dearth of academic literature on street harassment, as a matter of fact, that scarcity is a mirage. This is because the problem regarding harassment on the streets has definitely been researched, analysed, and written about by many researchers, scholars and activists over the years (Davis, 1993; Gardner, 1995; Macmillan, Nierobisz and Welsh, 2000; Kears, 2010; Vera- Gray, 2016), but the term 'street harassment' was not universally employed by them. The lack of agreement on how to define, conceptualise and name the phenomenon not only made it problematic to recognise the presence of a cohesive body of literature on the topic but also made it difficult to compare between studies. Therefore, one of the explanations for sparse academic treatment and relative silence is the terminological difficulties on the topic.

Analysing the literature of the last three decades showed that multiple naming had been used even by the same author within the same work or across different studies. In 1993, Davis labelled the phenomenon as 'the harm that has no name'. In her work, Davis (1993) explained the importance of recognising the behaviour and practices not only to combat the apparent lack of research but also to provide an effective framework for legal and policy reform. While naming the phenomena, some writers emphasize the location of the experiences, that is, public spaces, and thus, it was named 'public harassment' (Gardner, 1995; Lenton et al., 1999; Ilahi, 2010; Kears, 2010) or 'public sexual harassment' (Thompson, 1994; Osmond, 2013). In addition to that, both Laniya (2005) and Lenton et al. (1999) employed 'sexual harassment in public places'. Moreover, Laniya (2005) also attempted to introduce a gender-neutral term by using 'the harassment of women in public places', and the same term was also used by Lord (2009). In 1993, Bowman used another gender-neutral term which was –

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'gender-based public harassment'. On a few occasions, Gardner also used the term 'street remarks' (1980), whereas Robin West (1987) used a similar terminology of 'street hassling'.

While naming the phenomenon, many researchers focused on the frequency of the incidents more than the location of the incidents. In her famous works, Stanko (1985, 1990) uses the terms 'intimate intrusion' and 'commonplace intrusions', while Esacove (1998) employs the term 'everyday unwanted sexual attention'. In 2007, Fairchild introduced the term 'everyday stranger harassment', but in a later study in 2010, she used another term as well, which is 'stranger harassment'. The term 'stranger harassment' was previously also used by Macmillan, Nierobisz and Welsh in 2000 and Wesselmann and Kelly in 2010. Some authors prefer to identify the phenomenon under the umbrella term of sexual harassment (Quinn, 2002; Rosewarne, 2007; FRA, 2014). However, the most widely used terminology across the literature is 'street harassment' (Kissling, 1991; Davis, 1993; Bowman, 1993; Turkheimer, 1997; Larkin, 1997; Lenton et al., 1999; Macmillan, Nierobisz and Welsh, 2000; Nielsen, 2000; Laniya, 2005; Fogg-Davis, 2006; Kearl, 2010).

Many researchers believe that the uses of multiple terms arise from the difficulties women encounter while identifying and labelling their diverse experiences (Kissling, 1991; Larkin, 1997; Turkheimer, 1997; Lenton et al., 1999; Laniya, 2000; Kearl, 2010) and as a result, it was complicated to agree on a unified term not only to indicate the vast range of behaviours and practices but also to understand where exactly the incident is taking place. As a result, women's wide range of experiences and individual interpretations of harassment are not excluded or invalidated, which legitimises the subjectivity, and therefore, women's own understanding of violence and harassment is placed at the centre of theory (Vera-Gray, 2016) instead of '(t)he variety of labels used by English-speaking writers (which) points to the absence of a label from the women who experience it' (Kissling, 1991: 457). Since, as a concept 'street harassment' is broadly understood these days and also widely used in the academic literature, this thesis will deploy the term to refer to the phenomenon instead of trying to introduce another term to encompass all the behavioural, spatial, and temporal characteristics of the problem. As such, the chapter will now go on to explore how different behaviours are defined against the different meanings in the literature.

### 2.3 DEFINING AND IDENTIFYING THE BEHAVIOURS

Over the years, multiple definitions of street harassment have been used by researchers, activists, and lawyers, which included different dimensions of behaviours of victims and offenders. Anthropologist Micaela di Leonardo was apparently the first scholar to use the term 'street harassment' as well as to create a definition: "Street harassment occurs when one or more strange men accost one or more women whom they perceive as heterosexual in a public place which is not the woman's/women's worksite" (di Leonardo 1981, p. 51-52). Cynthia Bowman (1993, p. 3) built on this to provide a broader definition of harassment based on this definition by di Leonardo (1981), but she effectively acknowledged the breadth of practices and, thus, highlighted the key features of street harassment in her definition:

- (1) (T)he targets of street harassment are female; (2) the harassers are male; (3) the harassers are unacquainted with their targets; (4) the encounter is face to face; (5) the forum is a public one such as a street, sidewalk, bus, bus station, taxi, or other place to which the public generally has access; but (6) the content of the speech, if any, is not intended as public discourse. Rather the remarks are aimed at the individual (although the harasser may intend that they be overheard by comrades or passers-by), and they are objectively degrading, humiliating, and frequently threatening in nature.

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Based on these characteristics, Bowman (1993, p. 575) also suggested a legal definition of street harassment:

Street harassment occurs when one or more unfamiliar men accost one or more women in a public place, on one or more occasions, and intrude or attempt to intrude upon the woman's attention in a manner that is unwelcome to the woman, with language or action that is explicitly or implicitly sexual.

Bowman is clearly suggesting street harassment as an invasion of women's privacy and an intrusion into her personal space. With the use of the word 'unwelcome,' she emphasised intrusion or invasion and therefore, any argument of women finding men's comments, whether positive or negative, as flattering becomes invalid. Focusing on the concept of intrusion, Kissling and Kramarae (1991) argued that the nature of social interaction in public places is different for men and women. In their research, they referred to the term 'civil inattention,' which was coined by Goffman in 1963, suggesting a behaviour in which two men in a public place look at each other just long enough to acknowledge each other's presence without making each other objects of particular attention. Kissling and Kramarae (1991) explained that men are expected to maintain 'civil inattention' in public places, whereas a woman is considered to be an 'open person' (Goffman, 1963; p. 126), who might encounter a range of verbal and non-verbal behaviours including whistling, winking, pinching, groping and shouted remarks from male strangers. Deborah Tuerkheimer (1997, p. 167) noted that street harassment occurs- "when a woman in a public place is intruded on by a man's words, noises, or gestures". Following the definitions provided by Leonardo (1981), Kissling and Kramarae (1991) and Bowman (1993), Laniya (2005, p. 100). demonstrated street harassment as "the unsolicited verbal and/or nonverbal act of a male stranger towards a female, solely based on her sex, in a public place."

Gardner (1995) was one of the first to conduct an in-depth empirical study on the phenomenon of street harassment (which she termed 'public harassment') in Indianapolis in 1995 and presented her definition of street harassment in 'Passing By: Gender and Public Harassment'. Her definition included a wide range of characteristics of street harassment:

[Public harassment is] that group of abuses, harrying, and annoyances characteristic of public places and uniquely facilitated by communication in public. Public harassment includes pinching, slapping, hitting, shouted remarks, vulgarity, insults, sly innuendo, ogling, and stalking. Public harassment is on a continuum of possible events, beginning when customary civility among strangers is abrogated and ending with the transition to violent crime: assault, rape, or murder (1995, p. 4).

Gardner's definition indicated the difficulties of properly identifying and differentiating the behaviour of street harassment and sexual harassment, and this difficulty of identifying behaviours, similar to the problem of naming the phenomenon, persisted throughout the literature on street harassment. The Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA) published a factsheet in 2013 where the inconsistency in defining street harassment and sexual harassment was highlighted as such:

The boundaries between sexual harassment and street harassment, and other forms of sexual violence are not easily defined. That is, they are blurry and overlap. This can make labelling these forms of sexual violence particularly difficult. For instance, terms such as sexual harassment or 'minor' sexual violence can, at times, downplay or occlude the harm of these forms of sexual violence. Yet, at other times 'sexual violence' seems too serious or broad a label for certain behaviours or experiences. For example, how useful or meaningful is it to categorise unwanted verbal comments alongside rape? (Fileborn, 2013; p. 2).

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In this respect, Liz Kelly's (1988) notion of a continuum of violence can effectively capture the difficulties of identifying boundaries between street harassment and sexual harassment that has dogged debate. Instead of relying on binaries, where something is either 'street harassment' or it is not, Kelly (1988) connected the various types of violence in women's lives, placing everyday street harassment at one end and crimes like sexual assault and rape at the other. At the same time, Kelly (1988) also emphasised that no form of sexual violence is less serious than any other, and so, placing different forms of violence within the continuum does not make a judgment of the severity or the seriousness of the violence. Kelly (1988) explained that the continuum rather refers to the pervasiveness, i.e., the prevalence of various forms of violence that women experience most frequently and the impact of that violence across time. Kelly (1988) argued that all sorts of violence against women act as men's attempts to control women through fear, threats, abuse, and force and thus, all kinds of male behaviour that posit as threats to public safety can be referred to as violence. Kelly also drew attention to women's "generalised fear" (Kelly, 1988; p. 9) of being victims of violence, which can also limit, restrict, and control their mobility and behaviour. This concept of the continuum of violence is a core part of Chapter Five - the first chapter of this thesis where fieldwork data is presented. As we shall see below, using this concept to analyse the harassing experiences of the participants indicates the fluidity and complexity of street harassment, where a range of behaviours are not always isolated or discreet incidents. Women who took part in this research confirmed that even the most normalised harassing behaviours and actions like staring and gestures are sexualised and can be felt as equally invasive and sexually offensive. Moreover, regardless of whether someone has experienced any criminal forms of violence beforehand, the majority of the participants could easily recall particular incidents of street harassment when they felt extremely threatened and assessed whether the incident could escalate to other grievous forms of sexual violence, for example, rape. Furthermore, empirical analysis in chapter

in light of the continuum of violence concept shows that the cumulative effect of the 'normalised' yet repetitive street harassment behaviours can be substantial on women and can be a significant barrier in disclosing and reporting the incidents to police.

The literature on street harassment meets further difficulty due to the lack of definitional consensus as well as inadequate terminology in terms of harassment in a transport environment. Until recently, research on street harassment on public transport has been extremely limited. While public spaces often include streets, parks, restaurants, and shopping centres, transport has become a frequently overlooked part. Few recent studies have investigated the frequency and nature of harassment in transport (Horii & Burgess 2012), the impact of harassment on women's travel behaviour (Koskela 1999) and the severe underreporting of the incidents (Solymosi et al. 2017; Smith 2008). Lim (2000) noted the behaviours which are frequently reported to occur in public transports, and these behaviours include lewd comments, leering, sexual invitations, stalking, masturbation, frotteurism (rubbing the pelvic area or erect penis against a non-consenting individual for sexual gratification) and Shoukry et al. (2008) added unwanted sexual touching to this list of behaviours. Neupane and Chesney-Lind (2014) researched violence against women in public transport in Kathmandu, Nepal, and they reported women's unwillingness to respond to harassment due to fear of public condemnation. As we shall see, the women who were interviewed in this research explained that men who harass on public transport blatantly refuse these accusations by blaming the motion transport and, thus, cover up the intentional bodily contact. At the same time, harassers also take advantage of the busy public transport environment and commit an offence without little or no risk of exposure or reprehension. Gekoski et al. (2015) also recognised the context of public transport as an overcrowded, isolating, and hard to control setting which may facilitate certain types of harassment. All the participants of this research who use public transport have reported being subjected to different forms of harassment, especially physical harassment like grabbing and frotteurism. The empirical analysis in Chapter Five regarding the transient nature of public transport and women's harassment reveals a significant difference from the harassment in public spaces like streets. Women who were dealing with

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harassment on public transport reported feeling extremely anxious since they were unable to remove themselves immediately from the situation, and therefore, they felt trapped and helpless.

As we can see, across the academic literature on street harassment that detailed the harmful and harassing behaviours of men on the streets, there is a lack of a single, accepted conceptualisation. Moreover, and very importantly, the existing research on street harassment weighs heavily towards the Global North, and only a limited amount of research has addressed the issue across East Asia, Latin America, India and Egypt in recent times. Keeping these facts in mind, this thesis places the most importance on the experiential knowledge of women. Kelly's (1988) concept of continuum of violence can capture the ways in which women's daily experiences of mundane and routine forms of harassment can be described differently by different women and by the same woman in different contexts. At the same time, this thesis also identifies the importance of recognising the differences in women's experiences of harassment in different cultural contexts. Moreover, emphasising the lens of intersectionality in this thesis, we need to understand and recognise that women's experiences of street harassment are supposed to be different across different social and cultural locations. On the whole, this thesis applies all these concepts in the context of the global South. To this end, to have a better understanding of women's daily experiences on the streets, the chapter will now move on to explore women's fear of personal victimisation in public spaces.

### 2.4 WOMEN'S FEAR OF PERSONAL VICTIMISATION

Over the last three decades, the phenomenon of fear of crime has been a focus of study in academic literature for sociologists and criminologists (Pain, 1991; Koskela, 1997, 1999; May et al., 2009). Research has widely recognised that gender is one of the most pronounced characteristics that consistently influence fear of crime (Rader, 2008; May et al., 2009). The meaning and understanding of safety differ significantly between men and women, between different women, and between different groups of women. For men, understanding safety tends to be only related to physical safety, whereas for women, it is both physical and sexual (Stanko, 1990; Tulloch, 2004). Moreover, research has also explored that there is a significant level of difference between women's level of fear and the actual extent of risk to their safety (Stanko, 1990). Women perceive themselves to be at a considerably higher risk of criminal victimisation, even though it is men who appear to be at a higher rate of personal victimisation like physical assault, homicide, and robberies (Stanko, 1990; Valentine, 1992; Tulloch, 2004).

In fact, women reported three to five times higher levels of fear than men despite the fact that police-reported crime data suggests men to be more frequent victims of most types of violent crimes (Vaillancourt, 2010). In addition, surveys on fear of crime have identified that while men and women are equally concerned about property offences, women reported being far more worried about personal offences and, more particularly, sexual offences (Ferraro, 1996). While women's higher level of fear of sexual offences is predictable since they are the overwhelming majority of victims of sexual crimes, at the same time, it is contradictory that women are actually victims of higher rates of common assault than sexual violence (Vaillancourt, 2010) and as such, gender continues to prove to be one of the most influential factors in fear of crime.

In addition to the above contradiction between fear and fact, women's level of fear is at its peak in public places, even though Vaillancourt's 2010 report suggests that they are more likely to be victimised in private places. In other words, women tend to be far more fearful of victimisation by strangers in public places, while they experience more violence in private spheres by known others. These inconsistencies between women's fear of crime and the fact of victimisation have been referred to as the 'gender-fear paradox' (Ferraro, 1995, 1996).

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In light of this 'gender-fear paradox,' some research argued that women's higher fear of criminal victimisation is 'irrational' because there was a clear disparity between women's higher levels of expressed fear and lower levels of actual risk (Skogan, 1987; Lupton & Tulloch, 1999). However, feminist researchers have advocated that women's heightened fear of criminal victimisation needs to be understood by considering their lived experiences and actual high levels of violence perpetrated against them (Stanko, 1987). The gendered disparity in regard to the fear of personal victimisation is explained by Stanko (1990, p. 86) as such:

Women's heightened level of anxiety is born of an acute reading of their relationship to safety. It is not a misguided hysteria or paranoia. Women's life experiences – as children, adolescents, and adults – are set in a context of ever-present sexual danger. Worry about personal safety is one-way women articulate what it means to be female and live, day-in and day-out, in communities where women are targets of sexual violence.

Furthermore, a deeper investigation of fear of crime in the broader social context shows that the source of fear is not always the actual encounters of victimisation but also a result of secondary experiences (Mesch, 2000; Fox et al., 2009). To explain further, fear can be constructed as a result of crime directly experienced by the individual and the subsequent physical and psychological trauma as a result of the crime. Alternatively, crime-related fear can also be instigated by the information gathered from media, through friends and family and other secondary sources and not through any first-hand personal victimisation (Minnery & Lim, 2005). Therefore, a generalised fear of crime is present even though no direct victimisation has occurred yet.

In terms of the effect of fear of crime, women experience this phenomenon much differently than men. Women tend to bring more change and adaptations to their lifestyles and travel behaviour in order to minimise the risk of victimisation and to feel more secure (Green & Singleton, 2006; Rader, Crossman, & Allison, 2009). For example, women may employ many self-imposed restrictions such as going out after dark, going out at night alone, journeying with company to and from certain places, avoiding certain places altogether and avoiding certain transports depending on the circumstances.

Previous research (Stanko, 1990, 1993) has already pointed towards the relationship between fear of crime and women's fear of stranger victimisation in public spaces. Gardner (1995) noted that women can enjoy being in public places, but they remain alert at all times about the risk of potential violence. Moreover, it is also well-researched in the criminological literature that there is a clear relationship between women's fear of sexual violence and street harassment (Gardner 1989, MacMillan et al. 2000, Fairchild and Rudman 2008) which we will discuss in the next section. Similarly, my findings for this research too suggest that all of the participants considered their home as the safest place of all and whenever they venture out in public, they have a proper plan of action regarding the time and route of their journey, their clothing style as well as the coping strategies bearing in mind the risk of personal or sexual victimisation.

### 2.5 WOMEN'S FEAR OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

It has been argued by most feminist literature that women's fear of crime is, in fact, most usually a fear of sexual assault or rape (Stanko 1985; Gordon and Riger 1989; Ferraro 1995; 1996; Hilinski 2009; Cook and Fox 2012; Lane and Fox 2013). Stanko (1995, p. 39) labelled rape as the "ever-present terror" for women and she also argued that women's understanding of the risk of sexual assault is a "prime feature of women's understanding of their personal safety" (1990, p. 72). In one research, it was indicated that men are roughly eleven times less likely than women to "being forced to do something sexual" over their lifetime (Tjaden and Thoennes, 1998; p. 6). Therefore, when women report a higher

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rate of fear of victimisation, their fear is generally intertwined with their fear of sexual assault, and the basis of their fear is different than men since men rarely fear sexual assault (Warr, 1984, 1985, 1987). In other research, Ferraro (1996) observed that women and men reported a similar level of fear for a non-violent crime, but women reported a significantly higher level of fear when sexual violence was added to the fear category. In efforts to explain this phenomenon of women's higher fear of sexual assault that casts its shadow over a range of other general crimes, 'shadow of sexual assault hypothesis' was first explored by Warr (1984) and later developed by Ferraro (1996).

The way women's understanding of risk and safety is influenced by the construction of public and private places has been described as the 'geography of fear' by Valentine (1992). In her research, Valentine (1992) argued that women's sense of security is strongly affected by their inability to control who they interact with in public places. Similar to the fear of personal victimisation, as discussed in the previous section, there is a paradox between women's perception of safety and their fear of sexual violence with regard to spatial location.

Women learn to perceive danger from strange men in public places (Seabrook & Green, 2004; Green & Singleton, 2006), despite the fact that surveys and statistics on rape and attack clearly emphasize that the risks of violence are greater in private spaces (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Myhill & Allen, 2002). It was reported by British Crime Survey (2000) that the most common location for a rape to take place was a victim's home (55%), followed by the criminal's home (20%), while the number of rapes that took place in a public space was as low as 13% (Myhill & Allen, 2002). Moreover, further inconsistencies in women's risk assessments are confirmed in numerous other research studies where it is explored that women are most likely to be assaulted by a man who is known to them (Greenan, 2004; Kelly et al., 2005) and most often by partners or ex-partners (Myhill & Allen, 2002; Walby & Allen, 2004). Additionally, attacks by partners are more than twice as likely to result in physical damage than attacks by strangers (Myhill & Allen, 2002).

In order to understand women's heightened fear of sexual victimisation, many researchers have blamed the socialization process where women are taught and trained from an early age to be fearful of strangers and public places and to be dependent on known men, i.e., fathers, brothers, partners (Pain 1991, Valentine 1992, Hollander 2001, Wilson and Little, 2008). They are also socialised to remember that the threat of sexual violence is inevitable and "there is a series of boundaries in the physical and social worlds which they must not cross if they wish to remain safe" (Pain 1991; p. 423; Valentine 1992). Sacco (1990, p. 500-1) also mentions 'contributory negligence', which placed women in the position of responsibility for any offence committed against them. Therefore, women come to learn and believe that public places are masculine where they do not belong, and subsequently, they feel vulnerable to any type of unpredictable harm ranging from sexual intimidation to physical assault (Skeggs, 1999; Gardner, 1990). In the context of the present study of street harassment, what is contributed to the existing literature is the demonstration that women perceive the public spaces of Dhaka city in a gendered way and how their knowledge about safety and risk of sexual violence is created and influenced from an early age and how that knowledge, in turn, shapes how women experience and negotiate with street harassment in their daily lives.

### 2.6 THE CONTINUUM OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

It has been a topic of much debate within the literature about the validity of agreeing on a broader definition of sexual violence (Pain, 1997a; Kelly & Radford, 1998; Boyle, 2009). A range of terms are used to identify and describe violence perpetrated by men against women, including "domestic violence/abuse; rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment; genital and sexual mutilation and harmful cultural and/or traditional practices; trafficking in women for sexual exploitation/domestic slavery"

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(Reid, 2003; p. 12). An important characteristic of the feminist analysis of violence against women is the recognition that the different forms of violence against women are all connected. In light of this, some feminist researchers have adopted the term 'sexual violence' in order to conceptualise all forms of male violence against women (Kelly, 1988; Stanko, 1990; Kelly & Radford, 1998). As Kelly (1988, p. 41) described:

... any physical, visual, verbal, or sexual act that is experienced by the woman or girl, at the time or later, as a threat, invasion, or assault, that has the effect of hurting her or degrading her and/or takes away her ability to control intimate contact.

This concept was further developed by Kelly (1988, p.97) in placing sexual violence as a continuum. The continuum demonstrates how different types of normalised behaviours perpetrated by men against women every day in public places is worthy of legal attention (Kelly, 1988). Kelly (1988, p. 106) argued:

For women, sexual harassment ranges from physical assaults through to what, on the surface, appear to be innocuous remarks. The meaning behind the remark, the fact that through it men deny women the choice of which individuals to interact and communicate with, and the intrusiveness of the encounter are what defines this, for women, as harassment. The expectation that women should be paying attention to and gratifying men, rather than preoccupied with their own thoughts and concerns, underlies this kind of intrusiveness.

A further advantage of this continuum is that it sought to explore a range of harassing and harmful experiences rather than individual forms of victimisation that had been researched prior to this theory. The value of the continuum is that it captures commonalities between the different forms of violence in women's experience since different forms of violence against women serve to maintain structural gender inequalities and thus persist patriarchal power and control (Skinner et al., 2005). It is important to recognise here that although the continuum demonstrates how different types of violence are linked, Kelly (1988) emphasised that the continuum should not be understood as a linear straight line or isolated category of offences (Brown, 2011). Kelly (1988, p. 76) further explained that the continuum does not represent a hierarchical determination of seriousness, instead argued that 'the degree of impact cannot be simplistically inferred from the form a woman experiences or its place within the continuum.' Therefore, the continuum of violence theory sought to emphasise all forms of behaviour as equal incidents as they have cumulative effects on women in different ways and thus remove the hierarchical framework which could let seemingly normalised behaviour remain under-researched. Through this theory, Kelly (1988) also highlighted the importance of listening to women's individualised experiences to better understand their distinctiveness. To help acknowledge and better understand women's normalised and everyday experiences of street harassment, this thesis adopts Liz Kelly's theory of the continuum of sexual violence (Kelly 1988) and explores how Bangladeshi women can find even the most normalised forms of street harassment as sexually offensive and extremely threatening with the risk of escalation to grievous sexual violence.

There has been considerable debate and argument too about using 'sexual violence' as a broad conceptual term. Segal (1990), in contrast to Kelly, argued that sexual harassment and sexual violence need to be considered as separate even though they might share a common basis in gendered power relations, but the experiences of sexual violence cannot be trivialised by viewing through the same lens as sexual harassment. Pain (1997) made an important argument in this respect by pointing out that it might cause additional trouble and difficulties while describing both the experiences of harassment and violence as sexual violence since most women would draw a line between them and would agree with them being very different experiences. In contrast, Kelly and Radford (1990) explained that a majority of women minimise their harassing encounters in public places as long as

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they are not sexually assaulted. In one of their studies (Kelly and Radford, 1990), they found that the women participants experienced many intimidating behaviours from men where they felt sick and angry and were in tears and traumatised to safely navigate public places. However, while describing their experiences, they continually minimised the incidents by saying 'nothing really happened.' In such circumstances, the continuum of sexual violence can prove to be a useful concept in contextualizing women's fear of sexual violence by recognising the cumulative effects of men's behaviour on women rather than counting each act of violence, intimidation, or harassment as isolated incidents. At the same time, it needs to be remembered that not all women will recognise and experience different acts of sexual violence within the continuum in the similar way or even acknowledge them as sexual violence. As explained by Radford et al. (2000, p. 2):

(the continuum is) constituted through difference: the different forms of sexual violence, their different impacts, and the different community and legal responses to women, positioned differently, within cultures and through history.

Therefore, despite the fact that the continuum enables theorization of commonalities and connections between different forms of sexual violence, women's individualised experiences of sexual violence are still diverse and unique. Hence, even though this thesis recognises that street harassment stands on a continuum, it also argues that harassing incidents are never experienced equally by different women and there is a need to analyse the experiences through intersectionality – the unique aspects of differences that creates unique lived experiences. Below is a demonstration of the 'continuum of street harassment' based on the theory of 'continuum of sexual violence' by Kelly (1988).



**Figure 1: A Continuum of Street Harassment: Illustrated by the researcher (Based on Kelly's (1988) Continuum of Sexual Violence)**

In the context of this thesis, the theory of the continuum of violence frames the exploration of women's daily experiences of street harassment in public places. The concept is used throughout chapter five and chapter six to organise and make meaningful how women look at their daily harassing experiences and their effects, as well as how they proactively cope with them on an everyday basis. At the same time, conceptualising women's experiences through a continuum enabled a greater focus

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on its nature and the cumulative effects of everyday harassing behaviours of men that women find intrusive or threatening, and yet, in order to disclose the incidents to the loved ones and to report the incidents to police, women carry out a great deal of calculations estimating the after effect and consequences.

### 2.7 RESPONSES TO FEAR OF VIOLENCE

Earlier in this chapter, we observed gender differences in crime-related fear, and recent research has explored gender differences in response to the fear of crime too (Rader et al., 2009; Vaillancourt, 2010). The concept of fear of crime has been researched for more than 40 years now, and hence, the data on this topic is rich (Rader, 2017); however, research on women's responses to fear of crime and violence is still inadequate. One statistic in Canada showed that women are seven times more likely than men to avoid certain areas in order to protect themselves from crime and six times more likely than men to use particular precautionary measures to ensure their personal safety (Vaillancourt, 2010). The existing literature on responses to fear of violence has noted two broad responses: precautionary measures and routine behavioural and lifestyle changes. In the context of Bangladesh, however, there is a substantial gap in the literature concerning women's reactions and responses to fear of violence and street harassment and this thesis aims to address that gap. My findings on responses to street harassment are analysed and presented in chapter six of this thesis. Many of those measures employed by the participants of this research are noticeably different from the measures already explored in the literature of global North, and one key reason for such difference could be the differences in the social and cultural contexts between these two regions.

#### *Precautionary Measures*

Research has shown that women use two types of precautionary measures as responses to fear of crime: avoidance behaviour and protective strategies (Kearney and Donovan, 2013; Roberts, 2019). One of the primary responses to fear of crime is different types of avoidance behaviour, and Miethe (1995) argued that the preference for avoidance behaviour is due to the belief that avoiding risky circumstances or people can reduce the risk of victimisation more than any other coping strategy. Common avoidance behaviours include staying indoors at night-time, avoiding certain areas or establishments, and avoiding particular individuals or groups. Several researchers (Sherman, Gartin, & Buerger, 1989; Nasar, 2000) have established that women avoid certain areas that evoke a sense of danger, regardless of actual crime rates or risk of victimisation in those particular areas. According to Nasar (2000), fear-induced hot spots are created through the information received from various sources, including media, friends and family, and neighbours, and this subsequently forms cognitive images and emotions regarding that particular area. Print, electronic, and social media tend to over-report sexual crimes that occur in public areas like public parks and dark alleys and, as a result, shape women's fear of public places (Politoff, 2013; Stanko, 1985). In turn, women adopt the notion that public areas are unsafe for women, and in order to avoid victimisation, it is better to avoid these places.

In addition to avoiding public areas at certain times, it is argued that women also tend to avoid or limit their participation in social, leisure or outdoor activities (Miethe, 1995). In her research, Gardner (1995) listed some of the common avoidance behaviours that women frequently employ, for example, invoking an absent protector, ignoring the harasser, the pretence that 'nothing is happening' to provide defence or to mask their own reactions (including, for example, using sunglasses, headphones, faster and business-like walks). She found that: "the most common restrictive behaviours women said they regularly engaged in related to being 'on guard' while in public, particularly when they are alone" (1995, p. 113).

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As part of the precautionary measures, it has been further suggested that women use a range of other strategies in order to reduce the risk of victimisation as well as to feel confident and safe (Miethe, 1995). Examples of protective behaviours include wearing loose or full-cover clothing, walking with an escort, carrying a weapon or personal whistle, and taking self-defence training. These kinds of coping strategies can also be called resistance strategies, where women actively resist, fight, and refuse to submit to the harassers (Kelly, 1988). Violence is often an attempt to exert control, and by using these strategies, women refuse to be controlled by the harassers even if they do not have any physical means of resisting the harassment.

Kelly (1988) also noted that depending on the context, women might use both avoidance behaviour and protective strategies in order to reduce the risk of victimisation. Hence, Kelly (1988) argued that it is immensely complicated for women to safely navigate public spaces since they have to employ different micro-scale coping strategies (clothing choices, carrying defensive tools like pins, pepper spray or keys) by maintaining certain facial expressions or behaviour as well as by acquiring constant mental planning and quick decision-making abilities. Whether women employ avoidance strategies or protective strategies, these actions have implications for their freedom, mobility, and life choices, nonetheless. Kelly (1988) noted that:

‘(m)ost women recall an awareness of being watched or possibly followed. It is these perceptions and realities that result in women feeling they have to be constantly aware of their environment, watching and checking the behaviour of men they may encounter, trying to predict their motives and actions’ (98).

Both Stanko (1985) and Larkin (1997) argued that such constant vigilance should not be part of a normal lifestyle and women can sense the illusion of normalcy only with the help of these strategies.

### ***Routine Behavioural and Lifestyle Changes***

Although women generally employ various avoidance strategies in order to carry on with their daily activities, fear of violence often leads them to bring overall changes to their routine behaviours and lifestyles. Routine behaviour or activities indicate the actions that are necessary for daily living, for example, working outside the home, shopping and leisure or outdoor activities. If women perceive a particular area or town to be unsafe, they may choose to seek employment somewhere else, take different routes to home or work, move out of a particular neighbourhood, shop, or participate in leisure activities somewhere else (Miethe, Stafford, & Sloane, 1990). Women may also bring changes in their lifestyle by deciding to stop doing certain activities altogether due to their fear of being victimised (Dolan & Peasgood, 2007).

Most researchers agree that although amending behavioural and, lifestyle changes can provide a sense of safety. In reality, these changes and restrictions do not guarantee any safety, rather, the changes only induce more fear and limit women’s full participation and contribution to society (Gordon et al., 1980). However, some research has also argued that some lifestyle choices can noticeably increase the likelihood of becoming a victim of a crime due to increased contact with dangerous situations and people (Wilcox, Tillyer, & Fisher, 2009). For example, in a study of college women, Mustaine and Tewksbury (2002) observed that women who socialised with friends with no properly planned activities had a notably higher chance of being sexually offended because they did not have any particular activities to focus on and the male pressures to have sex were effective. However, Mustaine and Tewksbury (2002) also concluded that even though the lifestyle choices of the women increased their exposure to potential offenders, it is the societal teachings that find women to be more suitable and easy targets for certain crimes. Most of the feminist literature concurs

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that there is no evidence or guarantee that the coping strategies employed by women can increase their safety in public places, but they can certainly affect the quality of women's lives (Gordon et al., 1980; Stanko, 1990a; Dhillon and Bakaya, 2014). Stanko (1990a) noted that coping strategies can cause emotional costs (anger, anxiety, resentment), financial costs (transport, safer housing) and social withdrawal or isolation. While these restrictions may help women feel secure and minimise their fear of being victimised, at the same time, such restrictions can curtail their personal liberties, lower the opportunities for education and employment and overall, decrease the general quality of life (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; San-Juan et al., 2012). In chapter six of this thesis, I will present several strategies employed by the participants of this research, and it is clear from my research that the invention of those coping strategies is not only part of the family teachings during their upbringing, but women also come up with different types of strategies depending on the time and places of their journey. My research provides further evidence to suggest that women's coping strategies are also influenced by their financial abilities, where they calculate if maintaining certain forms of coping strategies are financially viable on a temporary, short term or long-term basis.

### 2.8 SECONDARY VICTIMIZATION: VICTIM BLAMING

Victim blaming refers to the transference of blame from the perpetrator of a crime to the victim (Taylor, 2020). In incidents of harassment or violence against women, victim blaming includes blaming the woman's character, behaviour, appearance, decisions, or situation when the incident took place rather than attributing the blame towards the male offender who committed the act (Burt, 1980). Moreover, Walklate (2007: 141) argues that victim blaming is not just a useful tactic for diminishing the responsibility of individual perpetrators but 'also provides a shield for inefficient and ineffective criminal justice systems.' After being victims of violence, women may receive victim blaming from close family members and friends, relatives, neighbours, colleagues, their place of worship or from formal institutions such as the criminal justice system, health services, and social services (Campbell et al. 2001). Experiencing blame from these mentioned sources can further increase the feelings of self-blame among women (Campbell et al. 2001). Moreover, there is a larger cultural structure in the society, for example, porn culture, sexism, rape myth acceptance (RMA), and belief in a just world (BJW) which can further contribute to victim blaming by influencing the society how to respond to the women who are subjected to violence.

While victim blaming has been frequently researched in relation to rape and sexual violence, the issue is severely under-researched in relation to street harassment. Three of the major theories of victim blaming in rape and sexual violence cases are discussed below to explore their potential value with regard to the victim blaming issues in street harassment cases too. Moreover, discussions on these theories can also help us better understand the dynamics of victim blaming and street harassment since the subject of victim blaming repeatedly appeared in the findings sections of this thesis. The dominant theories that will be discussed in this section are i) Rape myth acceptance (RMA), ii) Belief in a Just World (BJW), and iii) Attribution Theory.

#### ***Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA)***

The 'rape myth' is one of the dominant components in victim blaming (Hayes et al., 2013), and it is closely associated with people's stereotypes about gender roles, prejudices, and false beliefs about rape (Bohner et al., 2013). The topic has been the subject of much research, and the definition has developed over the years. Powell and Henry (2014, p. 2) suggested a definition as such:

[Rape culture is the] social, cultural and structural discourses and practices in which sexual violence is tolerated, accepted, eroticised, minimised and trivialised.

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They further continued that societies where rape myths are prominent, violence against women is “eroticised in literary, cinematic and media representations; victims are routinely disbelieved or blamed for their own victimisation and perpetrators are rarely held accountable, or their behaviours are seen as excusable or understandable” (Powell and Henry, 2014; p. 2). They have also argued that rape myths are part of the broader gender inequality of the society, and these are expressed in the language, laws and social establishments which are supposed to challenge and prevent sexual violence, but instead “perpetuate, support, condone or reflect” such stereotypes (Powell and Henry, 2014; p. 2). The existing literature on sexual violence provides a good overview of the rape myth acceptance in victim blaming attitude and my research fills the void regarding the influence of the same rape myth attitude for the victims of street harassment. Empirical analysis of chapter six and chapter seven of this research demonstrate that Bangladeshi society’s stereotypical beliefs and practices about gender roles significantly contribute to the victim blaming attitudes of the women who encounter harassment on the streets and that, subsequently, influence the women’s disclosure and non-reporting behaviour. One of the most blatant manifestations of rape culture that is expressed through the language and terminology is naming the phenomenon of street harassment as ‘Eve teasing’ (see chapter 3). Through this one terminology, not only is the violence minimised and trivialised as small banter or teasing, but also the blame is singlehandedly placed on ‘Eve,’ as in the woman, for being the provocateur of her own harassment.

Examples of rape myths in the literature of sexual violence include blaming the women’s behaviour, clothing and appearance, woman’s relationship status, alcohol consumption, time of reporting the rape and sexual history (Burt, 1980; Gerger et al., 2007; Temkin, 2010). In another research, it was found that a higher proportion of men than women believed that most rapes could be prevented if the men were not provoked and if the women did not secretly want to be raped (Sleath, 2011). My findings for this research provide valuable insight into those factors with which Bangladeshi women find themselves to be frequently scrutinised and blamed by their own families, friends, and bystanders after receiving harassment on the streets.

When rape or sexual violence occurs outside the stereotypical rape characteristics (no injuries of victim, attacked by a stranger, the victim was not drunk and did not do anything to cause the assault, dressed modestly and immediately reported the incident to police), the victim can often be completely disregarded (Taylor, 2020). Moreover, without these stereotypical rape myths, a rape differs from “real rape,” where more responsibilities are attributed to the victim and less to the perpetrator (Koppelaar, Lange, & van de Velde, 1997; p. 14). In the discussion of my research findings, I will explore how women are conditioned to dress and behave in certain ways if they wish to receive support from their own families while dealing with harassment on the streets.

### ***Belief In a Just World (BJW)***

The second argument for victim blaming attitude has been termed Belief in a Just World (BJW). This argues that people have a need to believe that the world is a fair place where good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people- that is – everyone simply receives what they deserve (Lerner and Miller, 1978). When applied to the cases of rape and sexual violence, Belief in a Just World theory indicates that rape only happens to bad women’ (Sinclair and Bourne, 1998; p. 586). Whilst such thinking seems over-simplified or even ‘astonishingly crude’, as Williams (2003, p. 463) labels it, this type of thinking is rooted in societal discourse. For example, regardless of cultural differences around the world, some of the common and popular discourses include - ‘karma will get them in the end’, ‘what goes around comes around’, ‘you reap what you sow’, ‘they did not deserve that to happen to them’ (Taylor, 2020). Such discourses are frequently applied to the victims of sexual violence and lead the observer to assume that whatever happened to that individual’s life was either deserved or undeserved and then continue to look for factors to justify the reasoning process (Correia

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et al., 2001). In sexual violence cases, the justifying factors may include the individual's clothing and behaviour, whether she was walking home alone at night or drinking with friends. By attributing the responsibility to the victims, the observer is trying to confirm their Belief in the Just World theory by reinterpreting the situation by making it appear just and fair. As Lerner (1980) explained, when a 'bad thing' happens to a 'good person', it threatens the observers' BJW. Therefore, if the victim appears to be completely innocent, the observer holding BJW theory employs much higher levels of derogation in order to justify their BJW (Correia & Vala, 2003).

In the context of street harassment cases, the justifying factors for such beliefs are not too different either, primarily concerned about the women's clothing, appearance, and behaviour as well as the time and mode of her journey. This is significant to the discussion in chapter six, where women who participated in this research blamed other women on the streets for dressing up and behaving in a certain way, and even in some cases were willing to remove the blame from the harassers too. The findings will demonstrate how the women themselves have internalised the notion of gender roles and certain patriarchal beliefs and, thus, unconsciously act as the passive agents of the patriarchy.

### ***Attribution Theory***

This third argument is attribution theories, which indicate the urge of people to explain the causes of certain events or behaviour (Manusov, 2006). In terms of sexual violence cases, the observers cause victim blaming by prioritising the characteristics and behaviours of the subjected women rather than prioritising the external forces, such as the behaviours and motivations of the sex offender. In the context of street harassment cases, attribution theories are more relevant because women are more frequently blamed for their clothing, behaviours, and attractiveness (Pryor & Day, 1988), however, no research has yet been conducted investigating victim blaming in a street harassment situation with regard to the attribution theory. Although research by Workman and Freeburg (1999) investigated the role of several variables, including the victim's dress, in order to understand victim blaming in a dating or social situation. The researchers discovered that female victims wearing short skirts were attributed more responsibility for the rape than victims in a moderate or long skirt. In another study by Whatley (1996), the researcher investigated the role of several attributes, including the victim's character (morality), clothing, attractiveness, and relationship with the offender, to understand which of these contributed the most to victim blaming in sexual violence cases. The findings clearly indicated that the character and clothing of the victims are the main factors by which the observers assign blame to the victim in sexual violence cases. Women who are dressed in sexy clothes are viewed by the participants as less moral than the women who are modestly dressed, without reflecting whether clothing choices are indeed influenced by the morality of an individual.

In their research, Pryor and Day (1988) attempted to find out the role of a victim's attractiveness as one of the variables in relation to victim blaming in sexual violence cases. Their study revealed that an attractive woman was less likely to be seen as harassed in comparison to an unattractive woman, who was clearly considered as having been harassed. The authors believed that such reasonings of the observers were due to the common perception that the attractive woman was seeking male attention with the help of her dress, makeup, behaviour, and sexuality and, thus, might have provoked the harassing behaviour. In other words, such perception reaffirms the common belief that sexually harassing behaviours are motivated by sexual interest and are brought about by the behaviour and demeanour of women. As I will argue below, my research clearly contradicts the findings of Pryor and Day (1988) since all the participants of this research, regardless of their behaviour or demeanour encountered harassment on the streets and were held responsible for the actions of the perpetrators.

Additionally, victims of street harassment are often wrongfully blamed for their own harassment by society and that ultimately leads them to engage in self-blaming. Self-blame is an act of believing that

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one deserves to be harassed because of one's own actions (Janoff-Bulman, 1979). Instead of blaming the perpetrator for his crime, the blame is often attributed to the victim with the belief that the victim must have done something to provoke the harasser, for example, she might be looking for attention, otherwise, the harassment would have never taken place. Eventually, the victim too starts to agree to similar stereotypical beliefs and blames herself that it was her behaviour, actions or appearance that triggered the attack. According to Janoff-Bulman (1979; p. 1798), self-blaming can affect the victims in two ways: 'characterological' and 'behavioural'. Characterological self-blame indicates the idea of placing the blame on someone's character and, thus, a person deserving of the harassment or abuse. Behavioural self-blame, on the other hand, places the blame on someone's behaviour which needs to be modified in order for the victim to avoid further harassment in future. Believing in such biased perceptions defies rational thinking because the victim is held responsible for the attack instead of the perpetrator, and instead of taking actions against the perpetrator, the preference is given to the notion of the victim changing her behaviour to avoid further harassment.

To sum up, I have presented three major theories of victim blaming in the context of sexual violence cases in this section. Research has shown that rape myths and victim blaming beliefs are prevalent in most cultures, not only among the general members of society but in the criminal justice system too. I have made a strong link between the existing attribution theories and victim blaming in street harassment cases which calls for further research. Now the chapter will move on to review the theory of intersectionality because this allows us to consider how the experience of harassment is further organised according to different aspects of social identities like gender, class, age, religion, and marital status.

### 2.9 INTERSECTIONALITY

In the research on violence against women, gender has always been the prime focus, however, gender is always modified by other aspects of social identity such as class, age, race, dis/ability and citizenship (Davis, 2008). Every individual has multiple social identities which can interact with their social position as well as influence their lived experiences (Davis, 2008; Nash, 2008) and therefore, knowing someone's gender identity alone can provide relatively limited information as one identity category is always pervaded by others (Cho et al., 2013). Intersectionality captures this multiplicity and describes the interaction between systems of oppression (Davis, 2008). While intersectionality is often associated with black feminism, Collins and Bilge (2016) argue that by using a similar framework and conceptualizations, other women of colour, including Latinas, Indigenous women, and Asian-American women, have made important contributions to the literature on intersectionality. However, the literature on intersectionality incorporating violence against women is scant in the global South literature. No research has been conducted yet in Bangladesh examining how different forms of social identities such as gender, class, religion, culture, age, marriage, and other identities intersect with each other to determine the everyday experiences of women in the public places of Bangladesh and this research aims to address that gap.

As a theoretical concept, Intersectionality was developed in the 1980s by Black feminist researchers as a critique of white feminism. The whole concept behind Black feminism arose from the frustration that Black women's interest was not represented in either the Black Movement or the Women's Movement in the United States. Therefore, according to the Black feminists, movements led by Black men were sexist, while the Feminist movements led by white women were racist. They argued that Black women's oppression was not similar to that of white women, and generalising women's experiences in a 'one size fits all' approach neglected the varied forms of oppression that women have to go through. Accordingly, Black women were forced to fight against classism, racism, and sexism with the focus on improving the predicament of all Black people and all women (hooks, 1981). In her

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renowned work "Ain't I a Woman", bell hooks (1981, p.7) argued that no other group in America had their identity "socialized out of existence" in the way that Black women had. As she explained further:

We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from Black men, or as a present part of the larger group 'women' in this culture" (hooks, 1981: p. 7).

Patricia Hill-Collins' work (1990) also focuses on the experiences of marginalized women. She was best known for her ideas of intersectionality and the matrix of domination. Collins (2000, p. 299) defined intersectionality as an "analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization, which shape Black women's experiences and, in turn, are shaped by Black women". Collins placed greater emphasis on how intersectionality creates different kinds of inequalities and how these cross-cutting influences impact the trajectory of social change and thus, Collins perceives intersectionality operating within a matrix of domination. The concept of 'matrix of domination' symbolizes the different ways that various forms of oppression such as racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism etc intersect with one another to create an overarching umbrella of domination for marginalized social groups (Collins, 1990). Moreover, the matrix of domination provides a framework for understanding how oppression is organized and manifested across various domains, that is, structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, or interpersonal and these four domains support each other to perpetuate the cycle of oppression. As a result, Black feminist theory was developed to battle against the Eurocentric masculinist views of the world and to internalise and also, to convey a positive self-defined standpoint. Collins argues that:

Afrocentric feminist thought offers two significant contributions toward furthering our understanding of the important connections among knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment. First, Black feminist thought fosters a fundamental paradigmatic shift in how we think about oppression. By embracing a paradigm of race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression, Black feminist thought reconceptualises the social relations of domination and resistance. Second, Black feminist thought addresses ongoing epistemological debates in feminist theory and in the sociology of knowledge concerning ways of assessing 'truth.' Offering subordinate groups new knowledge about their own experiences can be empowering. But revealing new ways of knowing that allow subordinate groups to define their own reality has far greater implications (Collins, 2000, p. 222).

This process of affirming the self-dignity allows the Black women to value their freedom through experiences, dialogue, care, and personal accountability and thus, it creates a space for Black women to develop conceptual tools to resist oppression. Beverley Skeggs (1997) also agreed that feminism was never universally applicable, as it was usually spoken by individuals with class or race privilege and often focused on issues that were disconnected from the daily realities of working-class women.

However, Kimberly Crenshaw is generally credited with first using the term coined the term 'intersectionality' in her famous article called 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex' in 1989. The word 'Intersectionality' defines "the various ways race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of black women's employment experiences (p. 1244)." Crenshaw (1989) explained that the struggle of Black women was twofold as they embodied two different identities: Black, in terms of race and female, in terms of gender. The concept was initially used as a way of exposing the ineffectiveness of the law in employment discrimination cases and to discuss black women's unique position in anti-discrimination law (1989). In terms of employment law, Crenshaw (1989) pointed out that Black men could challenge discrimination due to their race and white women could challenge discrimination due to their gender, however, Black women could not build up either argument. For Black women, their identity and discrimination intersected at the point of gender and race, and the law did not recognise these experiences of discrimination. Similarly, in terms of sex

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discrimination cases, women who were privileged due to their white race and upper-class identities received the focus and recognition from the law, however, Black women and their struggles and discrimination were again overlooked (Crenshaw, 1989). She noted that ‘...dominant conceptions of discrimination condition us to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis’ (1989, p. 57). The law used a single-axis framework in order to compartmentalise experience and discrimination, concentrating on either race or gender. However, Crenshaw suggests that it is absolutely mandatory to adopt a multiple-axis or intersectional approach because Black women were suffering from race and gender discrimination.

It is clear now that even though Crenshaw developed the term ‘intersectionality’ in 1989, her arguments for the recognition of multiple identities of Black women were already well established within Black feminism in the United States (Cooper, 2016). Feminists such as hooks (1981), Davis (1981) and Collins (1986) had long emphasised the need to analyse intersections between race, class, and gender and maintained that failure to do so disadvantages Black women in various ways, including the risk of forgetting the glorious history of their intellectual work and political activism.

In Great Britain, Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) contributed to the literature on intersectionality with an important analytical contribution. They argued that oppression along one axis of identity, such as gender, is interlinked with other social divisions, such as race and class. They explained that one aspect of identity is relationally shaped by others and helps to account for differences (Yuval-Davis, 2006). For example, the intersection of gender and age indicates the fact that there is a vast difference between how women’s femininity is constructed when they are in their twenties and when they are in their sixties. In another study, Newman and Williams (1995) analysed the relationship between race, gender, and class. They noted that these three components are separate but interconnected and that there are numerous forms of identity, differences, and inequality whose significance varies over time.

Nevertheless, when applied to the issue of violence against women, intersectional analysis reveals the inseparability and co-construction of systems of oppression such as racism, sexism, and colonialism. Crenshaw (1991) explained how Black women’s experiences of violence occur at the intersections of race and gender and are disguised within single-issue activism, namely anti-racism and white feminism. She argues that depicting rape as a function of patriarchy ignores the ways in which it may act as a “weapon of racial terror” (Crenshaw, 1989; p. 158). As she explains, “when Black women were raped by white males, they were being raped not as women generally, but as Black women specifically: their femaleness made them sexually vulnerable to racist domination, while their Blackness effectively denied them any protection” (Crenshaw, 1989; p.158-9). Specifically, Crenshaw (1991) further argues that there are certain racist stereotypes at play in society which portray black women as inherently promiscuous and ‘un-rapeable’. Such perceptions function as rape myths that undermine their credibility when reporting crimes of sexual violence and requiring institutional support. Likewise, Beth Richie (2012) argues that in terms of sexual violence cases, if the notion of patriarchy is highlighted only, mainstream feminism not only fails to acknowledge the intersection of all the other systems of oppression, but it also creates a ‘portrait’ of an ‘ideal’ survivor who is a white, middle-class, heterosexual, cisgender woman. As a result, Black women who are victims of sexual violence do not fall into this ‘ideal’ survivor category and are often “blamed, stigmatized or, worse, criminalized because of their abuse” (Richie, 2012; p. 23-4). In light of this, it can be concluded that intersectionality can highlight the important idea that women’s experiences of violence, as well as their level of vulnerability, can differ based on their social locations and colonial history too.

Doing intersectional analysis is widely recognized as a complex endeavour as it involves navigating numerous conceptual and methodological challenges (McCall 2005; Davis 2014). McCall (2005) conceptualised three different approaches to study intersectionality. The first approach,

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anticategorical complexity aims to deconstruct categorical divisions. The second, intercategory complexity, focuses on addressing inequalities within society. However, the most effective approach is the third: intracategorical difference which allows for a nuanced understanding of the differences within different identity groups. As pointed out by Crenshaw (1995), identity politics can sometimes ignore or conflate intra-group differences, leading to further conflicts. Intracategorical complexity seeks to emphasize the diversity of women's experiences, even amongst women who share certain aspects of their identity. By examining different identity categories and exploring the less acknowledged areas where these categories intersect, Intracategorical complexity aims to “reveal the complexity of lived experiences within such groups (McCall, 2005, p. 1774).” One of the prime focuses of this research is to view street harassment through the lens of intersectionality and explore how the differences in social identities can contribute to understanding not only the experiences of harassment itself but also women’s agency, coping and support mechanisms. By analysing the everyday experiences and perceptions of women of urban Dhaka from an intersectional perspective, this research aims to address the gap in the existing literature and provide a more nuanced understanding of structural power relations rooted in Bangladeshi urban spaces.

### 2.10 CONCLUSION

During the past few decades, numerous researchers and activists have written about the issue of harassment of women by men in public places, however, different terminologies were used, sometimes even by the same author in different studies. This chapter has argued that the apparent dearth of literature on the topic is, in fact, due to the lack of consensus on a consistent term and has also explored different definitions of street harassment containing the practices as well as the identified harmful behaviours.

Fear of crime has been a particular focus of criminology researchers in America and Great Britain since the late seventies, and as a result, a rapidly expanding literature has developed on the topic. The majority of this fear of crime research has focused on its relationship with property crime or environment design, but there is a major gap in the literature when investigating the relationship between fear of crime and street harassment. The existing literature is scant in order to understand the dominant role fear plays in the coping mechanisms of women while navigating public spaces. The aim of my research is, therefore, to draw together the experiences and insights of the women in order to gain a greater understanding of how street harassment works as a weapon of oppression and social control. The research examines women’s experiences and perceptions of street harassment in the public places of Dhaka, Bangladesh and, in turn, shows how fear of men’s violence socially controls almost every aspect of Bangladeshi women’s lives. Moreover, in order to understand how fear of crime and street harassment operates and affects differently in different women, the use of intersectional analysis is valuable. No other research in the global south has incorporated intersectionality and street harassment to date. This research will explore the multiple inequalities experienced by women while navigating the public spaces of Bangladesh and how these gender-based inequalities intersect with those produced by the patriarchal societal influences of gendered attitudes, class, religion, age, and marriage. By utilizing intersectionality, this thesis will reaffirm the concept that every woman’s experience and perception are unique and, thus, confront the hegemony of western feminist thought. The qualitative nature of the thesis sheds light on how important it is to give voice to women on issues that affect them directly and intimately by focusing on their own experiences with their varied socio-cultural and economic contexts.

On the topic of street harassment in Bangladesh, there is a big gap in the literature incorporating fear of crime and intersectionality. Having identified the gaps in the literature, this research will contribute to better understand the role of fear of crime in women’s everyday lives in the public places of

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Bangladesh and how women's multiple social identities foster multiple inequalities. Before engaging in that, the next chapter will carry on the discussion, focused on women's status and the topic of street harassment in Bangladesh, as well as the theoretical concepts specific to the Bangladeshi context.

### CHAPTER THREE

## Street Harassment in Bangladesh: Setting the Context

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the context of this research by providing a background of Bangladesh. This is important because a contextual background can provide valuable understanding for the sample of the research, research methodologies and the interpretation of the findings. The first part of this chapter provides contextualisation in the form of geographical information about Bangladesh and gives some current statistics about the country in general and women in particular. This information can assist in understanding the Bangladeshi approach to gender equality and women's current position in the present society. At the same time, the brief overview of Bangladeshi history can also give an idea about gendered roles in Bangladeshi tradition. Once the national context has been established, the second part of the chapter reviews the literature on street harassment in Bangladesh. It develops some of the arguments already discussed in chapter two and specifically focuses on the difficulties with naming the problem of street harassment that is unique to Bangladesh and South Asia in the broader sense. The purpose here is to establish the value of these arguments to my specific study by presenting the knowledge and ideas that have already been established on topic. To help with this, this section also discusses the nature, extent, and consequences of street harassment as studied by most of the Bangladeshi scholars. The third section of this chapter explores specific contextual detail on the patriarchal nature of the society and discusses Bangladeshi patriarchy, social stratification in Bangladesh and the purdah system and how all of these together shape women's roles in the public and private spheres. Investigating the culture of Bangladeshi society is essential to properly understand the image and status of women in the current Bangladeshi society. It is also important to remember the contextual background of Bangladesh and the status of Bangladeshi women because street harassment is primarily gender-based violence and the empirical findings of this research make a valuable connection between this form of violence and patriarchal gender norms as well as the social structure of Bangladesh.

### 3.1 OVERVIEW OF BANGLADESH

This study is focused on Bangladesh. Historically, Bangladesh has been part of the Indian sub-continent and was under British rule until the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. After partition, the country became part of Pakistan, known as East Pakistan. In 1971, Bangladesh gained independence from Pakistan after a nine-month-long liberation war that caused three million dead, ten million displaced to India and 200,000 victims of sexual violence (Mookherjee, 2006).

Geographically, Bangladesh is located in the north-eastern part of South Asia, covering an area of 147,570 square kilometres. The country is surrounded by India on three sides, west, north, and east, except for a short section on the very southeast where it borders Myanmar. The country has an estimated population of 169.8 million (PRB, 2020), which implies more than 1,100 people live per square kilometre, and thus it becomes one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Bangladesh is well known for the ethnic homogeneity of its population because over 98 per cent of the people speak Bangla, the national language. However, there are more than 49 ethnic communities and the Bihari community (non-Bangladeshi, stranded Pakistani or Urdu-speaking community) who consist of roughly 2 per cent of the total population and speak in their own ethnic languages (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2013b). In terms of religion, the majority of the population is Muslim,

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who accounts for nearly 88.3% of the population, and other religious communities consist of 10.5% Hindu, 0.6% Buddhist and 0.3% Christian (Population Statistics, 2004). Figure 2 shows the geography of the researched country, Bangladesh.



Figure 2 – Bangladesh in the World map. Source<sup>1</sup>

Bangladesh is poor, relatively speaking. It is ranked 133 out of 189 countries according to the Human Development Index prepared by UNDP in 2019 (UNDP, 2019) and therefore the country can be considered one of the poorest countries in the world. The 2019 figures represent an advance on the 2005 figures, where Bangladesh ranked 140 out of 177 countries in 2005 (UNDP, 2013). Recent developments may, therefore, be said to mark progress, with poverty declining but at an extremely slow pace.

The present study is limited to Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, which is one of the fastest growing and most populated megacities of the world (BBS, 2016). The city has an area of 360 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of over 23 million (BBS, 2016). Dhaka has only 1% of the total land area of Bangladesh, which accommodates 35% per cent of the total urban population and 12% of the total population (BBS, 2017). The overpopulation of the city is mainly due to the higher employment opportunities compared to the other cities of the country. Large concentrations of administrative, industrial, educational, and cultural activities can be observed in the city. Dhaka is a prominent destination for rural migrants, but also it attracts thousands of daily commuters and 'circular' migrants

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.worldatlas.com/maps/bangladesh#locationSection>

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from neighbouring rural districts too (Hossain, 2004). Although there is a high birth rate in the country and Dhaka city too, the population growth of Dhaka is not only due to the birth rate but also because of the migration from the other parts of the country (The Louis Berger Group and Bangladesh Consultant Ltd, 2004). All the characteristics of a fast-growing megacity can be observed in Dhaka with dense infrastructures, diversified income sources of the population, dependence on non-polluting modes of transport (such as walking), streets with poor driving surfaces, heavy traffic congestion, uncoordinated institutional structure, and lack of legal and administrative capacity to enforce law and order (Transportation Research Board, 1996).

My focus is women, and although 49 per cent of the total population of Bangladesh are women (Population Census, 2009), their role and importance in the economic and social development of the country have often been ignored. Some researchers (Islam and Sultana, 2006; Zaman, 1999, Chowdhury, 2009) argued that Bangladeshi society and culture are permeated with patriarchal values and norms of female subordination, subjugation, and segregation where they are deprived of all opportunities from birth. As explained by Islam and Sultana (2006):

Women are vulnerable in every sector in Bangladesh. They also lack access to justice on human rights because of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, and social and economic class distribution. In a word, women are discriminated against from home to parliament in Bangladesh (Islam and Sultana, 2006, p. 56).

However, it needs to be added here that the role and position of women have been changing significantly during the last two decades. Women have been participating on a greater scale in the economic sectors of Bangladesh. In the informal sector, the majority of rural women are involved in activities such as poultry rearing, agriculture, horticulture, cane and bamboo work, silk spinning, garment making, fish-net making, handicrafts, and other home production (Baden et al., 1994). While in the formal sector, women are increasingly visible in professions such as teachers, lawyers, journalists, government, and non-government employees etc. and more notably, a large number of women work in the ready-made garment (RMG) industry where women make up almost 80 per cent of the 4 million workforces (that is, 3.2 million workers) that currently brings in approximately 70 per cent of the country's foreign currency earnings (Matsuura and Teng, 2020). Women's increasing involvement in economic activities is not only helping their own families to gain financial stability but also contributing to the transformation of the traditional values and gender roles of Bangladeshi women.

At the same time, economic progress has not been matched in the realm of gender, where violence against women in Bangladesh is a common yet persistent burning issue, and deep-rooted patriarchal social norms are to blame again (Hossain, 2016). One important example of this is the abuse of women in the home. According to a survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2015), over 70 per cent of married women in Bangladesh have faced some form of intimate partner abuse, where half of them were physically assaulted. According to the same report, the majority of the participants, however, said they never disclosed the assaults to anyone, and fewer than 3 per cent took any legal action. Apart from domestic violence, women in Bangladesh are also subjected to many other forms of gender-based violence, including rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and street harassment.

This chapter will now discuss the concepts of patriarchy, gender roles, and purdah in the Bangladeshi context in order to understand how these concepts control women's lives as a whole and, at the same time, contribute for the pervasiveness of street harassment. We will see in the subsequent chapters how the risk and fear of street harassment restrict women's access to public spaces and increase women's dependency on men, which in turn, reinforces men's patriarchal control of women and

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further disempower women. Moreover, the findings of this thesis will also show that apart from being a part of their religiosity, a big part of the participants of this thesis adopted purdah and other forms of modest clothing and self-regulate their movement outside the home in public places in order to reduce or eliminate their risk of being victims of street harassment and hence, street harassment can be seen as men's attempt to terrorise women and push them back to the private spaces of home, which according to the patriarchal notions of Bangladesh is the ideal space for women (Kabeer, 1988).

### 3.2 UNDERSTANDING BANGLADESHI PATRIARCHY

Before the findings from the fieldwork are discussed, it is necessary to understand how patriarchy organises women's lives in Bangladesh. Throughout the findings chapters of this thesis, we will explore how different forms of street harassment can also be the expression of men's dominance over women as well as their entitlement in public spaces; how women's coping mechanisms are mostly constructed keeping in mind the patriarchal values of the family and the society like dressing up in a certain way, behaving in public in certain ways, avoiding public spaces in certain times and so forth. I believe that understanding the local patriarchal context in the milieu of street harassment is essential to recognise the discriminatory and oppressive treatment of women in Bangladeshi society. Patriarchy refers to the manifestation and institutionalization of male domination over women and children in the family and the extension of male domination over women in society. The concept has been defined in many different ways by different scholars. Walby (1989, p. 214) defines patriarchy as - "A system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women."

Walby (1989) places importance on explaining patriarchy as a social structure or system that exaggerates the biological determinism or differences between men and women and supports the notion that men should always be in dominant and masculine roles, whereas women should hold subordinate and feminine roles. Walby (1989) further conceptualises patriarchy as consisting of six structures: household work, paid work, patriarchal state, male violence, sexuality, and patriarchal cultural practices. Walby (1989) also specified two main forms of patriarchy: private and public. Private patriarchy is based on household production where the men in the family control and oppress women, whereas, in public patriarchy, the oppression takes place in public, for example, by the state or in the workplace. The gendered division of space established and facilitated by patriarchy has led to the confinement of women in the private spaces of the household, and men gained a monopolisation of the public spaces.

Bangladesh belongs to what has been defined as 'classic patriarchy' (Kandiyoti, 1988), which characterised the institutionalisation of extremely restrictive sets of behaviours for women. Cain et al. (1979, p. 406) defined patriarchy in Bangladesh as:

A set of social relations with a material base that enables men to dominate women. In Bangladesh, patriarchy describes a distribution of power and resources within families such that men maintain power and control of resources, and women are powerless and dependent on men. The material base of patriarchy is men's control of property, income, and women's labour.

Contrary to the 'Classic patriarchy' or traditional patriarchy is 'Neopatriarchy,' where the domination and subjugation are operated through women, but men still have the supreme authority at the household level (Sharabi, 1988). In other words, in neopatriarchal family system, some women (mostly elders) reproduce and perpetuate patriarchal values in order to suppress other women within the family and to preserve their power and control within the household. In Bangladesh, however, the lives of women have been shaped by the system of traditional patriarchy that disadvantaged girls since

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birth, limited their mobility outside home, controlled the opportunities for economic independence while also undervalued their labour contributions and sanctioned or even normalised gender-based violence as a way of expressing women's subordination and social disapproval (Feldman, 2001). Thanvi (1996) noted that Bangladeshi girls are considered liabilities who need to be taken care of until marriage, and boys are regarded as assets who will look after their parents in their old age. With these different ideas in mind, a male and a female child are treated differently since birth, where the male child is welcomed into the world by reciting azan (call for Islamic prayer), whereas the female child is not greeted the same way. Furthermore, the female child is regularly deprived within the family in terms of food and other necessities like the opportunity to receive a formal education, and therefore, becomes unable to enhance their capabilities and join the paid labour force on similar terms to males (Zaman, 1999). However, it needs to be remembered that not all Bangladeshi women experience patriarchal relations exactly the same way; rather, their lived experiences differ depending on their varied social identities like social classes, location, religion, education etc. As argued in chapter two, I have contextualised the core concepts of Intersectionality, which suggest that all aspects of a person's identity need to be considered in order to accurately contemplate how "the social world is constructed" (Crenshaw, 1991; p.1245). Thus, in chapter 7 of this thesis, we will explore the nexus between patriarchy and women's varying identities like class, religion, and education and how the nexus operates within women's everyday experiences of street harassment. Using an intersectional approach, I will show that women in Dhaka experiencing street harassment are not marginalised by a single dominant structure, but they are being discriminated against and disadvantaged on multiple platforms.

Religion constitutes a critical component of Bangladeshi identity, and as a majority Muslim-populated country, Islam plays an important role in shaping the cultural and political norms of the mass of Bangladeshi population. However, Muslim values and cultures in Bangladesh are much different to that of the ones that prevail in other Muslim countries and even Pakistan (of which it was once part). This is because the Bangladeshi culture itself is a unique mixture of Muslim religious beliefs, medieval Sufism as well as many Hindu-Buddhist religious practices (Feldman, 1992:119). For example, many of the religious and cultural beliefs regarding the seasons, land, sexuality, marriage, childbirth, kinship, fate, ghosts, demons, and holy men are shared by both Muslims and Hindus alike and followed together as traditional Bengali beliefs (Kabeer, 1988). Moreover, Bangladeshi culture of songs, art, literature, cinema, language, apparel, and diet has also shared certain similarities with the Hindu culture of West Bengal, India (Kabeer, 1988). Therefore, it is hard to clearly define which aspects and practices of the Bangladeshi culture are purely Bengali, which are Islamic, and which are products of Hindu influence. In the same vein, when analysing women's subordination, gendered spaces and the relation between men and women in Bangladesh, influences of the pre-Islamic era, Hindu cultures in general and North Indian cultures need to be pointed out too, along with the ideology and practices of Islam.

Religion has been used as a tool by Bangladeshi men in order to glorify male supremacy, spread misogyny and uphold the subjugation of women. In traditional Bangladeshi society, gender inequality and subordination of women prevail at all levels, and this is because Islam is misinterpreted by Bangladeshi men and a section of little-learned religious leaders or 'mulla' (Hashmi, 2000). Islam, however, itself does not approve of the oppressive and exploitative behaviours and attitudes towards women and condemns such people that do. Badawi (1995) stated the view of Prophet Muhammad in this respect:

Whosoever has a daughter, and he does not bury her alive, does not insult her, and does not favour his son over her, Allah will enter him into paradise. Whosoever supports two daughters till they mature, he and I will come in the Day of Judgment as this (and he pointed with his two fingers held together). (Badawi, 1995, p. 15)

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Receiving an education is considered not only a right in Islam but also a responsibility for both male and female Muslims alike (Badawi, 1995, p. 15). However, by misinterpreting Islam, a false ideology has been created in society that Islam does not approve of female education and condemns women's employment. As we shall see in chapter seven, Bangladeshi women face different sorts of barriers in their daily lives regarding their free movement, dressing style and behaviour management and these types of moral policing in the name of religion and culture influence the prevalence of gender-based violence like street harassment.

Since the post-independence period of 1971, Bangladeshi women have been joining the labour force in great numbers (Feldman, 1992). There has been a massive influx of women workers in different sectors in the last two decades, and women have become more visible in the public areas of streets, shopping centres, and public transport. While poor and landless women have been working in many low-paying jobs for a long time, a new form of better-paying urban employment has become available to this class of women from the early eighties, which is export-oriented garment industry jobs. The vast majority of this workforce is composed of young single women who are traditionally subjected to the most severe forms of social control (Kabeer, 1988). For the sake of working in the garment industry, a majority of these young women migrated from the countryside on their own, and started living in makeshift arrangements, often sharing rooms or beds in the absence of any type of male guardianship (Kabeer, 1988). With the increase in women's labour force participation, today's ready-made garment industry has become the highest contributor to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and hence, an important feature of the country's economic development (Kabir et al., 2018). However, patriarchal values still prevail in society despite these economic advances for young women, and it has created a more complex attitude towards women.

Specifically, the long-standing patriarchal behaviour of Bangladeshi men did not change appropriately to appreciate the involvement of women in the labour force. Women may be taking up paid employment opportunities and contributing to bringing changes in traditional gender attitudes, but they are still oppressed in the family without having any significant control over their own earnings (Chowdhury, 2010; Hussein, 2022). In the patriarchal society of Bangladesh, husbands consider their wives as property, and therefore a wife's earnings are controlled by the husband and spent on the in-law's family, whereas the wife's own parents do not get any share (Chowdhury, 2010). Therefore, even with education and paid employment, Bangladeshi women have managed to gain only limited freedom from the knots of patriarchy. They are still unable to take care of their parents by controlling their own income and hence, still considered liabilities in their parental home. The issue of private patriarchy, where men dominate and oppress women, takes on a different significance in public patriarchy, where the oppression, dominance and inequality are articulated to the larger social, political, and economic institutions of the society, and right at that intersection, the topic of street harassment becomes even more relevant and crucial. At this point, the chapter will now continue to discuss patriarchy with regard to the class system of Bangladeshi society to locate how women from varying classes are exposed to different forms of patriarchy.

### 3.3 SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN BANGLADESH

Although the research available on Bangladeshi women's class struggle is scant and barely reflects the recent changes in their socio-economic situation, this thesis will argue that women from different economic classes are still subject to different types and degrees of patriarchal control. Labelling people in specific class terms is an extremely complex and controversial topic in Bangladesh, and only a handful of key scholarly research can be cited in this respect. Lewis (2011), for example, identified the issue of researching the class system in Bangladesh by explaining the pre-independence era when

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a national bourgeoisie was not allowed to emerge by the Pakistani rulers and only a small number of Pakistani elite families were controlling the industries that existed in the country. Following the decades after its independence in 1971, Bangladesh went through a lot of political, sociocultural, and economic transformation and three class patterns were identified by Lewis (2011): the elite, the middle class, and the poor who own little or no agricultural land.

The elite class was further divided into two groups. One was the traditional ruling 'national' elite who were mainly the urban Calcutta-based cosmopolitan class, and the other was a new elite class who were drawn from the Bengali-speaking, provincial, lower-middle-class families which Jahan (1972) termed as 'vernacular elite'. The well-educated 'vernacular elite' class had been influential throughout the 1960s and 1970s and had a strong international connection as well as good control over the bureaucracy, the universities, and older businesses. This class has further broadened its boundaries after the independence in 1971 and includes party leaders and political activists, political appointees, and a few Bengali army officers who had held ranks in the Pakistan armed forces.

Since the 1990s, a new urban middle class has emerged who had its power base within the businesses of construction, pharmaceuticals, and other industries. This relatively less well-educated, business-oriented, and more pragmatic middle-class group has emerged as a central key element in the power structure of the country after independence. Lastly, the poor social class is comprised of the land-based peasant class, leased farmers who work one another's land and the large group of urban 'floating' workers (for example, day labourers, rickshaw pullers and ready-made garment industry workers) who started migrating to the cities from the other parts of the country since the 1980s. As mentioned in the earlier part of this chapter, a majority of the ready-made garment workers are women who have migrated from the countryside as a result of rapid urbanisation and industrialization. In a more recent work on stratification in Bangladesh, White (2012: 1433) made a 'rough economic categorisation' and identified three social class categories: rich, middle, and poor.

It is important to understand these categorisations because the intention was to use them to explore how class organised participants' experiences (White, 2012, p. 1433), but this proved to be problematic. During the interviews with the participants, I realised that they found it complex to position themselves within a specific class boundary. For example, there were two participants who were known to belong to upper-class families, but during the interviews they identified themselves as middle class instead. Again, few of the participants identified themselves as middle class, but while discussing their lifestyles, they seemed to have struggled to strictly maintain any specific class boundary and often shifted to the lower-middle class spectrum by mentioning that they struggled to afford their daily travel costs and education costs or the fact that they had to continue their part-time jobs due to the financial difficulties of the families even if the return home time was late and the journey to home did not feel safe. Therefore, to simplify this complex social status of Bangladeshi women, I will refer to 'upper class' women as those who belong to well-off urban families with higher education. I will use 'middle-class' to indicate women in families who possess less wealth than the upper class, but who could be highly educated or have completed a college education. My reference to the 'poor class' will indicate those from poor families, who might have attended primary school or cannot read or write but are involved in various low-paid jobs to manage and contribute to their household income. This discussion on class division is crucial to understand how women's access to public spaces is influenced and organised by their different social classes. Hence, this section works as a useful preface to understanding the discussion on intersectionality in chapter seven, where women's varying class status influence their varying experiences of street harassment.

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Central to understanding gender relations in a patriarchal society like Bangladesh is the segregation of spaces between private and public, which defines and limits women's economic autonomy and social power. In economic terms, segregation of space also denotes a division of labour where men are associated with the activities carried out in the public spaces and women are supposed to perform the reproduction and household activities within the homestead (Kabeer, 1997; Kibria, 1995). The sexual division of labour that prevails in Bangladesh has not only restricted women's access to mainstream employment opportunities but, at the same time, their participation and contribution to household activities and in household-based small-scale industries remain socially invisible (Kabeer, 1988). Due to such a patriarchal structure in Bangladeshi society, different classes of households are generally identified on the basis of men's labour and income. However, at this point, I would also like to add here that during the last couple of decades, there has been a noticeable presence of women in the political sector, a rise in educational attainment and increased visibility in different sectors of the labour force (Mahmud, 2003; Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004).

At present, Bangladeshi women from all classes - upper, middle, and poor – have come out of seclusion and joined the paid labour force. While for poorer families, women are being pushed into the paid labour force out of sheer economic necessity, for middle and upper-class women, the reason for women joining the wage employment is not only the economic pressure but also to ensure a higher standard of living (Sogra, 1995). Although the male-dominated Bangladeshi society has loosened its tight grip on women out of necessity, the domination and biases men have against women are still very much present. Throughout chapters five and six, while discussing different forms of harassment, coping mechanisms, and support mechanisms, men's domination, oppression, and control of women become visible.

To this end, one of the most prominent negative implications of joining the labour force has been the increased exposure to the risk of violence – both at the workplace and in the streets (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000). Research suggests that there might be a small number of positive changes in women's lives due to their involvement in waged employment, for example, improved bargaining position within the household (Kabeer, 1997), increased access to information and support networks (Amin et al., 1997), and increased feelings of self-worth (Paul-Majumder and Begum, 2000). However, women from different social classes experience these apparent positive changes differently in terms of controlling and accessing their own income, egalitarian gender relations within the household as well as improvement in their social status. Empirical analysis in the subsequent chapters will reveal that while women from rich and middle-class families are pursuing higher education and are involved in paid employment, they still require permission from their families for their own free movement. On the other hand, women from poor families who are the sole or partial breadwinners of their families are more concerned about the perceptions of their neighbours and society regarding their type of work and time of their mobility, for example, such as the fear of being labelled as prostitutes.

While women from better-off families are able to find or redefine employment opportunities consistent with their status, this situation is unlikely for poorer women. In research conducted by Khan (1992), it was revealed that despite contributions to the family, the socio-economic status of poor women is degraded because the kind of employment they hold is regarded as conveying low social prestige (Khan, 1992). In her book, Kabeer (2002, p.382) quoted a member of the UNITE<sup>2</sup> - "there's a

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<sup>2</sup> UNITE, the American garment workers union and the National Labour Committee

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saying among the girls in the slums of Bangladesh: if you are lucky, you'll be a prostitute- if you're unlucky, you'll be a garment worker". However, the garment workers are proud at being able to contribute to their families. Jobs in garment factories were regarded as well-paid compared to the other jobs available to uneducated young girls and women, and therefore, many were willing to offer a bribe in exchange for securing such a job (Islam, 2005). Moreover, even the parents of the young girls preferred their daughters to join garment factories where they think girls are less likely to be sexually harassed compared to the other jobs open to girls (Delap, 1998). However, as we shall see from the fieldwork data, women from different classes, regardless of their employment and educational status, encounter harassment in public spaces, albeit the types of harassment and their coping strategies may vary according to their class positions.

### 3.4 UNDERSTANDING PURDAH IN THE CONTEXT OF BANGLADESH

One of the most complex issues organising patriarchal relations in Bangladesh is the purdah system, since it has implications for gender roles, the division of labour, educational attainment, and women's employment. Engaging into a complete and detailed discussion about the interpretation and debates regarding purdah or veiling is beyond the range of this thesis, however it is important to understand the religious and cultural meanings of purdah in the context of Bangladesh because the empirical analysis in chapter five, six and seven shows that the issue of purdah and street harassment are closely associated. For example, some of the participants explained that women who wear veils or hijab are generally considered to be the 'good girl' or they belong to a 'good family' and hence, are not supposed to be harassed on the streets by strangers. This reasoning also leads many families to direct their daughters to dress in a certain way, for example, wearing a hijab or modest traditional clothing. However, in chapter five, we shall see that some of the participants also shared that even young women wearing the hijab are frequently harassed on the streets and therefore, even though Purdah is socially considered to be a safeguard against street harassment, it does not prove to be so in real life. Nevertheless, while an understanding of the purdah system is important, it is equally crucial not to over-generalise or to hold a simplistic view of the system. This is because Bangladeshi women are not a monolithic group whose actions, behaviour and situation are uniformly guided by cultural traditions, such as purdah. Rather, purdah is observed in diverse ways and has different implications at different hierarchical levels of society.

The literal meaning of 'purdah' refers to veiling and researchers have used these two terms sometimes interchangeably and sometimes separately. Siddiqi (2000), for example, argues that purdah refers to the system of ensuring the segregation of men and women using the Islamic way of dressing for a woman once she reaches puberty. Veiling, on the other hand, commonly stands for the use of a headscarf or 'burqa'/'abaya' to carry the visual understanding of modesty and Islamic identity (Mernissi, 1991a). However, from the Islamic point of view, purdah is the Quranic prescription of how both men and women are expected to behave with each other while in public and private places. Contrary to popular belief that only women should take full responsibility for covering up and maintaining segregation under purdah, it is clearly dictated in the Quran that men should lower their gaze first in front of women they are not related to by blood or not married to, and also to guard their private parts (Boulanour, 2006). In terms of the different styles of veiling that are found all over the world, Slininger (2014) explained with an illustration (figure 3). According to her, the most common form of veiling among Muslim women is the hijab which is a square scarf that covers the head and neck but leaves the face open. The most concealing form of veiling is the burqa which covers the whole face and body down to the feet, leaving a mesh screen over the eyes. Niqab is similar form of veiling as a burqa that covers the whole body along with the face but leaves an opening for the eye.

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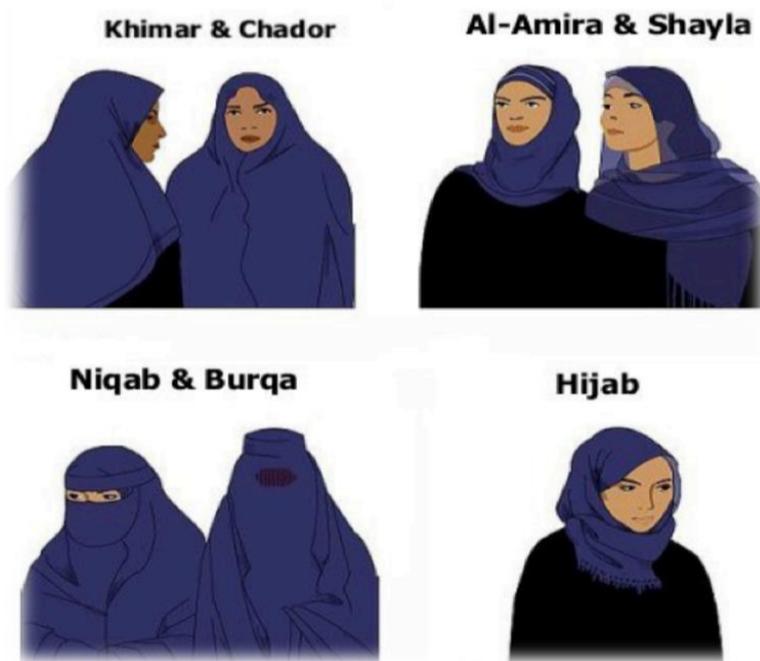


Figure 3: Slininger (2014)

Khimar or Chador also refers to one form of headscarf that covers the upper body and head whereas al-amira is a modern form of khimar. Shayla style, as mentioned in Slininger (2014), is a long rectangular scarf that is wrapped around the head. It is important to understand that these different types of veiling are followed by women from different parts of the world including Bangladesh, possibly in different terms sometimes, and even within the same region, women can practice different types of veiling depending on the context, social class, affordability, and choice, of course.

The concept of purdah and women's attire are core parts in both chapter six and chapter seven of this thesis, where I discuss the use and purpose of the veil and traditional Bangladeshi clothing style as safety behaviours in order to manage street harassment. The traditional clothing for Bangladeshi women is the 'sari' (a 6-yard-long piece of fabric), and the end of the fabric ('achol') is used to cover the heads in order to indicate decency (Hussain, 2010). Since independence, women have been increasingly wearing 'salwar kameez', which comprised of a long top, a pair of trousers and a long rectangular shaped scarf ('orna') to cover the breasts and /or heads to maintain decency (Hussain, 2018). In Bangladesh, western wear refers to jeans or trousers paired with t-shirts or shirts worn by young women, mostly students and young professionals (Rozario, 2006). In her study, Rozario (2006) mentioned that veiling is a more common attire among poor urban women and very limitedly among middle-class women in Bangladesh. However, my fieldwork data suggests an important change has taken place, in that the hijab or veiling has become a very popular form of clothing among women from all classes and all professions. Most of the participants of this research explained this popularity due to the increase in religiosity, while some also mentioned following the latest trend and fashion. Besides wearing an abaya or 'burqa' with or without a niqab, many women wear an additional robe or apron on top of their everyday wear of 'sari' or 'salwar kameez' along with a headscarf to cover the hair and neck. Using only an additional big scarf or 'chador' / scarf to cover the upper parts of the body along with the hair or using an additional small headscarf or, as popularly known, 'hijab' has become a common form of clothing style for Bangladeshi women. Similar to other forms of clothing, women's

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veils are being modernised in different styles with tighter or looser fitting, ornamental designs, or a range of colours. The common forms of veiling, as followed by Bangladeshi women, are illustrated in the below picture (figure 4).



**Figure 4: The common forms of veiling- Illustrated by the researcher**

Western clothing for women has become very common during the past few years even though they are still considered overtly sexual and not compatible with Bangladeshi culture, a theme that repeatedly came up during the fieldwork. Therefore, a significant social change has definitely taken place in Bangladeshi society in recent times, which has not been explored from the viewpoint of social and gender studies in the academic literature yet. Important for this thesis is that the data reveals that women have experienced street harassment in the public places of Dhaka city while wearing the hijab and definitely while not wearing it. At the same time, women faced harassment for not wearing the hijab/abaya the right way and also, in many cases, for not wearing religious clothing at all. Therefore, the limited evidence available on these issues exposes a gap in the literature. My thesis addresses this gap by looking at the relationship between women’s attire and veiling with street harassment and how the other identities of women, like religion, class and marital status, can work as contributing factors in the harassing experiences.

The fundamental principles of Purdah are sexual segregation, purity, shame, and honour which regulate women’s modesty, mobility and restrict their interaction with unrelated men (Rozario, 2006). These normative principles are derived more from the patriarchal culture of Bangladesh and less so from the Islamic institution (Rozario, 2006). Purdah suggests that the idea of female modesty is inextricably linked with family background, that is, whether she is from a ‘good family’ or a ‘bad family’ (Ahmed, 1993). Therefore, when a woman wears the veil, she is considered to be guarding her personal and religious purity and, thus, becomes a cultural and social symbol of a ‘good woman’ obeying religious and social customs. In other words, women’s behaviour, and attire work together as a symbolic representation of family honour and pride. This is explored in both chapter six and seven while exploring that women’s behaviour, character, attire, and their style of following purdah. What we shall see is that all come under scrutiny not only from society in general but also from their

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respective families, and thus are closely linked as one of the many motivating factors of men's harassing behaviours as well as the women facing victim blaming following the harassment. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the patriarchal culture of Bangladeshi society enforced the segregation of spaces between men and women, which also facilitates the gendered division of labour. In traditional Bangladeshi society, it was accepted that purdah is a status symbol for women from wealthy families because they do not need to go outside their houses and contribute economically to the family (Kabeer, 1988). For women to work outside of their homes is considered not only a violation of purdah but, at the same time, an overt sign of poverty since only the poorest families are unable to keep their women in purdah (Amin 1997). Since the 1980s, there has been increasing economic participation of women, but the control and surveillance of women by the family is still present in terms of controlling the time and places of physical mobility as well as income. This is explored in chapter six when the participants shared their experiences of being unable to take certain jobs due to family restrictions, having certain rules set by the family to not go out at particular times or to return home by certain times. Chapter six reveals that many of the female students were required to return home by sunset or before the 'Magrib azan' (Evening prayer call of Muslims), and this rule is commonly known as the 'sunset law.' Besides, Bangladeshi women in general, and unmarried women in particular, are expected to be escorted by a close male family member, an elderly woman or even a minor child while visiting anywhere outside the home (Zaman, 1999), and this notion was also confirmed by the participants of this research in chapter six and chapter seven.

The above discussion provides important contextual and background information regarding the complex socio-cultural and religious understanding of purdah in Bangladesh. The significance of the different forms of veiling of Bangladeshi women, its association with family status, honour, women's economic contribution and physical mobility as well as its relevance to women's experiences of street harassment will be explored in much greater detail in subsequent findings chapters of the thesis.

### 3.5 RESEARCH SPECIFIC TO STREET HARASSMENT IN BANGLADESH

Chapter two discussed the problem of conceptualising street harassment and how a lack of consensus on a particular term has created not only conceptual and categorical uncertainty, but also an apparent dearth of literature on the phenomenon. In terms of the research on street harassment in Bangladesh, there is also a problem of naming, which is unique to Bangladesh and South Asian countries and, at the same time, plays an important part in normalising and trivializing the violence. In this section, I will examine this phenomenon of inappropriate and incorrect terminology. I will also address the fact that research on street harassment in Bangladesh revolves around a few topics, namely, the nature of the violence, its prevalence and its causes which is severely inadequate given the rampant nature and gravity of the problem.

In some of the South Asian countries, including Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal, the term 'Eve-teasing' is used colloquially in order to refer to the range of practices and behaviours of harassment towards women in public spaces. The term 'Eve-teasing' seems to have emerged in India in the late 1950s and gradually entered into the everyday vocabulary of media and popular discourse, as well as the official legal vocabulary of not only India but other countries too (Misri, 2017). The term 'Eve-teasing' might have its root in the misogynistic culture and patriarchal norms of Indian society, where the word 'Eve' alludes to the Biblical story of Eve tempting Adam to stray from the path of righteousness (Misri, 2017). Apart from this, Chandra (2012) noted that the Anglo-Christian-associated term 'Eve' might also have a hint of comparing modern university and career women to the white women who were objects of, at that time, Indian revulsion, and contempt. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the theme of white female sexuality emerged excessively in upper-caste Hindu writers' writings, and one of them was Gauba (1899-1981), who wrote explosively about the

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sexual desires of White American women. In his writing, Gauba referred to white American women as 'Eve' who are driven by their sexual desire from a very young age. Whereas other writers portrayed sexually excessive pictures of a white woman at the inauguration of an Indian girls' school and described European behaviour as more shameful than the standards of native prostitutes. Hence, labelling university-educated-woman as 'Eve' was meant to create a moral panic in society about the de-Hinduisation of Indian women. Alternatively, in the local context of Bangladesh, when someone says that 'she is being Eve-teased on the way to school,' the immediate concern is about the safety of the victim and her helplessness while facing the strangers on the street, which is in contrast to the 'sexual harassment, where the person's sexuality might be acknowledged (Misri, 2017). Moreover, the word 'teasing' does not immediately imply violence and can denote behaviours or practices of light-hearted jokes. In other words, the term 'Eve-teasing' expresses a form of structural violence against women but disguised as an individualised heterosexual male behaviour and, thus, operates as a deceptive, harmless phrase to cover up a serious and possibly criminal offence.

By considering street harassment as trivial, as 'teasing,' this contributes to its marginalisation from serious debate and attention. As a result, academic research as well as legal changes to tackle the situation has not been given serious attention until recently. The problem is further complicated due to the lack of agreement on the definition and the terminology of the phenomenon when it is discussed. Since the term 'Eve-teasing' is not used outside south Asian countries, cross-cultural research on the topic is non-existent. At the same time, much of the research (Huda, 2003; Nahar et al., 2013; Ahmed et al., 2014) has been using the term 'sexual harassment' while describing the common types of street harassment behaviours or categorised certain behaviours under sexually harassing behaviours while studying the topic. As such, labelling the behaviours of street harassment as 'sexual harassment' caused further complications in creating an organised body of literature on this topic. On the other hand, the academic researchers who persistently used the term 'Eve-teasing' instead of the more commonly used term 'sexual harassment', did it as a way of lightening the research and communication problem. In most South Asian countries, a public discussion on anything with a prefix of 'sex' is largely taboo and any discussion, research or investigation relating to sexual harassment becomes incredibly difficult and sensitive (Leach & Sitaram, 2007). It is in response to this that researchers have framed their questions in terms of experiences of 'Eve-teasing' rather than sexual harassment.

Research on street harassment in Bangladesh is still nascent compared to the research conducted in the west. The majority of the research focused on a limited number of issues such as its nature, prevalence and causes, and the number of participants or if the target group were school going teenage girls, and the perpetrators young boys (Nahar et al., 2013; Sohel et al., 2014). The experiences of women from different age ranges, demographics and social classes have thus largely been ignored. It is important to note here that a wide range of research areas and issues pertinent to street harassment in the context of Bangladesh are still left unexplored. At this stage, I will highlight some of the research that examined the prevalence of street harassment in Bangladesh and the legal provisions in order to address the problem, as well as highlight the research gap on this topic. By doing this, I am also pinpointing the fact that my research is presenting a more holistic view of street harassment in Bangladesh by examining how gender intersects with other forms of social identities like class, religion, marital status, and age and affects women's safety and accessibility in the public spaces.

Faruq (2001) and Nahar et al. (2013) argue that street harassment was not a severe and rampant problem in Bangladesh until the 1980s. The problem was gradually on the rise as women became increasingly more visible in the public spheres of the country for the purpose of education, employment, or other activities (Nahar et al. 2013). Even though women of all ages become victims of street harassment at least once, at some point in their lives, some research showed that adolescent

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girls are among the most affected. In a quantitative study by Alam, Roy, and Ahmed (2009) on 5106 adolescent girls in rural Bangladesh, it was found that 43% had experienced some form of harassment while travelling to work or school, most frequently staring or leering (29.8%), followed by passing sexual comments (28.4%) and whistling (21.9%). According to another study carried out by Action Aid Bangladesh (2014), it was reported that 84% of women commuters admitted that they experienced different verbal and physical harassment while onboard. 53% of these crimes were committed by public transport operators and 43% by fellow male passengers. Moreover, 62% of the women participants stated that they limit their movement and have strict timings when they are moving alone in public spaces and transports, and alarmingly, 81% of them did not report the incidents to any law enforcement agencies. Even though street harassment is pervasive throughout the country, it is often invisible, especially to those who are not affected by it and, therefore, unaware of its prevalence, severity, and negative effects (Stop Street Harassment 2013).

Bangladesh, nevertheless, has some of the necessary laws and ordinances in place in order to tackle violence against women, including their harassment on the street. There are, however, certain gaps in the existing laws to address certain offences, for example, harassment on public transport, as well as challenges in enforcing the existing laws. Dhaka Metropolitan Police Ordinance of 1976 was the first Act to address street harassment as 'Eve-teasing'. This law confirmed 'Eve-teasing' as a punishable offence with imprisonment of up to 1 year or a fine of up to two thousand takas (1 USD = 103.444 Bangladeshi Taka), or both. However, this law is enforceable only in Dhaka and five other metropolitan areas, not in non-metropolitan cities and rural areas. There was no other law against street harassment until 2000. The Prevention of Oppression against Women and Children Act 2000 (amended in 2003) was the first Act to include sexual assault and sexual harassment as punishable offences. However, it was not clearly specified the types of sexual offences, for example, sexual harassment in the workplace or educational institutions, marital rape or street harassment, will be included under this Act. Subsequently, in 2009, the government issued detailed guidelines for employers and other authorities to follow in order to prevent or deter sexual harassment in the workplace or institutions, as well as specified the measures to prosecute the offences (Naznin, 2021). Later on, considering the prevalence and severity of street harassment cases all over the country, the government issued further guidelines to include harassment beyond the workplace or institutions and, more importantly, emphasised the offences should not be called 'Eve-teasing' rather the term 'harassment' must be used (Chhun, 2010; Naznin, 2021). The government also empowered the mobile courts in 2010 to prosecute perpetrators of street harassment and punish them immediately with one year of imprisonment or a fine of five thousand takas or both. In addition, the High court ordered the government to set up a separate unit at every police station across the country to monitor and deal with stalking cases (Naznin, 2021).

Despite these preventive measures, laws, and ordinances, it has been observed that the patriarchal societal structure of the country, which manifest unequal power relation between men and women, can vastly contribute to limiting the implementation of the laws (Naznin, 2021). Besides, in the male-dominated society of Bangladesh, a woman's decision-making process of whether to report the incident to the authority is frequently interfered with or influenced by the male guardians or the relatives of the women who prefer informal or out-of court settlement of any altercation (Begum and Saha, 2017). Moreover, women's access to justice is also often barred by many other social barriers, including social stigma, community shaming, threats of further violence or retaliations, and lack of social protection and support (Hossain, 2016). It can be said that due to all these societal factors, the majority of street harassment cases go unreported, as will be revealed in chapter six of this thesis, and women continue to be deprived of their access to the justice system.

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### 3.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a contextual background, highlighting the patriarchal system, social stratification as well as the status of Bangladeshi women in the present time. In doing so, it has provided a framework for understanding why street harassment is pervasive in Bangladesh but yet remains invisible and ignored, why the victims of street harassment rarely get any assistance from the bystanders or their own families and, thus, become reluctant to formally report the crime to the justice system. I began the chapter by explaining the patriarchal system of Bangladesh, which is resilient and permeates society at many levels, not only within the family. As a result, women face discriminatory social rules, norms and beliefs that affect their development and progress. Even though a lot of progress has been visible in the country three decades after its independence, women's participation in education and employment is still comparatively low, and the gender gap is still considerably high. The above discussion provides a context to understand the empirical chapters six and seven of this thesis, where the participants discussed how they are expected to prepare and respond in certain ways by their families and societies while dealing with harassment in public spaces.

I have also highlighted the social stratification system in Bangladesh along with the class struggle of women. While women from all social classes have been joining the paid labour force with the advancement of the modern era, their struggle in terms of finding the appropriate job, controlling, and accessing their own income, implications of employment and risks to potential violence vary depending on their different classes. As such, the discussion provides a framework for understanding the findings of chapter seven, where I have presented how women's varying class identities can influence the severity or variety of their street harassment experiences.

The different meanings of purdah on the socio-cultural and religious background of the country have also been discussed. The brief discussion has also highlighted the fact that purdah is a complex system in Bangladesh with deeper roots in the patriarchal culture than the Islamic institution. Understanding the context of Purdah in Bangladesh is imperative to understand the investigation of this thesis because the use of purdah (or lack of it) shapes the quotidian experiences of women in public places regarding their fear of violence and street harassment.

A thorough review of the existing literature on street harassment in Bangladesh showed that there has been a considerable amount of gap in the literature since the majority of the research has focused on certain topics and, thereby, failed to provide any significantly new insight into the phenomenon. It was also observed that the majority of the research recruited school-going teenage girls as their target group, and therefore, women from other age groups and demographics were largely excluded from research on street harassment.

Furthermore, the majority of the incidences of street harassment still go unreported and hidden, and the existing laws are not implemented properly due to various social and cultural factors which maintain, uphold and support men's dominance and control over women. Many women do not have adequate knowledge about how to access the justice system and, therefore, leave the violence unredressed.

In the next chapter, the discussion will centre on the methodology chosen for this research and the rationale behind the methodological choice.

### CHAPTER FOUR

#### Research Methodology and Methods

As outlined in previous chapters, although street harassment is a pervasive problem in Bangladesh, relatively little academic research has been conducted on this issue. Against this background, the present research aims to contribute to knowledge about street harassment through the presentation of original research findings that document and explore the experiences and perceptions of a sample of women from Dhaka. My intention in this chapter is to provide a detailed and reflexive account of the research process in order to situate and provide context to my data. For this research, I employed a qualitative approach to explore and document women's own experiences, understandings as well as commonalities or differences in their lives (Clisby et al. 2007).

The research discussed here is influenced by feminist methodologies and principles because these clearly align with a core aim to provide accounts that are both sensitive and relevant to the lives of women. In the first section of this chapter, I will outline the process and rationale for choosing the feminist methodology for this research. The second part of this chapter describes the process of conducting semi-structured interviews, including why that was an appropriate method for this research. I will discuss in detail the process of recruitment and sampling of the women who have experienced harassment in the public places of Dhaka, whose accounts are used in chapters five to seven. The process and techniques of data management and analysis are also presented in this section. Adopting a reflexive approach, the final section of this chapter discusses the role of the researcher in the research process. A discussion is put forward on my experiences of conducting fieldwork in my hometown of Dhaka, my positionality as a privileged insider or outsider in the field and the power relations between the researcher and the researched. By being upfront about my positionality as an insider and outsider researcher, I aim to add elements of trustworthiness and reliability to the research and, at the same time, allow transparency for the readers to assess the data collection process.

#### 4.1 A FEMINIST METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Since this research deals with an overriding concern with gender inequality and injustice in a patriarchal society, drawing upon a feminist methodological approach is the most appropriate one for this study. However, what constitutes feminist methodology and whether a distinctive feminist methodology exists have been subjects of considerable debate (Wise & Stanley, 2003, Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Therefore, I first highlight what I consider to be the key and most relevant aspects of a feminist methodological approach for this research and then carry on specifying why I have chosen the qualitative semi-structured in-depth interview method to obtain the empirical data for my research.

Even though feminist researchers (Harding, 1987; Reinharz, 1992; Parr, 1998) have argued that employing feminist methodology can produce more comprehensive data about the social conditions of women than that achieved by using traditional methods, there is no unified or agreed single feminist methodology (Skinner, Hester and Malos, 2005). As stated by Ramazanoglu and Holland, (2002, p. 16), "Feminist methodology is distinctive to the extent that it is shaped by feminist theory, politics and ethics and grounded in women's experience." Feminist theorists suggest that there are a few recurrent themes or characteristics amongst research adopting feminist methodology, which can differentiate feminist methodology from other forms of research.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of feminist research is a shared appreciation of women's oppression (Stanley, 1990) and a desire to challenge this oppression. To emancipate women from

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oppressive gender relations is the ultimate commitment of feminism, rather than being a discipline of study. In other words, the basic ideology of feminism is to change the world, not only to study it. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002, p. 147) clarified that feminist research does not necessarily have to work on women and gender alone; rather any research that seeks to “produce knowledge that will be useful for effective transformation of gendered injustice and subordination” can be labelled as feminist. In this respect, Acker et al. (1983) argued that in order to determine the usefulness of the knowledge produced by feminist research, it is important to assess whether the findings of the research can contribute to the women’s movement in some way. In other words, it is important to consider whether the research findings have any emancipatory goals. However, Acker et al. (1983, p. 431) have also added that “an emancipatory intent is no guarantee of an emancipatory goal”. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002, p. 147) further clarified the prior objective of doing feminist research as an opportunity to provide insights into gendered social existence, which would otherwise not exist. In agreeing with Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002), I believe that by revealing the gender inequalities and oppression in the forms of street harassment in the patriarchal society of Bangladesh through the lived experiences of Bangladeshi women, this research contributes to knowledge development regarding the betterment of women’s lives.

Feminist research also investigates the power inequalities between the research participants and researcher and questions whether the power relations affect knowledge production and research (Doucet and Mauthner, 2006). While positivist methods consider the researcher and the researched as knower and what is knowable, or as subject and object, and thus place them in a dichotomous model, the aim of feminist research is to develop a co-production of knowledge with the research participants by including their experiences and perceptions (Hesse-Biber et al., 2004). In the positivist model, there is a rigid division between the researcher as the subject and the researched as the object, and this division also creates a hierarchical power play where the researcher is privileged as the knower. Whereas in feminist research, such hierarchical division is removed because “the basic premise of feminist methodologies is the epistemological belief that women can possess and share valuable knowledge, and thus research can start from the perspective of women’s lives” (Hesse-Biber et al. 2004, p. 14).

Feminist epistemologies accept women’s personal experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge, and this approach has been critiqued with the argument that “personal experiences can be factual, limited, partial, uncertain and socially located and therefore it cannot be generalised” (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002, p. 125). However, the counterargument in favour of qualitative research is that it provides in-depth understanding and does not seek to generalise (Firestone, 1993). Moreover, disregarding personal experiences which are related to gender inequalities and oppression would also lead to dismissing and discounting the reasons behind such experiences and in this way, we would never be able to understand and investigate why and how a particular gendered experience occurs. Therefore, personal experiences are one of the significant elements in feminist research as they provide knowledge of gendered lives and actual power relations (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002, p. 127).

Another core principle of feminist perspectives is that the research process is dualistic; that is, it has both subjective and objective dimensions. Feminist researchers challenge the traditional view of science that seeks to establish dominance over subjects, suppress emotions, and maintain a separation between the researcher and the research under the banner of objectivity (Naples, 2003). They argue that all research is inevitably influenced by values, personal preferences, and the cultural and institutional context in which it takes place. They emphasize that no research can be completely unbiased or devoid of values. Despite researchers' intentions to be objective, they are shaped by their own perspectives and the societal structures surrounding them. As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2020, p.7):

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Demonstrating coding reliability and the avoidance of 'bias' is illogical, incoherent, and ultimately meaningless in a qualitative paradigm and in reflexive thematic analysis, because meaning and knowledge are understood as situated and contextual, and researcher subjectivity is conceptualized as a resource for knowledge production, which inevitably sculpts the knowledge produced, rather than a must-be-contained threat to credibility.

However, it is important to note that research is not purely subjective either. While researchers are influenced by their values and judgments, their primary goal is to gather factual information, and empirically verifiable data. Initially, when I embarked on my research journey, I held the belief that my role as a researcher should be neutral. However, through reflexive practice, I came to understand that having an activist agenda is an integral part of conducting feminist research (LaFrance & Wigginton, 2019). Consequently, during the data collection process, I embraced the concept of co-constructing knowledge and actively resisted hegemonic structures. I frequently engaged in discussions with participants, openly shared my perspectives, and encouraged them to do the same. Additionally, I actively sought the opinions of participants regarding the causes of the increasing rates of street harassment and potential measures to mitigate such incidents. During informal and unstructured interviews, when participants expressed their views on gender disparities within families, I would inquire about their thoughts on actions that could bring about social change. In this way, my research approach acknowledged the subjective influence of my own perspectives, while also actively seeking to empower participants and involve them in the process of generating knowledge and promoting social transformation.

The emotional and physical well-being of the researcher and the researched is of utmost importance in the feminist methodology, where the researcher needs to be mindful of the effects the research might be having on participants (Skinner et al., 2005). When conducting interviews for this research, some women admitted that sharing their experiences of harassment felt like reliving those experience or going back to that particular time. On the other hand, some women, especially women from the lower-income group, appreciated the opportunity of having their voices heard and valued. In the Bangladeshi literature on street harassment, the experiences of women who are from the lower-income group have always been absent. In order to counteract this, this thesis explored the voices of those women who are marginalised due to both their gender and class, along with other individual differences. If the researcher acts appropriately with proper care and emotional intelligence, the participants are facilitated with such an environment where they develop meaning around their experiences (Reinharz and Davidman, 1992). For the researchers too, it is difficult not to be affected by the experiences of women while investigating difficult and sensitive topics. However, we as researchers continue the emotionally difficult work with the "hope that we can help survivors be heard, hope that we can change institutional responses, hope that we can change society" (Skinner et al., 2005; p. 17). The role of emotion in the feminist methodology is also discussed by Dickson-Swift et al. (2009, p. 63), who believe that we must "challenge the dominance of the Western philosophical tradition that judges emotions to be the anathema to academic research". Hence, while embedding feminist principles in the research process, emotion should be considered an important research experience which can be reconceptualized as a tool of investigation as well as a source of data (Blakely, 2007). My own lived experiences of street harassment while living in Bangladesh helped me to better understand the perspectives of my participants, and that also allowed the participants to express emotions and certain experiences, the severity of some of which was unexpected. However, in order to deal with this, I kept a research journal and reflected after each interview. This was vital not only for capturing the observations and emotions of the participants during the research process, which the tape recorder was unable to record but at the same time, it also helped to remain objective whilst acknowledging the impact these interviews had on me.

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Feminist methodological principles are embedded in the design of this research. Given the nature of the experiences of the participants, which many times can be labelled as assaults, the mental and emotional well-being of the participants and the researcher (as a listener) were prioritised throughout the study. At the same time, great attention was given to ensure the physical well-being of both the research participants and the researcher while arranging the interviews in different locations and times of the day. Throughout the fieldwork period, I worked carefully to redress any power differentials between myself as the researcher and the participants and adopted a reflexive approach throughout the research. While designing this research, I have come to realise that even though the necessity of a reflexive approach in qualitative research is widely acknowledged, the ways to incorporate reflexivity in the research process are not clearly outlined yet (Finlay, 2002). I found the work by Wilkinson (1988) gave me a broader understanding of how to approach reflexivity in my research journey. Wilkinson (1988) outlines three elements of reflexivity; personal, functional and disciplinary. Personal reflexivity indicates the researcher's own identity and how that is expressed within the research. Functional reflexivity suggests how research is shaped by our values, biases, ideologies and life experiences as well as how methods and decisions can influence the construction of knowledge. Finally, disciplinary reflexivity refers to being reflexive about the researcher's relation to different academic research traditions and practices. In this study, I practised throughout, from repeatedly examining my decisions and designing the research to critically analysing how I analyse and present the data and represent the voice of the participants.

Moreover, I gave specific attention to minimise the power dynamic between myself and the participants by ensuring that the participants got involved in the research process by exercising their own choice and control as much as possible. For example, it was made sure that the participants knew that their involvement in the research was voluntary and they were free to withdraw from the process at any time. Moreover, it was mostly the decision and choice of the participants in terms of arranging the interview location and time. Throughout the interview process, participants were encouraged to ask me questions and were also provided with my contact details for any feedback or follow-up questions.

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Key to this research was understanding and exploring women's experiences of street harassment within the urban context of Dhaka city, rather than quantifying women's experiences when they navigate the public places of the city. In keeping with the qualitative research design, this research gathered data through semi-structured in-depth individual interviews with women of different age groups and social classes.

#### 4.2 QUALITATIVE APPROACH

For this research on street harassment in Dhaka, the use of a qualitative approach was most suitable because this method values women's personal experiences and the analysis of nuances of meaning and social relationships and thus, upholds the value of reciprocity in research (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002; p. 155). According to Glazier and Powel (1992, p. 7), "qualitative data can be said to yield more contextually detailed data- richer data. The richness of the data is ensured by the breadth of the context captured with the data." Keeping this in mind, a quantitative approach would not be able to fulfil the core aim of this research which is to attend to women's marginalised and often silenced voices by including their own narratives and experiences. In this respect, Mackinnon (1982) argued that quantitative research often interacts with the participants through the medium of a survey, and questionnaire types of methods and that prevents building any rapport between the

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researcher and the researched, widens the gap between them and obstructs the true representation of women's experiences.

Nevertheless, qualitative methods have their own shortcomings and challenges too, for example, using the qualitative method can offer the impression that baseline and standard knowledge have been produced, which can create methodological issues like poor representation and over-generalisation (Jayaratne and Stewart, 1991; p. 102). Therefore, Letherby (2003, p. 81) has rightly emphasised that, "it is not the use of a particular method or methods which characterises a researcher or project as feminist, but the way in which the methods are used". In other words, it is the responsibility of the researcher to choose the right research tools which are most appropriate for their research projects.

For this research, I believe, the advantages of using the qualitative approach outweigh the quantitative approach and hence, I considered the qualitative approach as the most appropriate method to obtain empirical data in order to illustrate the lived experiences and perspectives of women who encounter street harassment in their everyday lives. The aim of this research was to explore the subjective experiences of women and how their disadvantaged and subordinated position in society caused different types of inequalities and oppression. Rather than concentrating on broader social trends by using quantitative methods and, thus, acquiring a representative sample that lends itself to generalisation, I preferred to use the qualitative approach that will provide insights into the participants' subjective and individual experiences (Rubin and Rubin, 2011).

### 4.3 SAMPLING

In qualitative research, sampling is concerned with identifying and recruiting participants "who can best inform the study" (Fossey et al. 2002; p. 726). The only parameter needed to meet the requirements of this research was that the women were of a certain age range and had experienced some form of street harassment in their lives. However, it was important for me to have a sample not only with wider age groupings but also diverse socio-economic backgrounds too in order to get some breadth of intersectional experiences.

For the sampling of this research, I successfully used snowball and purposive sampling method. According to Bryman (2012, p. 202), snowball sampling is a form of convenience sampling where "the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses them to establish contacts with others". Although, at the initial stage, the samples collected through the snowball method were diverse in age, there was a similarity in their education level and social classes adding to the homogeneity of the sample. Among the 45 participants, 33 women were former, and current students in different colleges and universities of Dhaka and the majority of them belong to the middle class. Hereby, it could be argued that there is a degree of similarity between the experiences, attitudes, and belief of the participants too.

In order to bring diversity in the experiences of the samples, I decided to use purposive sampling method. According to Creswell (2013), purposive sampling is an intentional selection of participants for a study, and it is used to select "members of a difficult-to-reach" population (Neuman, 2003; p. 213). My intention here is to reach women from lower-income families and investigate their experiences and attitudes toward street harassment which was not possible at the initial stage of snowball sampling. Therefore, at this stage, I deliberately selected participants from lower-class backgrounds who can provide the information-rich data possible for this research. Twelve interview participants were recruited through purposive sampling who were working at different shops, and

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garment factories and were from lower socio-economic backgrounds. To reiterate the social stratification of Bangladesh as explained in chapter three, in order to simplify the complex class system of the Bangladeshi society, I identify the social classes of Bangladesh based on their differences on wealth and education: 'upper class' refers to wealthy and highly educated, 'middle class' refers to less wealthy yet highly educated or college educated and 'poor class' refers to low-income generating job holders with little or no education.

In qualitative research, typically a small sample size is appropriate since the aim is to achieve an in-depth understanding of people in a specific context (Hennink et al., 2011). Moreover, the sampling size is often not determined in advance, rather sampling can continue until saturation which indicates the point where "additional analysis no longer contributes to anything new about a concept" (Schwandt, 2001; p. 111). Hence, for this research, I decided to let the data guide whether enough rich material was gathered to answer my research questions. I stopped recruiting after 45 participants which was a manageable sample size enabling me to reach a group of women with diverse age ranges and socio-economic backgrounds. I also observed saturation of the data at this point where no new, significant data relating to women's harassing experiences in public spaces were shared by the participants.

All the participants were living in Dhaka, Bangladesh, at the time of their participation in the research. Dhaka was selected because as a capital city, a large and diverse range of the population lives there, and it was more feasible for me too, as my hometown. Participants' experiences and views, therefore, referred to their experiences of harassment while navigating in the public places and transports of Dhaka for the purpose of education, work, or leisure.

Participants in this research were women between the age of 18-28 years old. The main reason for focusing on women of this particular age group was previous research and media reports that women of this age range are primarily, although by no mean exclusively, vulnerable to street harassment. Young women aged less than 18 years were ineligible to take part in the research as they were unable to provide informed consent independently of their guardians/parents. The participants were of different social classes for the purpose of gaining varying and deeper perspectives on the topic of street harassment. The following table provides further biographical and contextual data of the participants—

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#	Name (Pseudonym)	Age	Occupation	Class	Marital Status
1.	Arin	27	University Lecturer	Middle	Married
2.	Hira	28	University Lecturer	Middle	Married
3.	Anila	27	University Lecturer	Middle	Married
4.	Hiron	27	University Lecturer	Upper	Married
5.	Rihana	26	College Lecturer	Middle	Single
6.	Tara	24	University Student	Upper	Single
7.	Neha	24	University Student	Middle	Single
8.	Runi	25	University Student	Middle	Single
9.	Nazrana	26	University Student	Middle	Single
10.	Takia	22	University Student	Middle	Single
11.	Sayeeda	26	University Student	Middle	Single
12.	Shana	26	University Student	Middle	Single
13.	Sakira	24	University Student	Middle	Single
14.	Minara	22	University Student	Middle	Single
15.	Saika	21	University Student	Middle	Single
16.	Sarah	24	University Student	Middle	Single
17.	Diya	23	University Student	Middle	Single
18.	Ramisa	24	University Student	Upper	Single
19.	Shikha	24	University Student	Upper	Single
20.	Priya	24	University Student	Middle	Single
21.	Maisha	23	University Student	Middle	Single
22.	Amrin	24	University Student	Middle	Single
23.	Nadia	24	University Student	Middle	Single
24.	Amina	22	University Student	Upper	Single
25.	Saju	21	University Student	Middle	Single
26.	Bani	19	College Student	Middle	Single
27.	Rivana	21	College Student	Middle	Single
28.	Amy	21	College Student	Middle	Single
29.	Rumana	26	College Student	Middle	Married
30.	Dolon	26	College Student	Middle	Married
31.	Alisha	25	College Student	Middle	Married
32.	Rupa	29	Housewife/ MBA	Middle	Married
33.	Nila	26	Medical Doctor	Middle	Single
34.	Jeena	20	Super shop Staff	Poor	Single
35.	Tuba	20	Super shop Staff	Poor	Single
36.	Lina	18	Super shop Staff	Poor	Single
37.	Aleef	24	Super shop Staff	Poor	Single
38.	Surma	23	Salon Staff	Poor	Single
39.	Jahida	19	Sales Staff	Poor	Single
40.	Risa	21	Sales Staff	Poor	Married
41.	Munira	19	Staff in Garments Factory	Poor	Single
42.	Arisha	20	Staff in Garments Factory	Poor	Married
43.	Rubana	22	Staff in Garments Factory	Poor	Married
44.	Shila	20	Staff in Garments Factory	Poor	Separated
45.	Pushpo	22	Staff in Garments Factory	Poor	Separated

**Table: 1.1: Biographical Data of participants**

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### 4.4 RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

The fieldwork began by recruiting participants through pre-existing contacts in several universities in Dhaka. This approach is called 'convenience sampling,' which is a non-probability sampling technique where the participants are selected because of their convenient accessibility to the researcher (Maxfield and Babbie, 2009). However, no women who were personally known to the researcher were permitted to participate in order to protect the integrity of the research. In this instance, the researcher approached her personal contacts who were working in different universities and subsequently, those personal contacts identified their colleagues and students who were willing to take part in the research.

Once an initial set of participants were identified and recruited, I applied the snowball sampling technique, where I asked the participants if they could connect me to more interested people matching the requirements of this research. Beirnacki and Waldorf (1981) stated that in snowball sampling method each participant introduces more participants with similar characteristics and, in this instance, being familiar with and concerned about the issue of daily harassment on the streets. This sampling strategy can increase the amount of identifying participants within a short period of time, and indeed, the majority of participants in this research were accessed through this form of sampling. All the underprivileged women who worked in different garment factories and shops were recruited via snowball sampling after key participants were recruited through personal contact. To recruit the women working in garment factories, three of the key participants resided in my own neighbourhood, and they were requested to pass the information about this research to their colleagues and neighbours working in the same sector. All the women working in different shops all around Dhaka city were also recruited via the same procedure.

Participants were also recruited by distributing information leaflets in colleges and universities and two local supermarket shops. Leaflets were distributed two ways: by displaying them near the department notice boards of the college/university, common room entry points, and university cafeteria entry points where those will be widely visible to the young women; and secondly, by requesting the women who have already participated in the research if they could pass them on to their friends. The leaflet was designed to be straight to the point, with fewer words and an image indicating to 'stop' in order to grab the attention of the passers-by (see appendix A). However, it was not possible to identify how many women approached as a direct result of noticing the leaflet. Snowballing sampling worked particularly well in both the college and university, local shops, and garment factories too.

The research was introduced to the potential participants as a study about women's experiences while being in public places and on public transport and the information leaflet mentioned 'harassing experiences' and 'Eve-teasing.' Since the participation was voluntary, it is understood that the women were interested in taking part in this research on street harassment because it was an issue which was of personal interest to them and, perhaps, as a result of their own disturbing and harassing experiences.

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### 4.5 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

According to Hennink et al. (2011), 'rich' and 'thick' data that is essential for studies like this one can be collected with detailed descriptions by using individual, in-depth interviews. Individual interviews are also more suitable when researching sensitive issues like harassment and assault, and that requires a more intimate setting for data collection as well as confidentiality in order to ensure the comfort and ease of the participants. Moreover, since individual interviews focus on one person, it is easier for the researcher to manage (Bryman, 2001) and allows the researcher to build a rapport with the participants that can lead the participants to share more personal information. Anderson and Jack (1991, p. 11) stated that interviewing allows the researchers to listen to people's arguably contingent and context-specific thoughts and thus permits the research participants to share their experiences in their own ways. Having the power and freedom of telling their stories in their own words that the participants have in qualitative research is in complete harmony with a feminist approach, and with that element of power, the participants can, to some extent, determine the course and content of the interview too. Moreover, during the interviews, the spontaneous exchanges between the researcher and the participants can resolve any ambiguities, and at the same time, the repeated questioning of the researcher as well as the personal contact help the researcher to gain a better understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions (Rubin and Rubin, 2011). Interviews are also more useful for understanding the economic, socio-cultural, and religious background of the participants (Hennink et al., 2011), which can capture the participants' individual stories and experiences while also considering and intersecting their different identities.

However, interviews are not entirely free from bias and problems either. Sometimes, it can be challenging to extract useful information from a lengthy interview, and there might be discrepancies between what the participants say and what they think or feel. Moreover, if the participant is not fully cooperative or is somewhat unforthcoming, the interview session might appear as a question-answer session instead, without producing enough fruitful data.

Despite these potential problems, semi-structured interviewing was used for the purpose of this research and was decided to be the most appropriate method for data production. Blaxter et al. (2006: 172) emphasize that interviews go beyond mere data collection, as they represent a natural mode of interaction that can take place in various contexts (Blaxter et al. 2006; 177). The authors argued that interviews hold significant value as they provide researchers with access to information which may be challenging to obtain through methods such as questionnaires or observations. Therefore, the key reason is the depth and breadth of information that can be collected through the interview method. Moreover, such a form of interviewing is flexible in terms of changing the order of the interview questions, re-phrasing the questions to suit the particular participants, clarifying any discrepancies in the answers of the participants and following up on any interesting points raised by the participants (Maxfield and Babbie, 2009). Further, a degree of rapport can be built through the use of face-to-face interviews, which can facilitate better production of data.

A total of 45 women participated in the face-to-face interviews, each lasting between 30 to 60 minutes and were always conducted in my first language, Bangla. The interviews were taken in a semi-structured format from an interview guide (see appendix B) which was tweaked and developed when any interesting aspects of women's experiences appeared. The interviews commenced by thanking the participants for their time and introducing myself and the research. After obtaining the verbal and written consent of the participants, I asked them to talk about themselves, their families and their childhood. By allowing the participants some time to talk about themselves, I was hoping that the informal nature of the conversation would help to relax the participants as well as give the researcher an opportunity to build rapport. At the same time, this prelude let me understand the educational, social, and economic background of the participants, which helped to investigate the issue of

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intersectionality during the data analysis process, as I go on to discuss it in further detail in Chapter seven.

Since the research asks questions of sensitive nature, I was determined not to conduct the interview in a 'smash and grab' approach, that is, asking the required questions straight away and leaving as soon as the questions are answered without any genuine interest in the participants (Liamputtong, 2007). In a stark assessment of this approach, Reinharz (1992, p. 95) referred to such an approach as the "rape" model of research. In order to have a better understanding of the participant's situations, it is important to take time to get to know them, gain their trust and build a rapport with them. Many participants might be sharing their experiences for the first time in their lives through this interview if they feel that they have a good relationship with the researcher and can trust the researcher (Dickson-Swift, 2005). Keeping these ideas in mind and also, from a personal and ethical stance, I made a conscious effort to build up a rapport with the participants before asking the actual interview questions. I took time to describe the research itself and my experience of growing up in Dhaka city, and in this way, women had the time and opportunity to think and decide whether I was someone they could share their experiences as well as eliminate any anxieties or confusion they might have about participating in the research. These conversations with the participants gave me ideas about the participants' social, educational, and religious backgrounds and that ultimately gave depth to the findings in chapter seven of this thesis, how different identities influence experiences.

An interview process should not run like a mere question and answer session, rather it should be more like a conversation between the researcher and the researched where the information flows back and forth. An important feminist perspective regarding the in-depth interview process is that the key responsibility of the researcher is to carefully, and attentively listen to the insights and opinions shared by the participants (Hesse-Biber, 2007). The researcher needs to pay attention to the language used by the participants to express their lived experiences but should be more curious about what is not said or about to be said (DeVault, 2004). While conducting interviews with the participants, I encountered instances of hesitation on several occasions. Some of the participants were hesitant and embarrassed to utter the terms like prostitutes, brothel, sex, and rape. In those instances, I applied feminist research perspectives that view the interview process as a co-creation of meaning and utilised the tool of 'probing'. Probing is an essential tool for an effective interview which includes gestures such as nodding and requesting clarification from the respondent regarding a particular point or term. Accordingly, I engaged with my participants during those moments of hesitation and showed that I was listening and understanding their points, while also seeking additional clarification from them. The probing technique was one of the ways of getting the participants to continue with what they were talking about, delve deeper into a topic, or provide further elaboration.

The interview guide for this research consisted of several parts. The first part asked about themselves-their educational background, occupations, if appropriate, neighbourhoods, and hobbies. The second part focused on their experiences and perceptions about gender roles and discrimination while growing up and at present. The third part asked about their perceptions of safety and fear, fear of crime while in public, any specific instances and experiences of violence and crime, including street harassment, reactions to harassment and coping strategies. I also asked about sharing the experiences, receiving blame from family or society, reporting the incidents to the police and barriers to reporting. The fourth part asked questions like their concepts about the reason for harassment, the age of the harassers, financial burdens on them due to lack of safety, the role of the community or police for prevention, any recommendations they might have or anything else they would like to share. All participants were asked questions on these topics, but the wording of the questions and sequences of the topics were altered, developed, or changed depending on the flow of the conversation. As the interview process progressed, I became more confident in my own abilities as an interviewer and adopted a more relaxed approach. I was following the semi-structured interview

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prompts much less than before, changed the chronology of the questions, and asked many open-ended questions. As a result, some later interviews have more depth and richness in data than the earlier interviews.

At the end of the interviews, the participants expressed a range of emotions. Some of the participants were relieved to share certain experiences that they have never shared with anyone. Chapter Five, for example, describes the experiences of harassment shared by the research participants. Some participants felt empowered and incredibly proud that they had contributed to an important research. Some participants became distraught to have relived their experiences by sharing them. It is already acknowledged by feminist researchers that sharing distressing experiences can be traumatic but cathartic too (Kelly et al., 1995). In this respect, Opie (1992) stated that participants may feel empowered that their participation in research would focus on and highlight a social issue and at the same time, they might benefit from the therapeutic effect of being able to reflect and re-evaluate their experiences during the interview process. This has become relevant while conducting research on street harassment in Dhaka, where this pervasive social problem is significantly normalised, and the negative implications on women are not sufficiently highlighted. The participants may feel individually empowered when they agreed to take part in the research and, thus, expressed their willingness to contribute significantly to investigating and analysing a social issue. At the same time, the participants had to make a brave decision to disclose some of the intimate experiences of their lives when they agreed to participate in the research and their desire to help other women by making their experiences available can certainly feel empowering too. During the interviews, some participants were able to reflect on their responses to harassment and reassess their experiences with the formal and informal support systems. For instance, two participants who both were from wealthy and educated families began to question their own decisions and fear of not disclosing any of the traumatic and harassing experiences to their families. It was inspiring even for the researcher to witness their fortitude in denouncing passive responses to harassment and the determination to rethink more appropriate responses.

### 4.6 RESEARCH JOURNAL

Gerstl-Pepin and Patrizio (2009) stated that in the context of qualitative research, a research journal can act as a source for personal reflection. One aim of a research journal in qualitative research is to support the understanding of the role of reflexivity, where the researcher can document the thoughts, feelings, and decisions of a particular time. Gerstl-Pepin and Patrizio (2009) also believed that a research journal can also act as a catalyst for discussion through which the researcher can realise how their own knowledge is created. Apart from this, a research journal can also prove to be a valuable resource for the research. Borg (2001) outlined the benefits of maintaining a research journal during a research project. The benefits include a reminder of past ideas and events which led to the subsequent action, building a conceptual framework as well as dealing with fieldwork pressure and anxieties where the research journal works as an emotional support and companion.

A research journal was kept during the fieldwork process because writing down the personal thoughts and reflections of the interviews on the same day as it was conducted can become a valuable source of data during the analysis process. Moreover, as a postgraduate researcher who was working alone far from the university and the supervisors, the research journal worked as a colleague where I could write down my thought process and, thus, keep a log of decisions made during the fieldwork. During the fieldwork, I aimed to write the research journal at the end of every working day after conducting the interviews during the daytime. I believed that observing the participants and then writing about them could provide an in-depth understanding of the participants, their stories and their body language. I found it very beneficial while writing down my feelings and reflections in the research

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journal about the participants and the interviews, which many times provided clarification about certain behaviour of the participants.

Here, I showcase some of my own journal entries to illustrate to the reader the content of my observations but also the manner in which I approached a reflexive practice during fieldwork.

### October 6th, 2016 (Name changed to protect anonymity)

I noticed a common thing with Alisha (pseudonym), which I have also observed with many other participants, that is, her uneasiness to utter words that have anything to do with 'sex.' She would say 'yea' (Bengali colloquial for 'that' or 'umm' kind of filler words) or mutters continuously but will not say the word 'rape', for example. If I say the word 'rape,' then she would agree, but she would use the word 'accident' rather than 'rape.' On another occasion, she was trying to refer to something which I did not understand or assume, so after a lot of stammering, she uttered 'brothel' and the same happened when she wanted to refer to 'extramarital affairs.' Throughout the conversation, she never uttered the word 'sex' even though she referred to it several times. She also did not use the words 'sex work,' or 'prostitute'; instead said 'bad work' and 'bad girls.'

I assume her tendency for not uttering those words might have come from her upbringing in a conservative family. Or possibly, she might also think that I will think about her negatively if she says those words – she might be trying to act more naïve. Something to ponder about Bangladeshi culture for a later date.

During the interview, I did not take any notes since it could impede my interaction and rapport with the participants. I started observing the participants as soon as I met them and later, documented a general description of the participants, the chronology of the events, all the non-verbal cues of the participants during and after the interview session, statements they shared when the recorder was turned off and my thoughts about the interviews. In participant observation, it is vital to recognise patterns of behaviour and actions which can provide comparable results among the participants.

A considerable amount of time and attention was given to this research journal during the fieldwork, and thus, the research journal served two purposes, firstly, it helped me to be reflexive during the data collection process and secondly, the journal became a valuable source with contextual information during the data analysis process, as explained in Borg (2001). The above journal entries, for example, urged me to look into the social and cultural traditions in Bangladeshi families regarding the upbringing and treatment of female children during the data analysis process.

## DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS

### 4.7 TRANSLATION AND TRANSCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEWS

All the interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. Each interview file was downloaded and stored with a password onto the researcher's personal computer as soon after conducting the interviews as possible. All the interviews were successfully recorded, and no technical issue was encountered during the process. All the recordings were deleted from the recorder.

All the interviews were translated from Bangla and then transcribed by myself without any external help or support. I preferred to do it by myself in order to identify recurring themes as I can understand the language of my participants and recall their behaviours, hesitations, as well as experiences and settings while conducting the interviews. This would not have been possible if someone else had done

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the transcription and translations. My research journal, combined with the transcriptions, kept the images of my participants very much alive throughout the analysis and later stages of writing this thesis. At the point of transcription, each participant was allocated a pseudonym in order to preserve their anonymity, and a spreadsheet of pseudonyms was created. The data was translated and transcribed manually from the audio files into the Microsoft word files on my personal computer by listening to the recordings with headphones and pausing and playing the recordings as I typed. It was not possible to use any speech-to-text software for this process since I had to translate the recording from Bangla first as I went along. This was a slow process where the recording had to be heard multiple times during the transcription of each sentence. Since most of the interviews took place in public places, there were a lot of background noises, including voices of surrounding people and therefore, sometimes the recordings needed to be listened to numerous times in order to ensure accuracy. However, I believe that transcribing the interviews by myself provided me with a valuable opportunity to re-engage with the data after the interview and, at the same time, was vital to recognise and assess the major and potential themes from the participants' accounts (Fielding and Thomas, 2001). Hence, even though translating and transcribing the interviews was a very time-consuming process, I immersed myself in the data by listening and re-listening to the interviews and reading all the transcripts several times. As a result, I was well-familiarised with the data, which enriched the subsequent process of establishing and building key themes from the data gathered.

It is important to note here that transcribing while also translating from one language to another is an especially complex and challenging task (Davidson, 2009, p 38). During the transcription and transcribing process, I was especially careful in documenting what my participants said in a particular context. This is because, in many instances, merely translating words from Bangla to English would not properly capture the participants' narratives, and therefore, I had to choose the cultural viewpoint or the context from which the participants were speaking. At the same time, attention was given to properly documenting the punctuations, silence, laughing, pauses and hesitations too so that it does not alter the intent or the context of the participants' accounts (McLellan et al. 2003). Bucholtz (2000) declared transcription as an act of interpretation and representation as well as an act of power where the transcriber brings her own particular assumptions, interests and values, which also influence what is included and excluded in the final transcript. Throughout the process of transcription, I was fully conscious of my power and privilege as a researcher and allowed the transcriptions to be accurate and reliable to the recorded interviews as possible.

### 4.8 ANALYSIS

My approach to the data analysis process was influenced by the concept of thematic content analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is considered to be particularly useful while analysing rich interview data (Bryman, 2001) due to its flexibility to divergent theoretical frameworks, which goes 'beyond the semantic content of the data and starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations - and ideologies - that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). The whole process of analysing and coding involves reading and re-reading the transcripts in order to identify recurrent keywords, terms, or ideas. The fragments of words or ideas which are meaningless if viewed alone are grouped into a single theme. I considered that such an approach would accommodate Bangladeshi women's diverse and detailed accounts of harassment they experienced in the public places of the city. We see evidence of this approach and its outcomes in the subsequent chapter five, where I show the different types of behaviours that are grouped as various types of street harassment.

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Strauss (1987) described a three-stage model of data analysis with open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the initial open coding process, the researcher would find broad analytic themes from the data and code them on that basis. In the next stage at the axial coding process, further reading and organisation of the data develop links between the emergent themes. In the selective coding process, extracts from different interviews are identified which properly embody the main themes and then, are organised to include them in the thesis. Following Strauss's model, I began the analytic process by reading through the transcribed interviews and the research journal several times to become absorbed in the data collected (Bradley et al., 2007). Through persistent reading, I concentrated on identifying regular recurring experiences and feelings of the research participants. I identified various patterns of experiences and assembled all similar patterns together as my themes, as thematic analysis focuses on identifiable themes (Aronson, 1995). These patterns of behaviours and experiences include different forms of harassment like verbal, non-verbal, staring, and physical harassment which were analysed in chapter five. I have identified different types of responses and precautionary measures that women take and analysed them in chapter six. While some of the broad themes were guided by the research questions, several interesting themes and sub-themes were formed during the coding and analysing process. For example, many factors relating to the patriarchal, socio-cultural, and religious norms of the country were related to the patterns of behaviours and responses, and these factors led me to notice differences in the responses, precautions and attitudes of the women while dealing with street harassment. Women's varying experiences due to their different types of identities were explored in chapter seven through the lens of intersectionality. However, the whole process of coding, clustering, and analysing the interview data was not a straightforward one, and I had to move back and forth many times between these phases at different stages of the data analysis process.

Since qualitative research produces a large amount of data in the forms of interview transcriptions, field notes and research journals, managing and analysing the data in a systematic and rigorous way can be overwhelming, laborious, and time-consuming (Pope et al., 2000). Hence, to aid in the analysis process, I have also used a qualitative analysis software package, NVivo. This is a specialist software package that can conduct data analysis, but in this research, it was not used to auto-analyse the data but to help me to manage the large quantity of the data. In order to start the process of analysing and coding the data in the NVivo software, all the transcripts were imported at first. Then, I began the coding process by pinpointing and listing the identified themes as various nodes, and I had a list of approximately 40 nodes that evolved during the process. Some of the most recurrent nodes were verbal abuse, physical abuse, staring, transport, public places, avoidance, precautions, reactions, clothing, age, violence, safety, restrictions, blaming, honour, company, and night-time. Parent nodes (main nodes) were created at a later stage to develop hierarchical relationships between the coded concepts. This method of coding was flexible and changed and developed throughout the analysis process.

The analysis did not rely on the interview transcriptions only but also on the behaviour, and body language of the participants, as well as my thoughts and observations during and after the interviews and the research journal became useful at this point.

### 4.9 ETHICAL ISSUES

Ethical concerns play an important role in feminist research methodology (Knight, 2000). Ethical considerations were of utmost importance in the design of this research. As this research asks questions of a personal and sensitive nature to women, it was necessary to submit an application to the Ethics Committee of the University. Following the submission of a research proposal along with the recruitment strategy, information sheet and consent form (appendix C) for the participants, full

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ethical approval was approved by the Ethics Committee prior to commencing the fieldwork in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

As the starting point of the interview session, the participants were given an information sheet and a consent form. All participants were informed, verbally and in writing, of the nature and purpose of the study. They were asked to give their written consent to take part in this research on the understanding that this would not infringe on their right to withdraw from the research at any time before submission/publishing, and there will be no obligation to state their reasons for withdrawal. Participants were also given the opportunity to request further information from the researcher about the study prior to, during, or after the interview session. The participants' permission to voice record the interview session was also sought prior to commencing each interview.

Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed to participants during recruitment, data collection, data analysis, writing up and dissemination of findings. I was keen to ensure the participants that they were fully confident about the anonymity in view of the sensitive nature of the topics that would be covered in the interviews. Therefore, the process of anonymising the participants' narratives through the use of pseudonyms, as well as the removal of any details which would allow participants to be identified, was explained at the start of each interview. Data gathered through the interviews was stored in a password-protected folder on my personal computer.

It was understood that the personal and potentially very sensitive topics that will appear during the research might impact the participants, and therefore, careful thought and consideration were given during the research design as to how best to deal with a situation where the participants displayed signs of becoming distraught or upset. In light of this, I was mindful of the body language of the participants when they were responding in a physical sense to certain questions asked. Hesitancy, a change in their voice tone in terms of volume or speed, fiddling with objects in their hands – for example, the end of their scarf, bag straps etc. and avoiding eye contact may indicate emotional distress or discomfort (Curtis and Curtis, 2011). In cases where I noticed discomfort in the participants, I empathised with them by expressing my sympathy and acknowledging their distress. I offered them some time and space to regain their composure if required. Furthermore, recognising that participants might require institutional support regarding certain issues, adequate information was already gathered. During the fieldwork, some of the participants sought further support to seek professional help around particular issues, and they were provided with information and guided through the procedure with the available resources.

Due to the nature of this project, it became evidently clear and imperative that it was not only the participants who needed support and protection, but I, as the researcher, needed to be aware of my own safety too. As Morse (2007, p. 1005) noted, "safety of the researcher is one of the least addressed yet most important considerations in qualitative research inquiry". This not only concerns the physical safety of the researcher but the emotional safety and well-being too. Therefore, measures to minimise potential harm to the researcher were also incorporated into the research design. All the interviews were carried out in public places (e.g., a café, university campus) to ensure that I was not working in an isolated environment. In terms of the emotional safety of the researchers, it has been recognised that female researchers are at greater risk of facing negative emotional experiences since participants usually feel more comfortable confiding in a female researcher and share traumatic or stressful experiences and concerns (Padfield and Procter, 1996). Throughout this project, I was acutely aware of the emotional risks involved since the participants shared their numerous traumatic experiences during the interview process, and those experiences were not always limited or related to street harassment only. In order to deal with the emotional risk and to ensure my emotional well-being, I resorted to the idea of maintaining a research journal, as Bloor et al. suggest, a research journal can

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“allow researchers to obtain a reflexive distance from the experiences they document and can also be used as a ‘space’ for off-loading” (2007, p. 35).

Finally, at the end of each interview, participants were asked about their feedback on the interview process. This was useful in flagging up potential problems and elements in the interview process and the interview questions, especially during the interviews which were conducted at the beginning. Feedback from the interviews helped me to change the layout or the wording of some of the questions, but more importantly, it reminded me to begin the interview with an informal conversation to understand the socio-cultural background of the participants. This informal conversation not only helped to build a rapport with the participants but also gave me useful context to situate and understand the findings on intersectionality, as presented in chapter seven of this thesis.

### ROLE OF RESEARCHER

There is a growing recognition that research findings do not ‘represent a view from nowhere’ and that the researcher is an integral part of the fieldwork process (Ryan & Golden, 2006:1192). Since achieving an ‘omniscient point of view’ is unattainable for humans (Mengxuan & Storr, 2012:14), it is essential to explain the researcher’s positionality within the fieldwork. While conducting and analysing the data, I have actively considered my role as a researcher in the research process and maintained a critical self-awareness throughout the interaction process by which the researchers present, negotiate, and manage their self to the participants.

Hence, in the final section of this chapter, I discuss my fieldwork experiences in my hometown of Dhaka and reflect on my positionality as a middle class yet privileged insider or outsider, the impact it had on the research, and the power hierarchies involved.

### 4.10 POSITIONALITY

In this research, I was constantly an insider as well as an outsider. There has been a long debate about the advantages and disadvantages of being an insider and outsider in the research process. Insiders have the privilege of researching people with shared commonalities (Collins, 2002) and, thus, can gain a better understanding of the research topic and the participants’ thoughts. Labaree (2002, p. 103) identified another advantage of being an insider, which is “the value of shared experience”. I shared my experiences and perceptions of street harassment during my childhood and adulthood in Dhaka with the participants, which made me an insider, while my current position as a researcher in the UK made me an outsider. Collecting data from Dhaka, which was my birthplace and home for 24 years turned out to be an extremely thought-provoking experience. Research on feminist geography has already looked at the duality between ‘home’ and ‘field,’ ‘belonging’ and ‘alienation,’ ‘familiarity’ and ‘investigation’ (Sultana, 2007). My association with the city gave me the advantage that I could ask for help from my personal contacts to carry on with the research. While I was looking for participants from different areas, classes, and professions, it would have been difficult to achieve if my personal contacts did not come forward. At the same time, building on the snowballing process and arranging interviews in public (yet safer) spaces would have been more complicated if the city, culture, and general attitude of the people were not familiar to me. Hence, my positionality as an insider influenced the whole research process – from finding participants, approaching them, and arranging interviews, translating, transcribing, analysing, and the writing of the thesis.

On the other hand, I did become aware that being an insider in terms of shared experiences of street harassment can occasionally prejudice my perceptions and judgement on the topic. Dwyer and Buckle

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(2009) argued that the insider researcher's perceptions might be mixed up by her personal experiences, and she might find it difficult to separate from that of the participants. While listening and later transcribing the interviews, I felt some of the participants' accounts were exactly what I had previously experienced. For example, when the participants were sharing their experiences of being touched and grabbed in the Newmarket and Nilkhet areas of Dhaka city, I remembered several similar experiences while studying at the university. In such instance, to avoid any personal bias, I tried to distance myself and looked at the data from an outsider's perspective, which would be more beneficial for the analysis since an outsider might notice and question facts that are easily overlooked and taken for granted from an insider's perspective.

The outsider position of the researcher can also have some positive and negative aspects. When I was considered an outsider by the participants, it gave me the added benefits of being seen and respected as a professional researcher working abroad. However, at the same time, it was challenging to access the working-class women due to my outsider positionality, and after accessing the participants, I had to spend additional time building rapport with them. For instance, while interviewing the working-class women, I began by asking about and discussing their lives and sometimes shared some of my own experiences too. Many times, the participants' narratives were irrelevant and far away from the research topics, but this prelude gave them the opportunity to ponder whether I would understand their experiences and perspectives or not and then, the interview would slowly progress towards more relevant questions.

However, such dualities are not rigid in any research process, and the positionality of the researcher can easily shift with time and space (Mullings, 1999) as well as on the context and topic under discussion in the interview. During the fieldwork of this research, I noticed my positionality shifting a few times during the interviews. For example, my interview with Takia (a 26-year-old university student) began abruptly, where I did not get an opportunity to talk about the research and myself before she started her narratives without any prompts or questions. From her tone, I could read that she perceived me as a privileged outsider researching in Europe and was there only to extract information. As the interview progressed and she continued to share her experiences and perceptions on street harassment in different public places, reactions, and precautions, with the help of my timely inputs in the discussion, I could slowly sense my transformation from being a complete outsider to an insider or privileged insider. By the time the interview was complete, we both had discovered our shared commonalities in terms of experiences and other identities. I could acknowledge a change in her tone when she offered further help in future if the research required.

### 4.11 POSITIONING THE 'SELF'

Positioning the researcher's 'self' in the field in terms of power hierarchy, class, gender, and other identities is an important aspect of the research too. Reinharz (1997, p.3) argues:

Self is the key fieldwork tool...we both bring the self to the field and create the self in the field. The self we create in the field is a product of the norms of the social setting and the ways in which the research subjects interact with the selves the researcher brings to the field.

Selective self-representation of the researcher, therefore, can have a notable implication in the whole research process, ranging from accessing the target population to build a rapport with the participants or to the type of information given by the participants during the interviews (Mullings, 1999). Even though I have lived most part of my life in Dhaka, when I went to conduct the fieldwork, I became aware of a 'different self.' Agreeing with the statement by Reinharz, I brought and changed different selves to the field depending on the research settings and research participants. For example, while I

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was trying to set up interviews with the university/college students and lecturers, I often highlighted my educational backgrounds both from Bangladesh and the UK and that I am a Doctoral candidate from the UK in order to justify the importance of the research and the interview. On the other hand, for my interviews with the socio-economically underprivileged participants, I represented myself as a local woman who spent her whole life in that city, studied there and moved abroad only few years ago in order to create a sense of familiarity and comfort during the interviews. I always dressed in traditional Bangladeshi attire (long tops with baggy trousers and long scarf/ 'orna') while conducting all the interviews in order to represent myself as a woman from the city and avoided all types of western attire like jeans, shirt, tops. During the interview stage, I might have, consciously and unconsciously, used my traditional dressing style as a tool to represent certain aspects of my positionality, but it was not until the analysis stage when I realised that by avoiding western clothing, I might have successfully escaped feelings of disapproval and distaste from my research target group which could influence my access to information. The role of women's attire and behaviours as an important contributing and motivating factor for street harassment, coping mechanisms and victim blaming came up repeatedly in the analytical chapters six and seven of this thesis.

Apart from appearance, the self-representation of the researcher in terms of her use of language can be an important tool too during the interview process which can have a significant effect on the type of information gained (Blakely, 2007). In empirical research, it is important to use plain, jargon-free language and avoid technical terms and acronyms while dealing with people. This is because language can become an important tool of communication which can both facilitate or complicate the situation if not used in the most appropriate way. One of the challenges of conducting research on the topic of violence is maintaining extra caution in terms of wording while dealing with the subjects or victims because sometimes a statement or question asked by the researcher can appear to be judgemental or offensive to the victims. While discussing past violent experiences can itself become traumatic for the participants, the researcher's use of language can also become a possible cause of additional distress and affect the participants' psychological well-being (Fontes, 2004). Keeping this in mind and in order to avoid occurring any such situation, the interview guide was reassessed repeatedly to ensure the aptness of the questions.

According to Elmesky (2005), the use of common language and practice during the interview process can assist in sharing the perspectives as well as the interpretations. Since the present research was conducted in Bangladesh by a Bangladeshi researcher with Bangladeshi women, the significant problem of the language barrier was avoided in this case. However, since the participants of this research were from different social classes and educational backgrounds, I was being extra cautious during my conversation with them and reassess my self-representation as a researcher. For example, while interviewing the university/college students and lecturers, I made sure to speak in the refined Bangla language and accent. On the contrary, while talking to the women with little or no formal education, I dropped the refined accent and adopted the colloquial language in order to make them comfortable and make myself approachable. I believe that the use of colloquial language and accent helped to balance the power relation between the researcher and the researched in this respect. At the same time, I made the conscious choice of not using the English language as much as possible during the whole interview process because I assumed that using English would only reinforce my outsider positionality to the participants.

The consent form and information sheet were originally prepared in English since they needed to be submitted to the Ethics Committee of the university. These were translated to Bangla in order to provide to the participants. The translation process was conducted prior to the commencement of the fieldwork phase.

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### 4.12 POWER HIERARCHIES

The power dynamics within the research relationship are complicated and multifaceted where the participants are often considered to be powerless and passive. Indicating the power hierarchies in the research process, Letherby (2003, p. 78) emphasised the authority of the researcher in selecting and rejecting data at the different stages of the research. While preparing for the fieldwork and interview, the researcher determines the research questions as well as interview questions, and later on, selects the data during the analysis stage and ultimately, writes the research thesis. Moreover, in order to maintain the anonymity of the participants and confidentiality of their information, the researcher has the ultimate control of the data, and this establishes an important aspect of the researcher's power in the overall research process (Letherby, 2003; Parr, 1998).

However, the power relationship between the researcher and the participants is not a simple binary and the participants are not always in a powerless position. Letherby (2003, p. 78) argued that "it is important that as researchers we do not over-pacify our respondents by defining them as inevitable victims of research". Research participants can exert their power in many different ways during the fieldwork stage: they have the full power to accept or deny the access of the researcher (Phoenix, 1995), they can refuse to answer, decide the topic of conversation, divert the flow of conversation, or simply not tell the truth (Letherby, 2003). Moreover, since the participants usually enjoy the freedom and priority to choose their interview venue and time, the circumstances of the interview, thus, can further empower the participants (Phoenix, 1995). In my research, most of the university students and lecturers who took part preferred the interviews to take place on their respective university campuses and I was not familiar with all of them which can potentially be more empowering to the participants.

Furthermore, the participants can experience the research as empowering by considering themselves more as contributors and less as subjects. Opie (1992) believed that by taking part in the research, the participants can benefit in at least two ways: firstly, they contribute to making a social issue visible and secondly, they can attain certain therapeutic value from the interview process. Phoenix (1995) also emphasised that some of her research participants appreciated and enjoyed the opportunity to talk about their experiences. Similarly, Olsen and Shope (1991, p. 197) maintained that it is certainly beneficial for the participants when given the opportunity of "being heard, to air grievances, to work over and perhaps seek reassurances for certain decisions, and, yes, to complain". Skeggs (1995) and McRobbie (1982) also talked about the enhanced self-worth of their participants when they took part in their research. I can strongly resonate with the views of these researchers because of several similar experiences during my fieldwork. While conducting interviews in one of the universities, one participant was convincing her friends to take part (as part of the snow-balling process) by explaining the importance of this research and how their experiences and perspectives can bring a positive change in the situation in near future. Additionally, at least three of the interviews ran longer than two hours where the participants spoke very openly about their certain traumatic experiences and the role of their families and relatives in dealing with them. Not all of the issues that they talked about were related to the research, but I did not stop them upon observing their enthusiasm and urge to share.

Influenced by feminist principles throughout the research, I was committed to recognising and minimising the power differences between the researcher and the researched (Skinner et al, 2005). However, the power hierarchies between the researcher and the researched are complex and changing and there might not be any universally valid approach to solving the ethical dilemmas in research. I conducted an interview with a university lecturer which illustrates the complex and shifting nature of power relationships within the research process. Since the beginning of the interview, Hira was constantly rushing even though the interview was previously scheduled according to her preferred time. Her answers to my questions were not completely related, rather she was constantly

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advising me what kind of topics to add and what are types of questions to ask. Even though I felt her evasive answers and constant suggestions as a challenge to my authority, but at the same time, I was absolutely aware that I have the total privilege and power to write about this interview from my own perspective. As a researcher, I was not always and automatically in a dominant position, but in many of the cases, I did hold more power as the researcher due to my educational background and in some cases, socioeconomic status too. I could appear as more privileged and hence, more powerful than the participants (Swartz, 2011) and it was always a concern whether such power differences made the participants uncomfortable during their interviews. While it is not possible to entirely eliminate such power imbalances from any research process and there are no universally valid answers to ethical questions arising from empirical research, but what I did as a researcher was that I continuously reflected on the dilemmas arising from my research by investigating them both theoretically and empirically.

### 4.13 CONCLUSION

This chapter has documented the methodology used in this research. Feminist methodology and feminist research have been explored since the research seeks knowledge on women's subjective experiences of street harassment in the public places of Dhaka. It has been acknowledged that there are many ways of conducting feminist research according to the literature on feminist methodology and there is no consensus on what makes a research feminist because of "the lack of agreement over what constitutes feminism as theory and practice" (Brayton, 1997; p. 1).

The chapter has outlined the rationale for using a qualitative approach in order to collect data and semi-structured in-depth individual interviews were the primary sources of data collection. As noted above, individual, in-depth interviews allow for 'rich' and 'thick' data to be collected and such method was used on women from a wide range of age groups and backgrounds in order to include their varying experiences and perceptions. I have highlighted the data analysis process and how I have used the NVivo software package as an additional help to manage the large quantity of data.

In this chapter, I have also discussed how my role as a researcher influenced the research process. The chapter has looked at the role of the researcher as an insider or outsider during the research process. In the context of this research, I talked about my positionality of being a researcher based in Europe while doing fieldwork in my hometown of Dhaka, which had significant implications for the research. I demonstrated the many benefits and challenges I have encountered of being considered both an insider and an outsider during the fieldwork period in Dhaka. Finally, I have also discussed the dynamics and dilemmas of power relationships between the researcher and the researched during the research process and my reflection as a researcher to minimise the power imbalance. It is with an awareness of these ethical challenges, and feminist principles that I now turn to the analysis of the data. The ensuing three chapters provide an in-depth understanding of street harassment from the standpoint of urban Bangladeshi women.

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### CHAPTER FIVE

## Understanding Street Harassment: From the Lived Experiences of Women

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter two, I presented the existing literature where common harassing behaviours are identified and definitions of street harassment by different social researchers are analysed. In this chapter, I draw upon the personal experiences of forty-five women who regularly confront those behaviours in their everyday lives. In doing so, I explore the many dimensions of street harassment, similarities, and differences between the experiences of these women through the conceptualisation of street harassment as a continuum of violence model by Kelly (1988). The chapter also explores women's experiences of harassment based on the concepts of gendered constructions of public and private spaces, social constructions of dividing spaces as 'safe' and 'dangerous' and the subsequent reproduction of male privilege.

In drawing upon the lived experiences of women, the chapter examines the nature of women's harassment and presents in detail the different forms of harassment they confront while navigating the public spaces and public transport of Dhaka city. The categorisation of the harassments in this chapter is based on the direct accounts and experiences of the participants. While examining the nature of harassment, I also analyse the frequency of some forms of harassment that are normalised in such a manner that they are hardly recognised or acknowledged as noteworthy harassment by many women. Therefore, by using the 'continuum of violence' theory by Kelly (1988), the chapter also draws attention to the fact that socially normalised behaviours like street harassment have a harmful cumulative effect on women and need to be recognised by society and law. The chapter will conclude by acknowledging the problem of drawing boundaries or blurry boundaries between the experiences of street harassment and sexual harassment and the Bangladeshi women's unwillingness to label their harassment as 'sexual harassment.'

### 5.2 EXPERIENCES OF HARASSMENT

Street harassment refers to how a woman's presence in public places leads to her encountering sexually explicit verbal, non-verbal and physical behaviours, as well as blatant observations and evaluations from male strangers. In the existing literature on street harassment, there have been a lot of controversies in terms of what kind of behaviours and actions 'count' as street harassment. A wide range of behaviours from whistling, staring, stalking, groping, and indecent exposure to physical harassment and sexual assault have been listed as street harassment (Macmillan et al, 2000; Fileborn 2013; Logan, 2015). As a result, the boundaries between street harassment, sexual harassment and sexual violence are often blurred and varied. Furthermore, due to the contextual nature of the harassment, creating a quintessential definition or typology of harassment that will be acceptable to all women is difficult. This statement comes from my personal experiences (noted in the *Fieldwork Research Journal*) during many informal discussions with women who were often in disagreement with each other over whether certain comments or behaviours could be considered harassment or compliments or politeness. Hence, creating an typology of street harassment can be more difficult not only due to the women's subjective experiences of street harassment but also due to the fact that some forms of street harassment (for example, apparent greetings) can indeed seem ambiguous or

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even innocent if encountered as an isolated incident (Bailey, 2016) and not on a daily basis. As discussed, Liz Kelly's (1988) continuum of sexual violence, therefore, proves to be extremely useful when analysing the experiences of women because her research demonstrated that different forms of sexual violence shade into one another and it is not the severity index but the subjective experiences of the victims that matters. By using Kelly's (1988) continuum of sexual violence, this research introduces the discourse on Bangladeshi women's street harassment experiences along the continuum. Moreover, although street harassment is commonly regarded as gender-based violence and sexualised in nature, my argument is that analysing the phenomenon of street harassment through an intersectional lens is extremely important. Bangladeshi women's experiences of street harassment are situated at the intersections of multiple social categories like class, religion, and educational status, and so intersectionality allows an in-depth understanding of how these divisions work together to organise women's street harassment that a single axis, the gender-only interpretation would not be able to achieve (Collins and Bilge, 2016).

Keeping the above factors in consideration, the chapter will now categorise the experiences of women based on the nature of the harassment and at the same time, two key observations will be drawn out from the process: firstly, how far harassing behaviours are normalised by the culture and norms of Bangladeshi society; secondly, how women themselves experience some of the incidents as fleeting and temporary.

### ***'These happen far too often'<sup>3</sup>: Gestures and Sounds***

The first of Kelly's [1988] category of 'gestures and sound' along the continuum of violence includes a wide range of behaviours such as whistling, wolf-whistling, howling, making kissing sounds, vehicle beeping/ honking, facial expressions like winking, throwing kisses, smacking lips, licking. All of the participants of this research reported experiencing the above-mentioned behaviours from unknown men in public places. However, over two-thirds of the participants failed to recall any particular instances of experiencing gestures and sounds from unknown men because such instances occur too frequently. Amy is a university student who explained the mundane nature of such behaviours in her everyday life:

To be honest, whistling, honking like behaviours happen far too often and we are quite used to them. For some boys, whenever they see a girl, they have to do something because they can. Although these are common behaviours, still, it feels uncomfortable and not nice. Sometimes I look at myself whether I have something wrong in me and that's why they are behaving as such. (Amy, INT 24).

Jahida works in a local dress shop and also experiences such behaviours frequently:

It's absolutely horrible when some people make kissing sounds or other types of nasty vulgar sounds. Even the rickshaw pullers keep on using their bells for no reason at all, other than to get attention. What can you say!! Some people behave like this with all the girls - it does not matter whether the girl looks from a decent family or not. (Jahida, INT 39)

Both Amy and Jahida, along with the majority of the women participants, excluded certain sounds and gestures as harassment on initial discussion not only because of the frequency of such instances but also because they thought such behaviours do not 'count' as harassment since they do not pose a serious threat of violence. Two key ideas need to be highlighted from this concept of ordinary, mundane harassment - firstly, while they validate the use of Kelly's (1988) continuum of sexual

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<sup>3</sup> Amy, INT 24

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violence as a framework, a more flexible approach needs to be taken while investigating street harassment issues. Taking a binary approach and counting certain behaviours as either harassment or not harassment cannot fully capture the full extent of women's experiences (Stanko, 1985; Kelly, 1988; Vera-Grey, 2016). Harassment is subjective to individuals and relative to time, space, and context. While for one person, experiencing such behaviour can be a normal part of navigating public spaces and public transport, the same behaviours can have a serious impact on someone else. Secondly, harassment like gestures and sounds may seem innocuous while investigating violence against women, but the cumulative effects of such harassment can be staggering. Research shows that repeat victimisation of any sort of abuse or violence can cause increased vulnerability and anxiety (Awan and Zempi, 2017, p. 373) and create fear and diminish one's sense of security (Bowling, 2009).

In her comment, Amy said she is "used to" experiencing regular sounds and gestures in the streets and she thinks men can behave in such a way to unknown women because they can. Her comment affirms Connell's (2002) concept of socially organised hierarchies of gender where men hold the power to act on women and their bodies and being accustomed to the norms of society, women might be unaware of defining such behaviours as harassment. Jahida's comment is also demonstrative of this when she mentioned "even the rickshaw pullers" were motivated to use their bells to let the women know that they have been observed. Jahida who is also a college student besides working part-time in the dress shop believes that she is in a higher social class than the rickshaw pullers and should not be subjected to such behaviour from someone below her own class. However, due to the unequal gender order in society, men felt powerful enough to harass women on the streets, irrespective of their different social classes or other relative identities.

### ***'Their eyes are like an x-ray machine - trying to see through'<sup>4</sup>: Staring / Male Gaze***

Staring was unequivocally considered to be the most common form of street harassment by all the participants in this research. Similar to the behaviours like sounds and gestures, it was reported as such an ordinary daily experience that most of the participants found it difficult to recall any particular incident. Out of the 45 participants, only 13 were able to recount one or more particular instances of being stared at that they deemed worth mentioning. Dolon is a 26-year-old college student who needs to use the public bus every day. She spoke of how she has experienced all sorts of harassment on public buses even though she dresses in a traditional salwar kameez outfit. She describes how men continue to stare while travelling on public buses:

I place my orna very decently; still some people stare, as if, they are trying to see through the orna. Their eyes are like x-ray machine. What else can be done for them? (Dolon, INT 28)

Such behaviour is completely out of the 'normal' behaviour range since a sustained gaze is projected onto another stranger and makes her uncomfortable. Public spaces are considered as the realm of unfocused interactions between strangers (Goffman, 1971) and by prolonged staring, men breach 'civil inattention' (Goffman, 1963), for example, deference owed to strangers in a crowded public space.

Lina is an 18-year-old college student who also works part-time in a supermarket and she describes how she becomes subjected to regular objectifying gazes from the customers.

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<sup>4</sup> Dolon, INT28

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They just keep standing in the front when we do shelving [putting and displaying items on the shelves] in the shop. Or just keep staring at the breasts and bums. So sometimes I try to stare back too - sometimes they leave and sometimes do not. (Lina, INT 29)

What both the participants are describing here are the instances of receiving unwanted sexual attention and being sexually examined where their subjectivity is completely ignored (Langton, 2009). Feminist researchers have come up with the concept of 'male gaze' in order to describe such sexually objectifying behaviour which is also known as 'ogling,' 'leering' or 'checking out' in the popular languages. According to the gaze theory as described by Mulvey (1975), men's fantasy of the women's body is actively projected through gazing and thus women are reduced to an object to be gazed at only. Frederickson and Roberts (1997) also argued that male gazing enables sexual objectification and through sexual objectification, a woman's body, body parts or sexual functions are separated from her as a person, reducing her to the status of a physical object of male sexual desire as if they are capable of describing or representing her (Bartky, 1990). As explained by both Dolon and Lina, their bodies have been sexually examined by strange men in public places which made them remember their role as sexual beings, available and accessible to men. It is an insidious reminder to women to not consider themselves as equals who are free to navigate in public places with a proper sense of security and safety.

Male gazing is constructed by underlying systems of power and gender relations where men have the power to evaluate women physically and sexually, and women do not have any control to avoid it, rather they regulate their behaviour to act in a certain way (Quinn, 2002; Denzin, 1995). Looking is power, as Foucault has amply put it. bell hooks (2006) has linked the repressed subjectivity of the subaltern with the white patriarchy and white privilege of America's colonial history. She noted that in the colonial past, only the white people, ie, people who are in the dominant position, can observe and see. Blacks cannot look, let alone gaze since they are not in the dominant position. Connecting hooks' (2006) understanding of white patriarchy and gazing to the current patriarchal social structure of Bangladesh, it can be said that male gazing works as a medium of control which entices the other into submission and can play a critical role in framing female subjectivity. From an early age women are taught that their bodies are always visible and available for judgement by unknown male spectators and as a result, women internalise a sense of self-surveillance (Berger, 1972). This behaviour of self-surveillance is a mirror of the sexist power structures of society that aim to control and subordinate women. Body surveillance can in turn lead to several negative psychological and mental health risks including body shame, anxiety, and depression, as explained in the Objectification Theory by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997).

Consistent with Objectification Theory (Frederickson & Roberts, 1997), not only Aleef but several other women reported their experiences of feeling disgusted, angry, anxious, and insecure when being subjected to objectifying male gaze. Aleef works as a customer service representative in one of the superstores in Dhaka and due to the nature of her job, she regularly goes home at around 11 pm at night. Moreover, she travels in the public bus because she simply cannot afford to hire private or semi-private transport for herself every day. She explains her predicament of being extremely fearful to travel on public buses at those late hours of the night and yet, she could not find any other alternative solution due to her financial difficulties:

Some people stare in a very creepy way and that is scary. Considering the way people behave and stare at the transports, I fear being kidnapped too, sometimes, and other sexual violence, not to mention. (Aleef, INT 31)

Aleef's fear of rape and sexual violence is demonstrative of the fact that male gazing and subsequent sexual objectification carry an implicit threat or message where the women do not know what the

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perpetrator is capable of doing or which way the situation can take a turn. This in turn creates an environment of sexual fear for women because every instance of harassment held the potential threat of further sexual violence. Feminist scholars commonly believe that rape is more about power and control than sexual desire (Brownmiller, 1975; Buchwald et al. 1993; Herman 1990; Ward 1995) and in the same way, some men use sexual objectification and sexual terror together as a tool for psychologically controlling women.

### ***'Hey Sexy! Come with me<sup>5</sup>': Sexualised and Vulgar Verbal Harassment***

The category of sexualised and vulgar verbal harassment captures a wide range of behaviours including, sexualised addresses, sexualised evaluations of body parts such as the breasts, genitals and bottom, and sexual innuendos through graphic comments. These kinds of comments are the most frequent forms of verbal street harassment experienced by all the participants of this research, similar to non-verbal harassment. Neha pointed out several of the sexualised comments that most of the women recognise as 'ordinary' and normalise as the rough and tumble of navigating public spaces of Dhaka:

Calling 'hi beautiful', 'hey baby', 'hey sexy' are very ordinary incidents. If two or more men are together, they loudly talk dirty within themselves and indicate to the women as 'maal,' 'jinis' ([literally 'object']. Sometimes they loudly sing romantic songs, ask for phone numbers, or say, 'come with me,' 'let's go.' (Neha, INT 6)

The above comment made by Neha touches on a very well-known and well-debated conversation on the topic of street harassment where the argument is by greeting someone on the street or saying 'hi/hello,' some men are only being polite and not necessarily harasser (Kisling, 1991; Kisling & Kramarae, 1991; Bailey, 2017). The participants of this research gave varied answers when this topic was brought up as a follow-up conversation. Neha, for example, argued that sometimes a simple 'hi/hello' is not just a pleasant greeting because there might be another intent. The wording of the greeting might seem innocuous, but the intent might not be. She believes that women can feel the true intention behind a simple greeting by how the man says it, how and where he looks while saying it and also, how the woman feels in response to it. On the same note, Rihana (INT 8) points out that sometimes it can actually be confusing what the men say in the street and the women's reaction in response. Sometimes the comment can indeed be a compliment and not an assertion of power and other times, the comment can be rightly considered harassment, but the woman might feel flattered by it. She thinks that it could be ambivalent for women in certain instances due to the frequency of such behaviours – one person is giving a compliment now and another person is making a crude remark in the next minute and as a result, women themselves might not know how to feel about it or they might feel both validated and repulsed at the same time. Referring to Goffman (1963) here, again, when he introduced the concept of 'civil inattention', he claimed that the remarks of a sexual nature made by men towards women in public places are compliments for the attractiveness of the passing women, which women can gladly receive or ignore. However, Gardner (1989) refuted this logic by saying that the passing comments from male strangers on the street are forced interactions which carry passive hostility rather than the genuine intention of civil communication.

Another common phrase that most of the women recalled hearing on the streets of Dhaka is pointed out by Rumana: You will look nicer if you smile. (Rumana, INT 27)

This kind of harassing comment is one form of sexism because the men on the streets are dismissing the woman's autonomy over her own body, emotions and self-expression and asking her to smile is a

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<sup>5</sup> Neha INT 6

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way of controlling her body, demeanour, and overall presentation. This type of comment is demonstrative of the general misogynistic assumption of patriarchal society that woman has an emotional responsibility to always present themselves as happy, pleasant, and approachable regardless of how she feels or what she wants to express. Sara Ahmed also labelled such comments to cheer up or smile as 'emotion work' and the societal expectation that is attached to the performance of femininity (Ahmed, 2016). The call to smile or cheer up are not the type of verbal harassment that are exclusive to the Bangladeshi context only and in the past few years, several studies have been conducted both in the US and UK where the topic was focused. Vera-Gray (2019), for example, argued that such intrusion from the stranger men on the streets can disrupt a woman's subjectivity by interrupting their internal thoughts and forcing them to become aware of both their existence and the sexual objectification they are facing that moment.

While verbal harassment like greetings is normalised and counted as an 'ordinary' experience by all the participants, the majority of the participants recalled hearing an extreme and graphic form of sexualised comments at least at one point in their lives. Runi talks about hearing sexual remarks from unknown men, not as a direct conversation, but discussed loudly within her earshot.

I was walking home with a female friend when three boys were passing by and continuously telling between themselves - 'hmm, big, big, very big.' They were trying to assume the size [bra size] as well. (Runi, INT 7)

Risa had a similar incident of hearing sexual innuendo from unknown men on the streets.

We were walking past a group of 3/4 men when one of them told his friends – 'catch the ball, catch the ball.' They were not playing anything, so I did not understand what where they are talking about. But then my friend told me that they were indicating to our breasts. (Risa, INT 36)

The sexualised commentaries that Risa and Runi experienced by unknown men in public places referred to woman's breasts and thus discounted women as 'objects' only and disregarded their embodied selfhood. These comments are indicative of men's feelings of entitlement to sexualise unknown women on the streets and at the same time, their audacity and sense of power to announce it out loud for the women to hear.

### ***'Garment worker, you're ugly anyway<sup>6</sup>': Insulting and Threatening Verbal harassment***

Almost half the participants in this research shared experiences of hearing insulting and threatening comments from unknown men on the streets on many occasions. Including threats and insults as one of the forms of street harassment is an unexpected finding of this research and it is also alarming considering the fact that a high number of women participants admitted to receiving such comments and vividly remembered the incidents. Research from the USA and the UK have only touched on the range and context of insulting and threatening verbal harassment from stranger men on the streets (Bowman, 1993; Vera-Gray, 2016) and no such empirical research was conducted in Bangladesh to date. Participants have been targeted for insulting comments due to their skin complexion, weight (being underweight or overweight) and lower social status and these comments came both as arbitrarily and retaliation after being responded to or ignored by the women.

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<sup>6</sup> Munira INT43

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For Neha, insulting comments from unknown men were directed towards her being overweight and these have been frequent occurrences where she has been compared to a 'bag of rice or wheat' (which in the local connotation stands for something extremely heavy). She shared her experiences of hearing such abuse not only on the streets but inside the restaurants too.

Some men like to throw hurtful comments like 'look at that bag of rice' or 'bag of wheat.' While I do not want to take those comments seriously, but they do hurt sometimes.

I was hanging out with my friends in the restaurant and our food was just served. A bunch of boys from a nearby table were laughing at me and the food in front of me indicating that – I eat a lot. Why would someone do that to unknown people? (Neha, INT 6)

This type of comment indicates the common prejudice and stigma against overweight people which can be noticed in most societies around the world, including Bangladesh, and it is unfortunate but still socially acceptable to mock and disparage them (Ross and Moorti, 2005). For many decades, feminist writers have documented and argued against the ideal picture of femininity, i.e., thin figure, which society upholds and upon which all the other feminine achievement rests (Gill, 2007; Malson 1999). In the case of Bangladesh, the interviews reveal that the traditional ideas of feminine beauty primarily include thin bodies and white complexion and women who do not conform to these ideas of beauty are subjected to harassment on the streets with terms such as, 'muti' (fatty), 'Kali'<sup>7</sup> (black complexion).

Another participant disclosed her experience of facing an abusive comment directed towards her appearance.

I was walking with my sisters when a man tried to bump into me on purpose. When I told him to be careful, his friends said to me that 'you should be careful too. You are not pretty that we will bump into you on purpose.' (Tuba, INT 11).

Targeting women's attractiveness, desirability and age in the comments is a reminder for women about 'who' they are meant to be - the feminine and appropriate identity set by society. Mantilla (2015; p 41) discussed how insulting comments towards women are often gendered or sexualised in nature, involving the physical appearance, sexual attractiveness, sexuality, and rape-ability (or not) of the targets. Moreover, women need to be docile, passive, and non-challenging to the dominant patriarchal narratives and thus they can be labelled as the 'good girl.'

In her research, McCann (2017) explores harassing incidents on the streets that include insults and name-calling as a result of rejection and how quickly the rejections escalate to gender-specific verbal insults. Some participants in this research, on the other hand, shared incidents where they experienced derogatory comments arbitrarily due to their lower social and financial status and not in response to rejections. Participants who shared such incidents with the researcher were mostly working in garment factories, assistants in beauty salons and sales assistants in shops at that time.

If I put a little make-up on, people both young and old, tease bad mouth me and, my parents too sometimes. We have to walk past a grocery market every day on the way to work, some people always sit there and thus know that we work in the garment. They would shout at us like, you work in garments, what are you so proud of? You're ugly anyway. (Munira, INT 43)

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<sup>7</sup> Pushpo INT 38

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Sometimes when we are walking on the streets, even rickshaw pullers shout like, hey, where do you want to go? You will not need to pay me any fare. (Jahida, INT 39)

These comments indicate not only the power dynamics in a highly gendered society but also the internalised misogynistic behaviour of men. Such behaviour is represented as an act of power where men feel they are entitled to sexualise the bodies of women from the lower class since those women do not hold the same societal power they do and they are unlikely to respond, retaliate or report the incidents to police.

Munira, along with 6 other participants, spoke about receiving comments where they were called 'prostitutes' ('magi' in the local language). All of the women appeared deeply hurt and insulted when talking about such incidents. Historically, 'prostitute' or 'slut' are terms primarily used against lower-class women as a tool for shaming (Attwood, 2007). In this research, all the women who received this particular insult work in the readymade garment industry and are from lower social class. The term was used against them not only to shame and hurt them for their poverty and social status but at the same time, such comments come from the underlying assumption of society about the sexual availability of poor women (Collins, 2004).

### ***Physical Harassment***

Physical harassment is the worst form of street harassment, as described by the participants of this research. Over three-quarters of the participants have been victims of different types of physical harassment by unknown men in public places. A wide range of experiences is categorised as physical harassment including touching, poking, pinching, groping, grabbing as well as physically blocking the path.

Here, I highlight the fact that feminist scholars have been giving cautionary warnings that gender-based violence exists in a continuum (Kelly, 1988; Gardner, 1995) but still, while brutal assaults like rape get wider attention, incidents like touching, groping, grabbing are generally overlooked. However, previous studies suggest that street harassment is often a precursor to legally recognisable and grievous crimes including stalking, battery, sexual assault, and rape (Roberts, 1993). Hence, there is always the risk that one act of street harassment can potentially escalate to something more harmful and severe form of crime and many of the participants have confirmed this fear of escalation. Shana, for example, believes that all street harassers are potential rapists:

I think people who harass women on the streets, will rape too only if they get the opportunity. They are not rapists yet only because of lack of opportunity. (INT 18)

Participants of this research shared their experiences that ranged from touching, groping, and poking in crowded places like shopping centres, public buses, busy streets, or even empty streets to physically blocking their way as well as severe or attempted physical/ sexual assault.

I feel more insecure in crowded shopping centres. In Gausia, for example, you will be bumped a hundred times (Rihana, INT 8)

In the crowded streets, some men walk in such a way that they can push women's breasts with their elbows. Sometimes, some men will touch the bum or place a hand on the waist and walk away quickly. It's hard to know who exactly did it in the crowd. (Minara, INT 21)

For example, I'm walking on the road, and someone just moves his elbow forward, to poke at the breast. Or I'm walking on the road, someone touches my bum. These are common incidents

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every day. When you are getting out of the house, nowadays it feels as if I could place a 'cage' around me. (Dolon, INT 28)

When asked about sharing their experiences of physical harassment, the majority of the participants claimed never to have experienced anything physical and yet afterwards, they gave accounts like the above comments and at the same time, labelled such incidents as 'ordinary' or 'common.' The minimisation and normalisation of physical harassment by the participants can be read in several ways. The participants simply might not want to identify their experiences as physical harassment, or they did not want to see themselves as one of those women who had received a more intense or severe form of abuse or assault. Kelly (1988; p.221) noted that women who experience sexual violence may often minimise their experiences because of "either the influences of dominant meanings or the desire to not see themselves, or be seen by others, as someone who had been assaulted".

Even though the participants spoke of their experiences as 'common' or 'ordinary,' their accounts are also accompanied by a heightened feeling of vulnerability and powerlessness. Dolon (INT 28) explained that being a victim of rape or other forms of sexual assault is one of her constant daily fears and she dreads this form of violence more than any other form. Hence, when she wants to put a 'cage' around her – as she later explains - the primary idea is to ensure protection from the outside world by creating some kind of barrier between her bodily self and the world. This is both ironic and interesting that in the usual metaphorical sense 'cage' denotes confinement and longing for escape, however, Dolon is using the metaphor to express her desire for freedom from street harassment.

Rihana's comment, also agreed by most of the participants who go to the crowded shopping centres in Dhaka, illustrates that despite being a public place and the presence of her friends or family who accompany her, the perpetrators of physical harassment can always operate in such a way to avoid detection by others - a fleeting act of groping. Not only did the perpetrators take the opportunity of the crowd to grope and get away but also the silence of the victims who, most of the time, were overwhelmed and shocked by the harassment were unable to react properly. Opportunistic harassment and assault like sudden poking in the breasts or touching the bottom occur even in busy public streets and on public transport.

All the participants who had to use public transport like a bus reported being subjected to physical harassment. The experience of someone bumping against them while on a crowded bus has always been a highly stressful feeling, as stated by the participants, because they felt highly alarmed yet uncertain whether the physical contact was intended or an accident.

I was sitting on the edge of the seat; a tall man was standing right beside me. Because he was very tall, his, you know, ... that... (mumbles) was right in front of my face. And it (penis) was touching me frequently. So, I asked him several times to move a little bit. He was not listening to me; he was rather looking at me with different facial expressions. I was feeling really bad at that time. I was feeling like why this is happening to me, when it will be over, and why is this man not listening to me. (Saika, INT 25)

One man was standing facing me. He was looking at me frequently. I tried to look around to avoid eye contact, but I caught him several times looking at me creepily. At one point, the bus did not even press the brake, he completely fell over me. (Dolon, INT 28)

Crowded buses, broken and bumpy roads, and rough or reckless driving can provide an excuse for physical harassment allowing physical proximity and seemingly accidental bumps. Hence, it can be suggested that a crowded bus along with the context of anonymity offers plenty of opportunities for

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the perpetrators to commit physical abuse. Moreover, the perpetrators take advantage of the fleeting nature of their actions to facilitate the harassment and then get away. The ephemeral nature of the transport environment is of significance here because it gives the women a notion that the situation is temporary. Hence, Saika explained that she found herself in a complicated situation where she knew that her journey will be over soon and thus, will there be enough time to confront the harasser. At the same time, she had the feeling of being trapped and being unable to remove herself from that situation, she felt extremely anxious and helpless. She also admitted that in every moment of that 'temporary' situation, she was praying and hoping that the perpetrator would disembark, and her ordeal will be over.

Thus, due to the fleeting nature of the physical harassment, the participants might not have enough time to mentally process what was happening to them and whether and how to formulate a response before the situation was over and the perpetrator disappears. Further, in the context of public transport, the transient nature of the environment also shapes women's experiences of physical harassment as firstly, the woman wants to make sure the physical contact is deliberate and not due to the motion of the transport. Secondly, the woman keeps anticipating that the journey of either the perpetrator or her own will be over soon and there will not be enough time to react to the harassment. All in all, the fleeting nature of the physical harassment, the crowded public space as well as the transient nature of the public transport – each of them contribute to causing distress and confusion for the women who simultaneously attempt to negotiate the ambiguity and uncertainty of the situation while also desperately looking for a way out.

### ***'No, it's not romantic at all, it's downright scary and creepy'<sup>8</sup>: Following/ Stalking***

More than half of the participants of this research reported being followed at least once in their lifetime, while three participants reported being stalked to such an extent that it seriously affected their daily lives for a considerable amount of time. While in the popular discourse, 'following' and 'stalking' are used interchangeably, in academic and legal research, however, following someone is one of three main aspects of the stalking crime (Baum et al, 2009; Fox et al., 2011). Another aspect of stalking crime is– whether the perpetrator invokes fear, anxiety and worry in the victims about what is happening to them or what could potentially happen if the behaviour escalates (Fox et al 2011; Catalano, 2012; Reyns & Englebrecht, 2013). The third and final aspect of stalking crime is whether the stalker makes or stands as a credible threat towards the victim (Fox et al., 2011).

What is important to understand in this distinction is that the unwanted and repeated pursuit of following needs to occur at least more than two occasions in order for it to be legally considered stalking<sup>9</sup>. This is endorsed in academic research as well (Logan 2010; Meloy et al 2011; Eterovic-Soric et al, 2017). In line with this, 'following' behaviour can be placed at one end of the continuum, proposed by Kelly (1988), which may or may not progress towards stalking and other threats of physical and sexual violence. It is, with this reminder, that I now detail the concept of placing 'following' in the continuum and the fear of escalation as expressed by the participants of this research.

In their interview, Neha, recalls the following:

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<sup>8</sup> Ramisa INT 32

<sup>9</sup> For the UK - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1997/40/section/4>

For the various states of the US - Saunders, R. (1998). The legal perspective on stalking. In The psychology of stalking (pp. 25-49). Academic Press.

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Sometimes I am being followed by unknown men all the way to home, and if they are in a group, then the usual behaviours like staring, teasing etc go on simultaneously too. (Neha, INT 6)

A man left his seat for me and when I got off the bus, he got off too and started following me. I became really scared because I was new to the city at the time. After some time, he came to me and said - I left my seat for you on the bus, can I have your name? (Minara, INT 21)

As understood from both Neha and Minara's accounts, the harassers were unknown men from the streets or bus and the 'following' behaviour was not repeated by the same person afterwards. However, what has not been explored in the research is the fact that women encounter 'following' behaviour regularly while navigating in public places. If we look at the behaviour itself and not focus on the perpetrator, the behaviour is taking place repeatedly and regularly by different strangers and therefore, the cumulative effect as a result of 'following' behaviour is no less than stalking.

As seen in Neha's account, the role of fear and fear of possible escalation to other violence have been noticed in all the other participants too who shared their experiences of being followed.

When I was in school, me, my sister and my mom went shopping in 'new market.' On our way back home, 3 boys used to follow us all the way home, and my sister was young too at that time. She got scared. And this is not too uncommon even today. Stalking is really common. (Runi, INT 7)

For 6 months, a boy harassed me too much on the streets. Like, he would always follow me everywhere, from tuition to home - home to tuition; he would wait outside my tuition place, outside my home, he would walk by my side and talk... I could not even go to the balcony because he was just standing in front of our house. So, I had to stop going to tuition even. It was a stressful time being inside the home all the time. (Lina, INT 29)

I used to see him on the streets right after getting out of the campus. Even within the campus, if I am sitting in the cafe, all of a sudden, I used to find him sitting right at the front table, directly facing me. Some of my friends said that he likes me. But it's not romantic at all, it's downright scary and creepy. (Ramisa, INT 32)

The role of fear is common in all of these accounts where the participants are facing prolonged and constant unwanted intrusion. It is not only the act of following itself but the possibility of being attacked by the harassers which created a sense of powerlessness and anxiety among the women and as a result, they have to modify their movements which affect every aspect of their lives. As Heckels and Roberts (2010) argue, by demonstrating the constant presence around the women, the perpetrators are displaying an air of dominance and control over their victims.

Another aspect which is noticed from Ramisa's account is the motivation of the perpetrator for their 'following' behaviour. Ramisa as well as the other participants think that the primary motivation for the majority of the 'following' harassers is to initiate an intimate relationship. Mullen et al (2000) also explored that desiring a romantic relationship with their victims is one of the key motives and patterns of stalkers. By being constantly around the woman, the perpetrator is trying to prove his interest and devotion and the glorification of romantic pursuit and associated behaviour in both society and the media can only cause further encouragement for the perpetrator (Cupach & Spitzberg, 2000). However, my research suggests that such behaviour can also be motivated by hate, a need for revenge, power and/or racism (Bocij et al, 2002).

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I have seen this many times on the bus. Those bus helpers start by sweet talking to the girls, then started following them home along with a few friends and then, if the girls do not like them or refuse to start a relationship, then they start throwing nasty comments and gestures towards her (Munira, INT 43)

As seen in Munira's account, the pursuits started in a seemingly innocent way by seeking a romantic relationship but then can escalate into abusive behaviour following the rejection from the women and therefore, the women's constant fear of escalation when being followed is not unjustified. Another aspect that needs to be highlighted here is the sense of normalisation and commonality of such behaviour which was expressed in both Runi and Munira's accounts. Both of them have seen such behaviour numerous times and labelled those as 'really common' because 'following' did not escalate to other forms of sexual assault or violence. On the other hand, if the 'following' does escalate to other types of violence, the incidents can be labelled as an attempted sexual assault with the possibility of excluding the mention of being followed altogether. Thus, a definitive categorisation of the experiences is complicated here since the women keep disregarding their 'following' experiences as ordinary until the situation escalates to a grievous form of assault or violence and in the process, they are also constantly disregarding their feelings of being intimidated, unsafe and unable to safely use the public spaces.

### ***Indecent Exposure and Public Masturbation***

Indecent exposure or flashing, as commonly known, is considered to be a serious form of sexual harassment. The term refers to the sexual behaviour of an unknown man exposing their penis in public places. It is one of the many forms of everyday violence, which is fleeting in nature, yet very visual and shocking. Although less than half the participants of this research have disclosed experiencing this type of harassment, however, there was a general sense of unwillingness to disclose such incidents. An excerpt from the research journal elaborates on the changes in the participants' postures and voices when they were sharing such incidents:

#### **03 Sept 2016 (Risa, INT 36)**

She started speaking in a very low voice - so low that I had to ask her to kindly speak up; otherwise, the recorder will not record anything clearly. Needless to mention that there was nobody else present other than us in the room where the interview was conducted. She also leaned forward towards me as much as possible but was actively trying to avoid eye contact. Visibly she was very embarrassed to share such an incident. Is she embarrassed that such an incident has occurred to her? She also could be embarrassed thinking that I am judging her as a 'good' or 'bad' girl.

Given that the participants who experienced these behaviours were all from different classes of society, it is difficult to determine what causes the unwillingness, however, the sexually conservative attitude of the Bangladeshi society could be the key. In Bangladesh, sex is a largely taboo topic and any open discussion on sex and sexual harassment is avoided as much as possible (Nahar et al., 2013). Three of the participants shared their experiences of being shocked and frightened when they encountered such behaviour in their childhood, before the age of 18.

It happened when I was a little girl. A man flashed his thing for a second and he was smiling creepily too. I was coming back home from the corner shop - like 2 mins walk from home. He was standing in our alleyway, flashed at me, and then left. I did not know him, never saw him before. At that time, I felt like I have suddenly grown up. (Risa, Int 36)

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We had a driver who became almost like a member of our family because he used to love my younger brother a lot. I was young too at that time, around 10 or 11 at most, but that man flashed at me once and said some nasty words. It was totally unexpected from him and I could not tell anybody in the family about it. (Minara, Int 21)

We had a caretaker for our house who was very old at that time. I was a young girl of about 9 or 10. Because he was such an old man, I was never scared of him for anything. One day I was playing by myself within the boundary of our house and that man was sitting in his small space, like you know a tool and wall boundary. Out of nowhere, he suddenly flashed at me. I was quite stunned and confused about what just happened. That was the first time I saw a penis too. Within a few seconds, I ran back into my home as fast as I could. (Shikha, Int 45)

It bears noting that these experiences happened during childhood, and thus, there is a need to reflect on the hierarchies of an adult over a child as well as those of male and female. Münzer et al (2016) discussed that some perpetrators of flashing behaviour target young children for multiple reasons, such as, children would not react or disclose the behaviours to adults if threatened and being aware of the social stigma where children are not often believed by the adults even if such behaviour is shared. Although none of the above participants could clearly articulate if there was any long-term effect on them following those incidents, but it can be said that the incident must have impacted their young minds in such a way that all of them could remember the incidents even after more than 10 years.

Contrary to the above comments where at least two of the perpetrators were already known to the victims, the rest of the incidents of both flashing and masturbation that took place were in public spaces and committed by strangers. Langelan (1993) has argued that anonymity in densely populated public spaces makes it easier for flashing to take place. With this understanding the following experience of Nazrana is important to note:

Never happened to me. But some time ago, there was a madman always roaming around in front of this dormitory. As you know, the dormitory is just opposite to one of the main gates of the university, there are always girls coming in and out of the university gate or coming in and out of their dormitory. That mad man who was wearing all dirty clothes with long, dirty beard and hair, used to ask the girls, 'you want to see something?' while holding his penis in one hand over clothes, as if he is ready to take off his cloth. Girls used to panic and that was his fun. Then one day a girl confronted him and answered, 'yes, show me.' He was stuck and ran away. (Nazrana, INT 15)

Perpetrators take the opportunity of the fleeting nature of the flashing behaviour to commit such offence and most of the time, women become extremely shocked, not only due to being flashed at but also due to the fact that it was happening in a public space in front of a large number of men and women (McNeil, 1987).

Men's public masturbation is also a form of exhibitionism and closely associated with the practice of indecent exposure. Research suggests that inappropriate public behaviour like public masturbation is not only a form of sexual aggression by itself but also can be preceded, accompanied, or followed by other forms of sexual assault and harassment (Karpman, 1951). It is to be noted here that all the encounters of being flashed at as shared by the participants were not followed by any encounters of masturbation. However, the experiences of seeing men masturbating are also encounters of indecent exposure. As previously argued, categorising harassing behaviours on the streets in discrete units is complicated because of the ways multiple different intrusive behaviours can be experienced within the same encounter. Two incidents of public masturbation as shared by two participants of this research occurred in busy public places like public buses and over-bridge.

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I was sitting on one of the front seats of the bus, those are reserved seats for women. I heard a girl screaming and shouting at someone from the back. I did not understand at first what was happening because the bus was moderately crowded. Later I understood that he was masturbating while sitting in the very back seat of the bus while looking at the girl. The man was wearing a shirt and a lungi [a form of clothing]. I saw him being dragged at by his shirt to the front by another man in order to kick him out. That was the end of it basically. (Bani, INT 09)

I did not see anything like that but one of my friends shared an incident. She was passing through a busy railway overbridge<sup>10</sup> with plenty of people and hawkers. One man was masturbating standing there, not facing the crowd though. But none of the people was saying anything, people were just casually passing by, giving a glance at him. I feel utterly disgusted. (Rivana, I INT 10)

What is noticeable here is that flashing and public masturbation does not interfere with the general norm of non-verbal or nonrepresentational modes of communication in public spaces (Bissell, 2010, 271), is not physical assault, and does not require using sexual language or gesture. However, such behaviours are still a form of sexual violence because a powerful man is masturbating in front of an unwilling woman and making her witness the act and thus, the woman can be personally violated with experiences of fear, anxiety, shock, and intimidation. Flashing and masturbating behaviour can also be placed in the continuum of violence because the women do not know what the perpetrator is capable of or planning to do after finishing his act. It is a legitimate fear considering that the perpetrator disregards the presence of onlookers, and bystanders and does not hold any fear of ramifications for their behaviours.

Another aspect we can notice here is that apart from the incidents that took place in the childhood of the participants, the rest of the incidents either happened to someone else they know or incidents they have heard from friends. This could be due to the social stigma and shame associated with the victims of sexual harassment who are often blamed and shamed for their own experiences (Chowdhury and Fileborn, 2020). As such, such cultural taboos can contribute towards a cultural context where such harassment can thrive, barriers to disclosure can continue and harassers can get away.

### 5.3 CONNECTING THE CONTINUUM OF EXPERIENCES

The key concept framing my research is Liz Kelly's (1988) continuum of sexual violence and the concept has been discussed across the different categories of harassment in this chapter. In this section, at first, we will see how street harassment sits on the continuum of sexual violence and then, we will focus on addressing the important factors in order to understand the normalisation and minimisation of harassing experiences, not only in the context of Bangladeshi culture but in general.

Kelly's (1988) widely used continuum of violence has several uses in relation to sexual violence. It highlights a wide range of experiences and behaviours, ranging from those daily harassing experiences (e.g., staring, verbal comments) which are stereotypically considered as 'ordinary' or 'trivial' to actions that are legally and discursively condemned for committing 'real' violence, such as rape. The concept also assists women to make sense of their own experiences 'by showing how "typical" and "aberrant"

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<sup>10</sup> A bridge that crosses over the railway

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male behaviour shade into one another' (Kelly 1988, p.75). This concept rejects any kind of linear, hierarchical determination of behaviours or experiences in terms of seriousness or harm. Rather, the concept posits that all forms of sexual violence are capable of causing harm and all of these behaviours disregard the consent of women's bodily and sexual selves. Accordingly, there are two different aspects of the continuum. Firstly, a continuum is 'a continuous series of elements or events that pass into one another and which cannot be easily distinguished' (Kelly 1988, p.76). The findings in this chapter show that it was not only the obvious and serious physical and sexual acts that the participants experienced while navigating in public places but different sorts of intrusive behaviours and many times several of these behaviours are experienced within the same encounter. Secondly, a continuum recognises a 'basic common character' underpinning and linking what might otherwise be seen as disparate phenomena' (Kelly 1988, p.76). Kelly (1988, p.139) noted that it is extremely important for feminist researchers to identify the common characteristics of different experiences in order to rightly name and describe women's experiences. Kelly (1988, 76) herself pointed out some basic characteristics of sexual abuse which are commonly used to control and dominate (mostly) women, namely, 'abuse, intimidation, coercion, intrusion, threat and force'.

In terms of placing street harassment on the continuum, street harassment shares several common characteristics with other forms of sexual violence. According to the findings presented here, the behaviours and actions are sexualised, even the behaviours like staring and gestures, and women experience those behaviours as invasive as well as sexually offensive. Even the participants who did not experience any criminal forms of sexual violence, still often recalled particular instances when they feel threatened and assessed the possibility of escalation to other grievous forms of sexual violence, most often rape. Diya (INT 22), for example, shared one particular incident as she was walking towards the bus stop on a very early morning, at around 7.00 am. A three-wheeler vehicle went past her very closely even though there was plenty of space on the street. Since there were not many people on the street at that hour, she did not react in case the driver stopped and escalated to other forms of violence. She went on:

I just stood there and let him pass. Just at that moment, a middle-aged man walked past me and threw a really dirty comment. He observed my silence toward the three-wheeler and took the opportunity.

Diya expressed her fear of being harassed, assaulted, raped, or even murdered by the unknown three-wheeler driver as well as her helplessness of not being able to find any assistance from the bystanders since the streets were almost empty at that hour and hence, decided to be silent.

On a different note, Kelly (1988) also added that the concept is not rigid, rather it is necessary to develop an intersectional analysis of the continuum by recognising the differential experience of differently situated women. In this respect, Vera-Gray (2017, p.2) elaborated that "although all women and girls are in some way subject to gender discrimination, all women and girls are not discriminated against in the same way. Hierarchies of worth situate women and girls in relation to each other, as well as in relation to men and boys." We have seen, as the conversations with research participants reveal, different experiences of harassment that invoke different power relationships and intersecting positions. For example, the power that exists between young women and older men (see the Indecent Exposure and Public Masturbation section) as well as different positions of work, either in garment factories or attending university. I build on this, in chapter seven when I bring a specific intersectional analysis to the data being presented here.

While the topics of sexual violence have been hyper-visible in recent times due to the advance of print, electronic and social media, the findings of this chapter suggest that the harassing behaviours on the streets which often escalate to sexual assault are masked and minimised by a culture in which men's

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violence against women is normalised. Kelly and Radford (1990, p. 19) argue that women are 'systematically encouraged to minimise the violence that [they] experience from men' and the findings of this chapter point to a level of acceptance of several forms of harassment, at least for some participants. Sometimes women can be 'accepting' of what seem to be very serious forms of harassment. Some forms of harassment have been repeatedly labelled as 'common,' and regular occurrences and some also stated that such behaviours are part of being in public places as a woman. Moreover, it is evident from the experiences of some of the participants that many of the incidents they encountered in public places can be clearly considered sexual abuse and not a mundane form of street harassment. The issue of minimising certain behaviours as sexual abuse could be due to women's understanding of problematic behaviours from 'normal,' 'everyday' harassment to a form of sexualised/gendered violence (Madison and Minichiello, 2000). A plethora of research has focused on women's understanding and minimisation of problematic behaviour has been represented in many different ways, for example, as evidence of internalised gender oppression (Cairns, 1997), as a coping mechanism to minimise the seriousness of the experiences (Madison and Minichiello, 2000), and as a failure to properly understand or recognise the sexually harassing behaviour (Hinze, 2004). As discussed in chapter two of this thesis, women's reluctance to properly recognise such behaviour as harassing and normalising certain abusive behaviour can also pose a significant barrier in challenging those behaviours which can eventually lead to various consequences, including the perpetrators getting away from the blame, blames being shifted to the victims instead as well as self-blaming by the victims (Eaton, 2019).

Apart from the perceptions of women, the law also plays a central role in deciding behaviours and actions which are condemnable and criminal and in terms of sexual violence, the focus is almost entirely on the extreme forms of violence while disregarding the mundane forms of women's experiences (Kelly and Radford, 1990). Thus, the law still counts behaviours and experiences in the binary sense – either something is violence or not violence; either something is abusive or not abusive (Kelly and Radford, 1990, Vera-Gray, 2016). As a result of this, participants of this research have been observed repeatedly to struggle between the dominant patriarchal notion of violence and their own practical experiences of violence. Consequently, some of them forget about experiencing any particular behaviour, some minimise the range of the behaviours while some do not label certain behaviour as abusive or assault. In Bangladesh and the neighbouring southeast Asian countries, the term 'Eve-teasing' is used to refer to street harassment i.e., popular discourse. The term itself plays a vital role in minimising and downplaying the harm caused to women and at the same time, inciting victim blaming (Nahar et al, 2013). It is important to understand that routine and repetitive street harassment can indeed have a cumulative effect on women and when such behaviours are normalised, this is a societal justification for men's behaviours enabling women's suffering and complaints to be disregarded (Kelly 1988, p. 104). An important contribution of this research is, therefore, to draw attention to and problematise these normalised yet routine and repetitive forms of street harassment, recognise their significance as well as reflect on women's lived experiences regarding these forms of harm.

### 5.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has offered a broader picture of street harassment in the context of Bangladesh. The primary focus of this research is to be 'subject-centric' by collecting and centring the voices and experiences of women, an approach endorsed by other feminist researchers like Powell and Henry (2017). This research has also included certain behaviours which were categorised and labelled as 'ordinary,' or 'harmless' in popular discourse, but my data suggests that repetitive encounters with intrusive behaviours can be harmful and cumulative. The nature of such harms can include constant fear of being victimised, being perpetually alert, women restricting their time in public spaces,

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changing their schools, workplaces, and neighbourhoods to ensure future safety and such cumulative effects further highlights the value of understanding street harassment as a continuum. Using a continuum of violence concept helps to understand the fluidity and complexity of street harassment with a range of different behaviours which are not always isolated or discrete incidents. The continuum provides a space to understand that the behaviours which are commonly labelled as 'everyday' or 'harmless' can be harmful and the cumulative effect on the women as a result of repetitive harassment can be substantial. By using Kelly's conceptualisation in the context of Bangladesh, this research has advanced and expanded the knowledge and understanding of street harassment beyond the context of global North where this concept has primarily been used. Such cross-cultural implementation of the concept can recognise the similarity and differences in the understandings and perspectives of street harassment as well as the importance of bridging them. Having identified the range of behaviours experienced as street harassment, we shall now turn to look at how the women respond to this harassment and the kind of coping skills they use to keep themselves safe while navigating public places.

### CHAPTER SIX

## How Women Respond to Harassment: The Dynamic Nature of their Agency and Coping Mechanisms

### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The research findings discussed in the previous chapter focused on the nature and frequency of street harassment of a group of Bangladeshi women in the urban context. As we saw, these Bangladeshi women experience different forms of harassment every day while navigating in public places and on public or semi-public transport. This chapter builds upon those experiences to explore the different types of measures that the participants take to minimise and prevent further victimisation and the way the participants respond while dealing with harassment. Drawing primarily upon the personal experiences of the participants, I aim to draw out the agency of these women, their help-seeking and disclosure behaviour as well as their accessibility to justice and support, because what is also clear from my fieldwork is that these women took steps to manage the situation and to protect themselves, as far as their situations allowed. I also aim to draw out particular issues and barriers that the participants faced when attempting to disclose their experiences to family, friends, and formal institutions like the police.

A key finding of the previous chapter was identifying a wide range of behaviours that can be understood as street harassment and how some of them are not distinctly recognised as harassing behaviour by the participants. Rather, they are often seen as common occurrences while navigating public spaces. Developing this finding through the interview data, the coping processes and management measures deployed by these women in response to street harassment seem to follow a pattern of 3 stages: prevention, response, and disclosure. This chapter, therefore, begins by exploring the precautionary measures that the participants take in order to prevent or minimise their daily encounters with street harassment. This thesis recognises that while some of the precautionary measures taken by the women are developed through their careful understanding of the situation, some are also taken instinctively - their socialisation process while growing up as a women in the patriarchal society of Bangladesh plays a distinct part in this respect. I then focus on how they respond immediately after encountering harassment on the streets or public transport. What kind of situation empowers them to respond to their harassers? What kind of scenarios or fear might prevent them from responding at all? Finally, in tracking their journeys of disclosure, I look at the particular issues the participants face while considering disclosing their experiences to their family and friends. What kind of issues do the participants encounter while considering reporting their experiences to the police? How were their experiences understood and recognised by the police, if reported? How did the existing experiences affect the mindset of the participants for the future report to the police? Thus, the analysis permits a new understanding regarding the disclosing and reporting behaviours of street harassment in the public spaces of Dhaka city.

## Chapter Six

### 6.2 WOMEN'S PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY: A CONTINUUM OF STRATEGIES

The women who took part in this research described an extensive range of strategies that they adopt in order to manage their perceptions of safety as well as to minimise or prevent the likelihood of being victims of street harassment. From the data I have identified different types of preventive and avoidance strategies that can also be viewed as a continuum rather than radically different measures and each of the strategies is one of the many options that the participants can deploy depending on the circumstances in order to manage their perceptions of safety. Although excellent research on the topic of women's safety strategies is available in the literature (Pain, 1991; Koskela, 1997; Day et al, 2003), I would argue that my research is the first one to initiate the conversation and explore the safety and coping mechanisms of women against street harassment in Bangladesh. The strategies adopted by Bangladeshi women are likely to be different from western women (target groups in most of the available literature) due to the wide socio-economic and cultural situation of the global South and global North.

#### *Dressing Style*

The topic of dressing up in a certain way as a strategy to avoid harassment emerged repeatedly during the interviews. Many women admitted to self-surveilling their clothing style depending on the time, location, and context of their journey as a way of minimising the risk of harassment. For instance, Runi describes how she uses her clothing, including the 'orna' (a long scarf), dependent upon her context, anticipates the level of risk and then acts accordingly.

Depending on the situation, I change how I dress. During the day, I wear my 'orna' (long scarf) normally, but if it is in the evening, and I am heading home with friends after class, I will definitely place the orna over my head and sometimes cover my face too, so that the boys do not know who I am or whether I am wearing any sorts of makeup or how I am actually looking etc. Basically, when it's evening, I get full-packed up like that. (Runi, Int 7)

What needs to be noticed here is that Runi does not cover her hair during the day, however, she feels that by covering her hair and face with 'orna' in the evening, she can make herself unobtrusive and thereby, avoid unnecessary attention on the streets. She could not properly clarify what prompted her to adopt this strategy – whether to simply conceal herself from public attention or to give the impression that she is a follower of the Islamic customs regarding clothing, like hijab/ niqab or both. Research on women's clothing style and street harassment is still very limited and those have focused on finding whether women's dressing style could be the cause of harassment. However, managing the dressing style as a way of preventing and minimising potential harassment remains to be fully explored by scholars. Mason-Bish and Zempi (2019) explored how veiled Muslim women were at an increased risk of street harassment in the UK and also described many instances where the women had to take the difficult decision to reluctantly take the veil off in order to ensure safety. As a Muslim-majority country, the situation is often the opposite in Bangladesh and my data shows that many Bangladeshi women resort to wearing the veil as a strategy to manage the risks of street harassment. Similar to Runi, another participant Tara also shared her use of 'orna' as a form of veil to cover her hair and thus, exhibit a sense of decency as a Muslim woman which might save her from being a victim of street harassment.

I cover my head with my 'orna' whenever I am out. I am not wearing any borka or abaya though, just using my 'orna' to cover my head. (Tara, INT 5)

Not only the above two women, but many of the other participants also resort to veiling especially after dark and also in different other circumstances as a strategy to steer unnecessary attention away

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from themselves. None of them follows the Islamic clothing practice of veil in their everyday lives regularly except in those circumstances when they need to feel safer against harassment. Extensive and follow-up conversations with the participants revealed that the majority of the women believed that veiling is the ultimate 'decent' form of clothing for Bangladeshi women in order to deter the occurrences of street harassment. At the same time, some of them also admitted that they themselves have experienced and witnessed occurrences of street harassment even while wearing different types of veils. Bani (INT 9), for example, shared the plight of her close friend who always wears a hijab covering her hair, neck and back. They travel together to their college every day and receive comments from unknown men like 'that hijabi girl is joss (local slang for nice) or 'look at that Alif Laila/ Arabian Nights'<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, even though veiling was regarded to be the utmost form of modesty and considered to be the safest form of coping strategy by the participants, it is, in reality, not always a foolproof preventive measure against street harassment.

Moving on from the veiling strategy, Bangladeshi women need to be extremely aware of even their regular dressing up style in order to manage their perception of safety. Some very early research (Gardner, 1990; McDowell, 1995; Munt, 1995) stated that women were advised by law enforcement institutions to be aware and manage their dress for the sake of remaining safe and preventing crime. Participants of this research mentioned policing their clothing style not only on their own accord but also due to the influence and pressure from families. Depending on the destination, choice of transport as well as the spatial and temporal context of their journey, women need to make the important decision of choosing their dressing style before leaving the house every day. Although the majority of the women also added that harassment can occur no matter what they are wearing, but it can be aggravated by the choice of clothes.

I always chose to wear 'salwar kameez' considering the location and surrounding of the university. I did not wear tops or jeans even if I wanted to, sometimes fearing more insecurity or harassment. (Anila, INT 3)

Anila's preference for traditional outfits due to the location and surroundings of her university is a very important point as it was also reflected in another participant's comment. Anila's university is located in a busy middle-class area of Dhaka city (Tikatuli) with both residential and commercial neighbourhoods (Siddiqui et al., 2016). Hence, it is both from her own perception and experience that wearing any non-traditional clothing like jeans, tops, shirts are only going to draw more attention from the public on the streets and more subsequent harassment. An opposite scenario is noticed in the responses from another participant, Amina, who is talking about her friend and her preferred way of clothing. Both Amina and her friend study at a prestigious university located in the upper-class neighbourhood of Dhaka city. However, her friend makes her journey every day from a middle-class neighbourhood by public buses.

I have a friend who likes to wear western outfits like jeans and tops or shirts. Her mom always asks her to carry a scarf with her because she is travelling alone on public buses. Of course, with the western dress, she is not going to cover herself fully with the scarf but only wrap it around her neck. Her mom asks her to wrap the scarf when she is on the bus, and she can take it off when inside the university. (Amina, Int 23)

It is important to notice here the relation between the spatial context and women's perception of safety. It is not known whether her friend received any harassment due to her dressing style while at

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<sup>11</sup> Alif Laila/ Arabian Nights was a popular Indian TV series in Bangladesh during the 1990s depicting the lives of Arabs.

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the university, but both she and her mother feel safer even with that dressing style only within the university campus. However, she has to give an impression of following the conventional dressing style by wearing a scarf while travelling from the middle-class area by public buses and hence, these are the two spatial contexts where they did not feel safer due to their clothing choice and had to adopt a strategy to minimise potential harassment. It is obvious from the interviews that the topic of dressing style is a controversial one among the participants where some desire to dress the way they like and push cultural boundaries while also battling with the desire to stay safe and avoid unwanted harassment in public places.

### *Being on alert*

One of the most protective behaviours that almost all the participants agreed on regularly practising, both consciously and subconsciously, was to be on alert all the time while in public places. Many of the women in this research explained that they habitually make advance planning regarding the dress they are going to wear, the time of the trip, the route they are going to take, the transport they are going to use and how they will return home in order to minimise the risk of being victims of harassment and to ensure their own safety from strangers. All these advanced plans that the women make were part of being on their guard all the time and being able to make informed choices if the situation demands. With a heightened state of alertness about their surroundings, women tend to feel more capable of perceiving threats and responding to them as well as retaining a sense of control over the situation.

Stanko (1990) suggested that women are acutely aware of their vulnerability especially while alone in public places and they constantly assess their surroundings. Here, the majority of the participants mentioned that they try to remain aware of their surroundings at all times as a conscious strategy to be safe. As explained by Sayeeda:

To be careful is the main thing. When I get a seat on the train, I look around to see the people and what sort of people are sitting around. Some people, when they get a seat, they just take it. They do not see their surroundings. But I am careful, even in my subconscious mind. Like, what sort of people, if anybody, is following me, is anybody targeting me or my bag. So even if someone attacks me, how will I respond or what will I do – I have some sort of idea or plan. (Sayeeda, INT 17)

The issue of harassment in public transport has not been broadly studied, and even less so in the global South. The limited research in the US and European contexts (Gardner et al., 2017, Hsu 2011, Gekoski et al., 2015), in India (Dhillon and Bakaya, 2014, Lea et al., 2017, Madan and Nalla, 2015), in Bogota, Colombia (Quinones, 2020) and Kathmandu, Nepal (Neupane and Chesney-Lind, 2014) revealed that harassment on public transport is widely prevalent and deeply affects women's access and mobility in public places. Hence, it was not surprising that none of the participants remarked that public transport in Dhaka was a reliable and safe option for their daily travel. Similar to Sayeeda, another participant mentioned being aware of her fellow passengers while travelling:

Whenever I am travelling on the bus, I make sure that there are a few fellow female passengers. If all the female passengers are getting off, then I get off too and take a rickshaw or walk for the rest of the journey. (Sakira, INT 19)

Such a strategy of being careful and ever vigilant about the surroundings and people is actively produced by women themselves because of their own safety concerns and is not taught by the family, school or safety campaigns. Women tend to come up with such safety strategies due to the implicit

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social understanding that the responsibility of assessing danger on the street rests with women themselves (Dhillon & Bakaya, 2014).

Another conspicuous example of being on guard that many of the participants adopted was the avoidance of certain areas.

I try to avoid the road where the boys are gathering or chatting together. This is because I have to keep myself safe. Or when I go to the park in the afternoon for walking, then I consciously try to avoid certain parts where I assume or I know that some boys will be chatting together. (Runi, INT 07)

This comment adds further support to arguments that women modify the local geography by their own understanding of safety and potential sexual attack (Valentine 1989). Moreover, many of the women described that they would regularly take different routes as a precaution against being followed and to avoid listening to verbal abuse every day, even if that means taking a longer route.

Sometimes I change the routes to my tuition, because of the hawkers on the footpath - they too say nasty things every day. (Nazrana, INT 15)

Additionally, a few women also shared the strategy of crossing the road when they see someone dangerous or suspicious-looking and also, to avoid walking past groups of men.

Apart from public transport like the bus, participants also used semi-public transport like rickshaws (three-wheeler), auto-rickshaw (commonly known as CNG), taxicab and Uber. These semi-public transports are commonly viewed by women as making them relatively less vulnerable to victimisation or harassment compared to the public transport system. Nevertheless, some of the participants pointed out that they would regularly assess the driver of the vehicle before hiring due to their fear of potential sexual violence from the driver; a further example of how they are alert to their surroundings. As disclosed by Hira:

I travel by rickshaw, I try to look carefully at the rickshaw driver [to see] if he looks okay, I mean, not addicted [to drugs], not hijacker or potential criminal who might be joined by his associates later on. (Hira, INT 02)

I try to look at the face of the rickshaw driver and figure out if he is a nice person. Because even within the campus, many rickshaw drivers are addicted [to drugs]. They do not listen to the passenger at all, they take whatever route they want. Some of them appear dangerous since they ask a lot of personal questions. (Sayeeda, INT 17)

All these 'self-policing' strategies that the participants mentioned here suggested that in order to create a safe space for them in public places, women "create a restricted world that further limits their opportunities" (Wesely and Gaarder, 2004; p. 657).

### ***Modifying Public Behaviour***

Guano (2007) argued that women methodically try not to draw unwanted male attention to themselves by modifying their public behaviour. This idea was found to be valid for the participants in the present research as some participants said that they adopted an 'angry' or 'serious' facial expression to indicate that they are not to be messed with. Another related strategy is to avoid eye contact with strangers and walk with their heads down so as not to attract attention.

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I always walk with my head down. (Surma, INT 37)

I used to walk with my head down with my dad. So, whatever happened, whoever was present on the streets, I did not notice anything until I started travelling on my own (Diya, INT 22)

Avoiding direct eye contact and walking with their head down has been a widely used strategy by the participants and this strategy was categorised as 'fictive invisibility' by Jane Khatib-Chahidi in 1981, where women enjoy public freedom in public places by intentionally trying to draw less attention to themselves.

Nowadays my facial expression is always.. like.. a fighting mood, some people give it a try and if fails, then step back. You know I have no way. I look like a little girl, so some people try to take the opportunity. If I try to pretend to be very innocent on top of my baby face, I will not be able to tread on the streets (Diya, INT 22)

Diya's comment illustrates that scowling is an effective strategy on the streets for many women even though such pre-emptive face work goes against formal public conduct or street etiquette as mentioned by Goffman (1963). However, it is evident from the interviews that adopting a tough outward appearance may help not only as a preventive measure but also can help the women feel stronger and tough enough to deal with the potential harassment.

Another common strategy adopted by the majority of the women was wearing headphones and listening to music which not only sent out an impression of being indifferent to the strangers around but also worked as a protective barrier against verbal comments. However, some women pointed out that even though blocking out the comments was the main purpose of wearing the headphones, but, at the same time, blocking out all the surrounding noise does not seem like a wise idea either and makes them anxious. Hence, a safer, and cleverer option is to wear headphones but not listen to music. In this way, the women can still give the illusion that they are not hearing the harassing comments but still retain the idea of being alert and prepared if someone approaches to attack or cause physical harassment. This strategy is a unique example of women deciding to take control. While street harassment is all about asserting power over the unknown women, by displaying indifferent behaviour through the use of headphones with no music playing, women are not allowing that attention and power to the harassers. At the same time, if the strategy backfires with the harassers thinking that they are being ignored and challenged and decide to escalate to a violent form of harassment, women are also on guard by being aware of their surroundings.

### ***Avoiding Night-time***

In order to avoid being harassed many of the participants avoid going out at night altogether. Even though the risk of being harassed is more during the daytime, especially in crowded places and the crowd is expected to be less at night in most places. This idea was demonstrated by Dolon:

If there are people on the streets and enough light, then it obviously feels safer. Empty streets scare me, because if there are some people on the streets, then hopefully not all of them will be bad people. At least someone will come forward to help if something bad happens (Dolon, INT 28).

Despite this analogy, the majority of the participants reported feeling vulnerable and fearful of going out at night, especially on their own.

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I do not go out at night especially, at any cost. If someone asks me to go somewhere at night and even offers me one million taka [Bangladeshi currency] for that, I still just cannot gather enough courage. But I will go anywhere in the daytime and if it's not for work, then I will try to come back home by evening (Arisha, INT 40).

Arisha's comment is echoed by many of the other participants who avoid going out after dark at all costs and always try to return home before sunset. Moreover, most of the participants were not allowed by their families to go out at night anyway, while few admitted to going out at night only with husbands, brothers, or together with families. So, it is evident that harassment has forced women out of public places at least at certain times and increased their dependence on men for their safety and protection. The point of male dependence leads to the next safety strategy adopted by the participants.

### ***Male Company***

Although almost all the participants adopted some kind of strategy in reducing the amount of harassment they faced on the streets, those strategies did not always guarantee protection. However, one strategy was considered to be a foolproof way of avoiding harassment on the streets by almost every participant, whether they liked it or not, which was to be accompanied by a man.

If I am with my boyfriend, nobody teases or stares. But whenever I am alone, even the street hawkers have the audacity to tease. (Minara, INT 21)

Well, I do not face any problems on the way to university. This is because my brother picks me up right in front of our house and drops me at the university gate. So, there is no way of any problem. But yes, when we go shopping – then we can hear a lot of comments always. (Tara, INT 05)

If I am travelling with my brother, then I do not face this kind of problem. This problem happens only when I'm alone or with my friends. (Neha, INT 06).

The above comments illustrate that the very presence of an adult male figure itself can reduce the possibility of facing harassment to a certain degree. Sen (1984) argued that men control and dominate public spaces in a patriarchal society and claim that public spaces are male-only domains. Therefore, women often encounter harsh retribution for these transgressions, in the form of physical and sexual harassment and assault, when they enter public places. I argue that the current gender norms of Bangladeshi society can play a vital role for strangers to refrain from harassing a woman when accompanied by a man because the woman is not treading on the male-dominated public places on her own and thus, respecting the patriarchal norms. In other words, by being in the company of a man in order to prevent victimisation of harassment, the patriarchal values of Bangladeshi society are reinforced where women's agency to move independently is removed and they are targeted for harassment or attack.

### ***Self-Protection Tools***

So far, we have identified different types of preventive and avoidance behaviours adopted by women, but it is important also to identify clear evidence of the women's resisting behaviour that demonstrates empowerment. Kelly (1998) argued that resistance is a coping strategy adopted to

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restrict the power men hold over women and Rowntree (2010) believes that resistance is indicative of a deeper understanding of the reasons for victimisation and hence, taking measures to protect themselves. This is demonstrated in this research through the women's attempt to be proactive by carrying different self-protective tools. This type of resistance is growing exponentially. A majority of the participants carry some kind of tools with them, either exclusively for self-protection or as opportunistic yet convenient items, whenever they venture out in public. Some of the women carried different kinds of protective tools or weapons with safety in mind, while others were also contemplating taking martial arts training like karate or judo in order to specifically defend themselves against an attacker. Among the weapons they reported carrying were:

I always carry small weapons like scissors or a small knife, nail cutters etc. (Anila, INT 03)

I always carry an NT cutter (utility knife), still have it with me now. (Amrin, INT 35)

I keep an umbrella in the side bag at all times, so in case of emergency, we can use it to beat the harasser up. (Sayeeda, INT 17)

It can be understood from the interviews that most of the women also make mental plans of what they would do in the event of an attack after assessing the situation. Carrying everyday objects like small knives, paper knives, scissors, nail-cutter etc was a conscious decision among the participants with the intention of using them as weapons to defend themselves if needed and that appeared to be fairly common informal precautionary behaviour. Carrying objects for self-protection is another example of women taking the control of any potentially unwanted situation.

Some of the other participants, on the other hand, did not like the idea of carrying knife-like weapons in their bags for fear of trouble from law enforcement officers.

I carried the knife for 1 week, but after that, my mom took it away. We both thought that the knife can cause further trouble if the police check my bag for some reason and they would ask me – 'why are you carrying a knife'? (Bani, INT 09)

Therefore, some of the women preferred everyday objects like body spray, safety pins, and hijab pins (straight hemming pins) that would not only match their images but also can be used to escape threatening encounters.

My mom always tells me to carry a bottle of body spray. In case something happens, I can at least spray that body spray on the eyes of the attacker because that can give a burning sensation to the eyes, even if on a temporary basis. (Runi, INT 07)

I always carry an NT - cutter [utility knife] in my bag. If I do not have it someday, then I have my hijab pins at least which might pinch those creepy hands on the bus. (Sakira, INT 19)

In the local buses especially, I always hold a safety pin in my hand and if someone tries to poke me, I will stab him with the safety pin straightaway. Ha ha.. I hold the safety pin openly, so if someone has a bad intention, when he sees the pin in my hand, he rather stays away. (Diya, INT 22)

I always have safety pins in my handbag, you will find a drawing compass too sometimes. (Amy, INT 24)

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Women in this research indicated that all these self-protective tools help them to strengthen their spatial confidence and lessen the fear of victimisation. As Bani's comment suggests:

: When you were carrying the knife, did you feel differently?  
: Yes, I used to feel very brave at that time. (Bani, INT 09)

However, none of the women mentioned any incident where they used the weapons when threatened or encountered harassment. Therefore, it cannot be said whether the women would actually employ the weapons or objects that could be used as such if confronted, the actual effectiveness of the weapons like knives and the opportunistic yet convenient tools like body spray, safety pins, hijab pins, and whether employing any weapons to the harasser can increase the possibility of injury or escalation of violence. However, it is certain that the tools definitely ensure the feelings of safety among the women and increase their mental power to ward off danger if encountered male intimidation.

Further analysis of the data revealed that the women who carry self-protection tools with them are of different ages within the range of 18-24 and hence, women's choices of carrying tools or weapons are not decisive with their age. Likewise, the decision to carry self-protective tools was not relative to their own assessment of the safety of the neighbourhood where they live because women from all different classes and professions alike admitted to carrying different sorts of tools. Furthermore, even though the existing literature on fear of crime and self-protective measures demonstrates that women start carrying weapons or enrol in self-defence classes following a traumatic experience of victimisation (Stanko 1990, 1993; Hollander, 2010), women in this research did not mention any particular turning point of vicarious or personal incidents of victimisation that led them to start carrying weapons or tools. However, since all of the women in this research have encountered at least some form of harassment on the streets or transport at some point in their lives, the idea of the previous victimisation as a catalyst for carrying tools cannot be eliminated either.

Additionally, in crowded places like shopping centres, public buses etc, women tend to protect their bodies from unwelcome touches in various ways before deciding to use self-protective tools. The participants of this research shared some of the common strategies adopted by them in their daily lives, like looking to erect barriers between themselves and other travellers:

In crowded marketplaces like Newmarket, Gausia or Chandi Chalk market, I hold my side bag in front of my breasts. This is because lots of people try to touch the breasts or poke in that part. (Sayeed, INT 17)

what I do in public buses is - whenever someone sits by my side, I place my bag in between, and if I am sitting on the edge, then also I hold my bag on the outer side. This way I am saving myself from unwanted touching. Then, when I go to the shopping centres, I hold my bag in front of my breasts. (Rumana, INT 27)

Hence, different types of items like bags, and books (as mentioned by some other participants) construct barriers to protect the sexualised parts such as the breasts of women's bodies. While the above comments demonstrate that using self-protective strategies can boost the sense of confidence and empowerment among women, at the same time it works to justify and fortify the underlying mechanisms of patriarchy that create the social space for street harassment.

Street harassment and the fear or threats of harassment deeply affect women's lives and everyday decisions as well as restrict their freedom of movement and expression. In this section, I have outlined a range of conscious and informal protective strategies employed by women in their daily lives while

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in public spaces in an attempt to shield themselves from the manifestation of different forms of harassment. Women deploy strategies that include changing their dressing style, avoiding certain places, avoiding going out at certain times, modifying their public behaviours, always being on guard and even carrying different self-protective tools or weapons. Evidently, the fear or the actual form of harassment not only affects how women access public spaces but also can affect their mental well-being as they are always making and re-making their journey plans only to ensure protection and safety for themselves. However, by being required to take all these forms of safety strategies, women are burdened with the responsibility of protecting themselves, but if they do not employ any preventive measures, they can be blamed by society for not doing enough and for their own victimisation. In this way, the idea of the 'rape myth' is reinforced and goes on a cycle with women carrying the responsibility and accountability of ensuring their own protection and deflecting the attention away from the perpetrators. At this point, the chapter will now move on to present the responding behaviours of women when encountered harassment.

### 6.3 IMMEDIATE RESPONSES TO HARASSMENT

Previously we have discussed how Bangladeshi women take pre-emptive steps to protect themselves by taking different types of precautionary measures in order to prevent or minimise potential incidents of street harassment. The next stage of the coping process deals with women's responding behaviour immediately after encountering harassment. Women's immediate responses to street harassment vary greatly depending on the individual women as well as the particular context of the incident. While there is a significant gap in the literature on street harassment regarding women's responding behaviour, it is literally non-existent in the context of Bangladesh. In this section, I have framed the participant responses to street harassment into the categories of passive and assertive. Passive responses to street harassment typically include ignoring the harasser and staring back angrily or annoyingly. Assertive responses indicate resisting the harassment by confronting the perpetrator, protesting, or simply replying to the harassing comments and also, asking for help from the bystanders.

#### *Passive responses*

All the participants of this research reported ignoring or avoiding the harassment and the harasser to be the most usual and common response to harassment. On the other hand, only a few participants admitted that they try to protest whenever possible even though resisting the harassment was never preferred over ignoring it. Previous research (Swim & Hyers, 1999) has identified a number of reasons why women do not commonly react to harassing situations, including fear of being identified as impolite, aggressive, non-feminine, feminist, and general societal pressure. However, from the data I suggest that the main reason for being silent after a harassing incident is the fear of escalation. As illustrated by the following interview excerpts:

We just try to avoid it as much as we can. This is because if we say something back and the situation escalates, what is the protection or precaution for that situation -we do not know. Therefore, it's better to avoid it. (Tara, INT 05)

Even if something happens, we do not care or bother too much; because if we talk, then there will be more talk and trouble. (Rivana, INT 10)

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If I get harassed on a certain road repeatedly, then I just try to avoid that road for a few days. If the harassers keep teasing me even after a few days, then I just do not take that road anymore. (Tuba, INT 11)

The above comments show that the participants prefer to ignore the harassers or more accurately, pretend to ignore the harassers, and this type of passive response can result due to several reasons. For example, women may remain silent because they are afraid of physical attack as a form of escalation, or they do not want to draw further attention to themselves or appear to be displeasing which, again, can further cause an escalation. Moreover, my research suggests that the participants were simply annoyed to be treated in a humiliating manner and simply did not want to reward the harasser with a response.

Rupa's comment below can incite a different train of thought:

I think that showing any kind of response turns the situation into [something] worse. The safe way is to avoid the situation as much as possible. And I think this is the primary solution. But if it goes to an extreme situation, then we can seek the help of elders - like family or friends too. (Rupa, INT 14)

Stanko (1990) explained that women are socialised from a very early age by their family and surroundings to take personal responsibility to ensure their own safety. Initial conversation with the participants about their family status, rules and restrictions from family while growing up suggests that women's socialisation in this respect indicates being able to avoid, ignore and be silent as long as possible and only to ask for help from the family if the situation is unmanageable. Although the direction and expectation from the family are to disclose the incidents to them and ask for help, how effective and supportive the families are as support networks will be discussed in the latter section of this chapter. It is to be noted that all the participants of this research were adults and they were still directed and actively discouraged by their families to employ assertive responses. Runi's response to this question aptly illustrates the situation:

No reaction at all, I pretend that I have not heard of the comments, or I have not seen the gestures. I am normally an angry person; therefore, my mom keeps telling me that 'do not say anything, do not react if someone says anything to you, just get back home with your head down.' Sometimes I do look back angrily and then the harasser gets his head down or looks the other way but that does not do anything, does it? I cannot raise my voice. So, returning home silently with my head down is the most normal reaction for me. (Runi, INT 07)

Regardless of the rationale for silence as the best response to harassment, the effect of not being able to respond to the harrowing remarks are self-destructive in the sense that the women might suffer anger, humiliation, fear, feeling of disempowerment and emotional distress (Bowman, 1993). All the participants of this research reported feeling negative emotions including being fearful, angry, annoyed, frustrated, anxious and overall, sad about the situation.

I feel really bad, really sad. But I cannot respond loudly or yell at that person. This is because then the people around will look at me too and they will hear me too. So even if I want to, I cannot protest, just feel bad that I had to hear such nasty things. I have always avoided or been quiet thinking about what other people will think about me if I say anything back or respond (Nazrana, INT 15).

Nazrana's comment reveals the gendered socialisation of Bangladeshi that influence their public behaviour. In Bangladesh, women are brought up from an early age to adhere to the unspoken rules

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about how they should conduct themselves in public, how they should dress and what activities they should or should not do in order to ensure their own safety (Pain, 1991). Another form of gender socialisation of Bangladeshi women is honour (Gill and Brah, 2014) which came up repeatedly when the participants were asked about the rules and restrictions of their families. Women in Bangladesh are expected to uphold the honour of their families by behaving in certain ways in public. Transgressing these behaviour traits not only brings shame to the family's reputation but consequences for the women themselves. Hence, Nazrana cannot protest against her harassment or the harassers because she is more concerned that the bystanders may question the reputation of her and her family. Another example of women's responding behaviour influenced by socialisation is the comment by Jahida:

It's better to be silent than yelling or protesting because the situation may turn worse. It's not possible for a woman to tackle such a situation. (Jahida, INT 39)

In a patriarchal society and culture, boys are defined as strong and independent with certain behaviours to prove strength, while girls are defined as weak and dependent, and they behave to replicate these behaviours (Bem, 1993). As part of the socialisation process, Jahida might have accepted this knowledge about the roles of males and females and thus, she is justifying her silence with the understanding that women are unable to handle the chaotic situation.

Further examination of the data revealed that anger, discomfort, and helplessness were most commonly used by the participants when asked about their emotional well-being after victimisation. Some of the participants reported feeling utterly frustrated at their inability to control the interaction with proper assertive responses.

I always try to avoid it, and never raised my voice. I know it's not right, but ... (does not finish sentence, shrugs and shakes head) (Ramisa, INT 32)

Lord's (2009) research, carried out in Delhi, found that as the experiences of street harassment become recurrent, the fear and anger of the participants towards it also heightened. Moreover, Vera-Gray & Kelly (2020) reveal that women become increasingly aware of their sexual vulnerability after each incident of street harassment and therefore, their fear of sexual assault as a form of escalation increases significantly. One of the participants of my research explained her motives to be silent:

When such things happen, I want to react or protest. But then, I think if I say something today, the man can do something bad or dangerous the next day. I am a girl, and I will have to travel every day on my own. Everyone else in my family is busy with their own work and there is nobody who can accompany them on the streets. So, I have to keep quiet. I cannot gather the courage to protest. I have to get out of the house every day, today is not the last or only day. So, if something happens, I just leave the place quietly. (Bani, INT 09)

Bani's comment demonstrates her feelings of being unsafe due to a lack of insight into the stranger's motives and her fear of escalation from a harassing incident to a severe sexual assault.

A further analysis of the data revealed an interesting, emerging conversation that sits at the intersection of street harassment, poverty, and crime. Little work on this area exists, within the context of Bangladesh. What my research revealed is women from the low-income families are more fearful than any other classes of women to protest against harassment because they fear that they do not have the adequate resources to fight the retaliation with alternate arrangements or external support from the police. For example, as one interviewee stated:

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We are poor and helpless; we do not have any power to protest. Protesting is for the powerful people, not us. I do not have the courage to protest. I feel like if I protest today, he or they might get angry and harm us even more or dangerously the next day. This is the fear that stops us from protesting. (Arisha, INT 40)

Arisha's comment indicates the multiple oppression that women from low-income households can face due to their gender, class, and poverty and how their unique situation influences their decision-making process about responding to harassment. This aligns with the previously outlined findings. Recall that in the previous chapter, I discussed how the garment factory workers were victims of insulting remarks on the streets and in the previous section of this chapter, one participant from a lower-income family shared her strategy of removing makeup before travelling at night lest she is misunderstood as a prostitute and harassed.

On the same note on poverty and street harassment, Munira who is a garment factory worker explained why she has stopped responding to the street harassers:

They reply that 'you people are worse than us because you work in garments and do all those nasty works' (sex work) (Munira, INT 43).

Munira's comment brings back the concept of honour and shame again as she is not willing to compromise the honour of herself and taint the reputation of her family by being wrongly labelled as a 'prostitute' for the sake of protesting against the harassers. However, while the majority of the low-income women admitted that avoiding and being silent is their preferred way of responding to the harassers, participants also mentioned circumstances where they feel brave enough to respond, for example, if they are travelling in a big group of 8-10 women or at the presence of a male figure. Shila (INT 20) explained that on their way back home from the garment factories, they always walk in a big group of 8-10 women and at that time, they feel empowered enough to protest or respond to their harassers. However, as they become closer to their houses and the group become getting smaller with someone reaching the house or taking a different route, they start to become fearful and stop responding. Surma (INT 37) talked about the incidents when she yelled back at her harassers in the presence of her elder brother and thus, she reinforced the fact that in the patriarchal society of Bangladesh the presence of one man is powerful enough to retaliate. On the other hand, without the presence of any man, an all-women group needs to be greater in number in order to retaliate against the harassers. In this way, we are reminded about women's inferior status in the patriarchal society, and their notion of vulnerability and dependence on men (Day, 1994).

### ***Assertive responses***

Women who decide to respond assertively to the harassers are forced to analyse and predict the outcome of a potentially dangerous situation. Data suggest that the participants were consciously crafting their responses, either passively or assertively, while also being aware that their responses could be one of the contributing factors in securing their safety. In such instances, the women were weighing their options between inviting more determined harassment, escalating towards serious assault, or ending the harassment. Surma and Amrin shared their conflict here:

Sometimes I do respond to such behaviour. Sometimes I feel like 'boys are like dogs, better not to bark back at them'. And today's age is very bad. If I say something today, who knows what they will plot for me tomorrow. That's why I do not say much these days. (Surma, INT 37)

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Responding to them all the time is not a wise decision. [the] Possibility is, that stupid person will have more supporters around him than you. Yes, you should respond sometimes, but you have to judge your situation and surrounding first. (Amrin, INT 35)

Moreover, when women do decide to respond to their harassers, “it creates a dialogue which usually requires two subjects” (Davis, 1993; p. 139). Therefore, by assertively responding to the harasser, the woman is no longer a mere passive object and rather, switched to a ‘subject’ position. This failure to objectify the woman might frustrate some harassers which can also lead to an escalation of the situation. However, in contrast to the negative emotion women felt for being silent, as noted earlier, even responding to the harassers can provide mental solace and confidence to the women and thus, brings out the positive outcome from a negative situation.

I feel that even being able to protest is a big thing. Not many girls dare to do that. But I am like that. I always try to protest. (Pushpo, INT 38)

As explained earlier in this section, women’s responses to street harassment vary not only due to different circumstances or contexts of the incidents but also due to the varying personalities of individual women. Social norms of a patriarchal society that are intertwined with socialisation and gender roles might be at play here again. Since Bangladeshi women are socialised from a young age to present themselves in public in a gender-appropriate way and to behave in a certain way that portrays the image of a ‘good girl’ underserving of harassment and assault, even protesting against their harassment are considered as overstepping their boundaries. In other words, women in general are socialised into being afraid, and so when they talk back to their harassers, some of them consider the act as ‘bold’ and ‘a big thing,’ (Pushpo, INT 38) while some others might consider that as ‘not a wise decision’ (Amrin, INT 35).

In contrast, some of the participants also remarked on their frustration of talking back to the harassers and yet, how the responses did not affect the harassers and incite any remorse or apologies and deter further harassment.

We four were seeing that the man did the same thing again with another girl on the road, as he crossed the road after touching my friend. One of my friends got really angry. She went on and held the man by his collar and punched him in the face. The man did not say anything. He saw us hiring a rickshaw afterwards and shamelessly waved at us (Neha, INT 06)

Jeena: Sometimes, it’s not possible to answer back, so I just keep my head down and leave the place. But it’s not tolerable all the time either. So, I try to say something to the harasser, like, ‘you too have a mother and sisters at home. Just the way I am feeling bad now if the same things happen to them, they will feel the same too.’

TA: Do they stop teasing then?

Jeena: No, not at all. They continue doing what they do. None of my words affects them in any way (Jeena, INT 12)

The participants who reported that they regularly try to respond to their harassers, mostly do so in the context of public transport. My analysis reveals that the main rationale of the participants to respond to the harasser while travelling on public transport is due to being stuck in a relatively confined space and being unable to quickly escape the threatening situation, they are forced to fight back.

Once I was sitting in the window seat and another girl was sitting next to me on the edge. A man was standing too close to her and was almost falling on her. She was not saying

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anything, or she was not looking comfortable either. I got angry and shouted at the man to behave himself, the girl was smiling then. (Tasnim, INT 34)

I used to be very embarrassed and scared when being harassed. I used to think that people will think badly of me, that I do not know how to travel by bus etc. But now I do not care. I raise my voice and I protest. (Shana, INT 18)

During the interview, Shana shared several experiences of street harassment both in public spaces and on public transport. Due to her financial constraints, she has no other alternative but to use public transport and at the same time, she did not have the family support to cater alternative options as her family repeatedly reminded her not to respond to the harassers for fear of further violence. Considering the situation, it is suggestive that in order to ensure her personal safety from daily harassment, Shana chose to take control of the situation by being proactive and vocal whenever encountered harassment.

Interview data suggest that bystander responses were not common and yet, women remained hopeful of responding to harassers if someone stepped in.

If I feel like I would get support from the people around which by the way, does not usually happen, women do not get support from the bystanders, then I definitely protest. If I am with someone, then obviously I become braver and protest. (Anila, INT 03)

Most women believed that the bystanders were unsupportive in a harassing situation because the situation did not impact their life or the bystander themselves feared escalating the situation to physical violence, or sometimes they were simply too busy to notice. Diya (INT 22), who is a young university student shared her experience in the early morning when a man touched her by taking advantage of a crowded place. She responded very angrily, shouting, and throwing her shoes toward the man as he was walking away very fast. She was recounting the incident with immense frustration that a lot of people were gathering around as a result of her response, but none of them intervened to stop and reprehend the perpetrator. Instead, they were looking at her while the harasser comfortably walked away. While there might be several reasons for bystander non-intervention, it is clear from the incidents that the failure to intervene indicates the failure to condemn and thus, facilitate them to continue such behaviour bolstering their belief of being able to walk away without consequence. The non-intervention of the bystanders could be one important factor in women not responding assertively to their harassers.

In many instances, the participants used both passive and assertive responses during a single incident of street harassment. Analysing the responses of the participants suggests that choosing the type of response while dealing with an upsetting situation requires precise calculation and judgement of the situation in order to impede further and severe victimization. However, there is no right way to respond to harassment. Sometimes, yelling and protesting can be safe and effective and other times, not responding at all is the right choice. It is difficult to decide and act while encountering harassment, especially because, even if the woman decides to remain silent, there is no guarantee that the harasser will not get violent.

### 6.4 SUPPORT SYSTEM

Analysing and exploring women's help-seeking and disclosure behaviour to informal (e.g., friends, family) and formal (e.g., law enforcement, counsellors, community resources) support systems are important in order to understand the social, health and behavioural consequences of street

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harassment. Existing literature has clearly identified that street harassment victims are likely to suffer from many mental and behavioural consequences like anxiety, depression, and self-objectification (Davidson et al, 2016; Fernandez, 2016, Sanchez-Diaz, 2019, Fisher et al, 2019). Even though the above impact of street harassment can notably be influenced by the help, support and responses received from the support systems, research on women's help-seeking and disclosure behaviour is almost completely absent both globally and in Bangladesh. My research is suggestive of what this might look like. Data from this research suggest that more than half of the participants disclose their victimisation experiences to informal support (e.g., friends, family) and only a few have ever been to any formal support system (police). In fact, none of the participants was aware of any support provided by the government or non-government social service organisations, and neither did they ever look for any support from this type of network. In light of this, this section will now analyse the kind of reactions and responses women experienced while disclosing and seeking help from informal and formal support networks.

### ***Informal Support Network***

Disclosure is a critical first step for the victims of street harassment where they often receive a mixture of positive and negative social reactions. Through the interviews, it became evident that participants drew mostly from their informal networks of family members and friends to deal with street harassment. Analysis from the interviews of this research suggests that positive social reactions include: a) emotional support, for example listening to their experiences, believing them and assuring them that it was not their fault; and b) tangible support, for example providing information and strategies to prevent future victimisation or offering company. On the other hand, negative social reactions as experienced by the participants of this research include: a) minimising or trivialising their experiences; b) victim blaming, i.e., telling the women that it was their fault or accusing them of not being careful enough; and c) curtailing their activities, for example, preventing the women for going out of the house, stopping their education, and taking control of their lives by getting them married.

Spalek (2006) found that the social network of family and friends might help the victims to cope with the negative effect of crime and harassment, especially when there is an absence of a formal support network, or victims are unwilling to disclose to the formal support network. From the discussion with the participants, it was understood that being able to talk about their experiences with family and friends was extremely important for them.

I share everything with my mom. Now after getting married, I share with my husband too. (Dolon, INT 28)

I share them with my husband and with my friends too. ... When we, friends, talk about or share these things, we tell each other how to hold the bags, how to move around etc. (Rumana, INT 27)

Sharing their experiences was beneficial in terms of receiving assurance and reassurance that they were not at fault due to their dress, behaviour, time of travel or the places where they travelled.

Supportive relationships with family and friends can buffer the negative effects of stress and trauma caused by previous harassment or the potential risk of future harassment and thereby offer a social safety net for the women to rely on. However, there is also evidence that the women evaluated positive emotional reactions from their mothers negatively and stopped sharing with them afterwards. Several of the women revealed that they felt guilty and sad for their mothers because by sharing their harassing experiences with them, they made the mothers upset and overly tense whenever they stepped outside of the house. Therefore, even though the mothers gave positive

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reactions and were sympathetic to their daughters' experiences, the daughter stopped disclosing further harassment to them so as not to cause the mothers additional pain or stress. Hence, it can be said that women's future help-seeking behaviour can also be influenced by the kind of support they receive from the informal network.

The fact that positive reactions and responses from family and friends can shape women's future help-seeking behaviour was further evidenced by Arisha's comment:

we do tell our dad if something happens. Because he knows some powerful people that can take some action if my dad complains. So, whenever something happens, we tell our dad, our dad talks to that man [councillor of the area] and then we do not get disturbed anymore. (Arisha, INT 40)

The narrative from the participants provides insights as to why positive reactions can be interpreted differently when coming from different members of the family. Emotional support without practical assistance might not be considered healing and effective by the harassed women. Therefore, where the mother's sympathetic reactions to the women's experiences made the women sad and stopped them from future sharing, the father's practical assistance to prevent future victimization was better appreciated. Arisha and her sisters keep going back to their father for both emotional and tangible support.

Interview data suggest that although both family members and friends were mentioned as the most frequent source of informal support, close friends were perceived as better and primary providers of support. Rumana, along with many other participants of this research, mentioned disclosing their harassing stories to friends and cousins who were close friends too, even before family members. Some of the women admitted that they prioritise friends as a better source of support than family because sometimes family members can provide more criticism than support. On the other hand, friends were mostly supportive by listening to their experiences, they were concerned for the harassed women and also angry with the harassers. Moreover, it was revealed that conversations with friends are often not limited to providing emotional support but also figuring out strategies to ensure future safety. At the beginning of this section, Rumana (INT 27) mentioned how she and her friends remind each other to hold books in front of their breasts when they go to crowded places. Another participant, Sarah (INT 26) shared her stories of how she and her best friend came up with the idea of carrying hijab pins every day when they travel on public buses together. This finding is consistent with the research on informal support networks for sexual assault victims that found that friends tend to provide the most positive social reactions like emotional support and friends' responses to disclosure are frequently perceived as healing (Filipas & Ullman, 2001; Ahrens, Cabral, & Abeling, 2009).

Evidence from this research suggests that women tend to be more supportive when listening and responding to harassing incidents. While women were most likely to provide helpful intervention responses, share their own experiences whenever possible and engage in less victim blaming, men, on the other hand, were typically identified to be less empathic, blamed the victims more and overall, were ineffective and confused as informal support. This is well illustrated by one particular incident recalled by Amrin (INT 35). She was on her way to the university on a public bus. When she was getting off the bus, the conductor/helper of the bus who was standing near the gate touched offensively at her back. Since she already got off the bus and the bus started moving too, she looked back and swore at him. The incident left her terribly upset and she decided to share the incident with a close male friend once she reached the university. Upon hearing the incident, the male friend responded as such: "that's the problem of helping a girl. He tried to help you and you took it otherwise" (Amrin, INT 35). Although it is hard to interpret the true intention of the close friend's comment, for example, he could be trying to look at the incident in a positive light to reduce the women's trauma, the unsympathetic

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response of the friend made Amrin even more upset, and she decided not to share any such incident with him in future. The notion of men being less sympathetic to disclosure applies to men both as family members and as friends.

Yes, I share the incidents with my sisters. Sometimes with my mom. But not with my dad or brothers. (Tara, INT 05)

With my mom sometimes, but never with my dad. (Jeena, INT 12)

This difference in the nature of the responses can be attributed to the gendered differences in experiencing public spaces since men do not experience street harassment to the extent that women do (Davis, 1993). Moreover, the unsympathetic responses can also derive from men's routine dismissal of women's experiences of gendered violence as an 'overreaction' or 'misinterpretation' of simple incidents and encounters with men. Neha mentioned that she shares her experiences on the streets with her brothers:

I share with my brothers too. They laugh and say, 'yes, there are some boys like that. Nothing to worry about. Your university is only 10 minutes away from home. If you are that scared, then you will not be able to study. You will have to be stuck at home all the time.' (Neha, INT 06)

From the above narrative, it is understood that responses that minimise and trivialise women's experiences are almost always considered hurtful, regardless of the support provider: brothers, fathers, or friend. Minimising their experiences tend to be hurtful to the women because such reactions are interpreted as the indifference or carelessness of the support providers that they do not care enough or are not concerned enough about what happens to the women and how they are feeling following the harassment.

The majority of the participants revealed that they have either stopped disclosing or have never disclosed their experiences of street harassment to anyone including family members, friends, or relatives. The fear of being blamed, fear of encountering disbelief, anger, and judgemental attitudes play the most important roles in not disclosing the harassing incidents to anyone. Whether blaming and doubting reactions are coming from partners, family members, and friends, they were almost always considered to be hurtful,

My mom usually yells at me – saying – 'why did you take the route in the first place?' Or 'Why did you go to that crowded place? Why not go somewhere less crowded?' – Like that – the blame comes over us – we should not do this or that etc. (Tara, INT 05)

Fears of being blamed, questioned, and treated insensitively were pervasive in most of the conversations with the participants. Tara's comment provides insight into the prevalent 'victim blaming' attitude of the patriarchal society of Bangladesh. In the earlier part of this chapter, I discussed the numerous strategies women employ by modifying their dress, public behaviour and travel arrangements in order to minimise the risk of victimisation. Such strategies were employed by the women in order to present themselves as the 'good girl' of society, undeserving of street harassment. The conversations regarding disclosure behaviour reveal that the majority of the women are often blamed by the close members of the family if they do not comply with those strategies of being displayed as 'good girl' and sometimes unjustly even after following all these strategies. Similar negative and blaming reactions toward victimised women were termed as 'second injury' (as termed by Symonds (1980) for rape victims) or 'betrayal trauma' (as termed by Freyd (1996) for sexual assault victims). Participants of this research admitted that the blaming reactions were the most hurtful and they often

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feel revictimized when encountering those responses. Previous experience of receiving a victim blaming attitude or the potential of receiving such a reaction can directly inform the women's decision of not disclosing their experiences with certain people.

I do sometimes share with my elder sister. But I cannot share it with my mom. I fear if she says that – 'you face these things because you dress and behave like this, no scarf/veil on your head, that's why people say these sorts of things'. These kinds of thoughts come to my mind. Or she might worry more about me. She might tell me that there is no need to go out, stay at home, no need to do late or evening classes. That's why I never share with my mom even if I am in a problem, never. (Runi, INT 07)

For some other participants, receiving blaming attitudes and reactions can also deprive them of the much-required social support which might be necessary for recovery.

I could not share them with my family anymore. I used to cry silently or share it with my friends. But that's it. (Hira, INT 02)

Thus, blaming reactions from the informal support network can add to the existing trauma and stress of being victimised with street harassment.

In some other cases, disclosure of harassment may elicit not only the blaming responses from the families but also the family members taking control of the woman's life and curtailing certain privileges like further education and going out alone or with friends.

The way sometimes the family react to the girl's complaint of being harassed does go against the girl. One of my cousins who was only studying in class 9 was regularly being harassed by a boy, being followed from school to home every day. When the family got to know about it, they got the girl married even though she was under-aged and that was the end of her study. (Nadia, INT 30)

In this instance, marriage is considered to be a safety mechanism to protect girls from harassment and potential sexual exploitation. A complex intersection with gender and age is noticeable here where the woman's ability to access the privilege of education was curtailed and she was married off early. It is also understood from this narrative as well as the background of Bangladeshi patriarchal society (see chapter 3), that the opinion and consent of the girl were of little value regarding her own marriage. In Bangladeshi society, women's position at home and in the community is decided by the dominant patriarchal rule and norms. It is the parents and other relatives of the woman who mostly decide the time and partner for marriage, where consent of the woman is not required nor considered either (Schuler et al., 2006). In common language of the country, marriageable girls are variously termed as 'burden' (UNFPA, 2012, p. 13), 'liability' (Chowdhury, 2010, p. 198), 'the spine of a fish stuck in the throat' (Chowdhury, 2004, p. 244) or 'rope around their parents' neck' (Simmons, 1996, p. 258) and hence, parents want to absolve their responsibility of the girl as soon as possible (HRW, 2015, p. 132). Related to this point is the concept of family honour and reputation and how these are closely connected to the female members of society who are expected to uphold them (Rozario, 2006, Siddiqui, 2013). Moreover, women's behaviours have a significant impact on the family's honour and any type of sexual assault can bring shame to the family and tarnish the family's reputation (Gill & Brah, 2014, Siddiqui, 2013). Thus, by marrying off the girl, the family is being proactive in preserving the girl's 'sexual purity and maintaining their own family honour because the duty to protect the girl is then shifted from the parents to the husband. (Gill & Brah, 2014).

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It is to be noted here that all the participants carefully selected who they disclose their harassing experiences to, for example, to friends, close family members or for some nobody at all. This curative process raises some very important questions, for example, how did the participants select their informal support network? What could be the likely implications for those who did not have any support network at all? Did the participants always receive sympathetic and supportive responses from their informal support network, or have they tested the responses of family and friends in the past and settled for the supportive ones later? Moreover, the complexity of understanding what exactly constitutes positive and supportive responses must be acknowledged because someone acknowledging the incident, but not providing any support can be perceived as negative by the victims (Relyea & Ullman, 2015). Due to the lack of follow-up interviews with the participants, it is largely unclear from the available response about what exactly constitute the positive and negative responses and how did the participants select their support network.

### ***Formal Support Network***

Participants of this research were asked how often they reported their experiences of street harassment and what kind of help they received from the formal support network. A formal support network includes trained professionals, such as, law enforcement officials, victim support workers and mental health workers. Out of the 45 participants of this research, only 2 mentioned that they would report their harassing experiences to the police. However, their comments are anything but hopeful:

I guess I will ask for police help, they will do at least something. It's better than doing nothing at all. (Pushpo, INT 38)

Yes, I will, out of formality. But the police will not do anything to help me, I am sure. And since I am a girl, it is even more likely to get a bad reputation if I complain to the police. (Alisha, INT 44)

Although the majority of the women did not report their harassing incidents to the police, many of the participants discussed their thoughts on the perceived barriers to reporting to the police, the likely consequences of making reports, and their perceptions that the police did not take these behaviours seriously. However, it is to be noted here that this research does not present the views or perceptions of those working for the police or within the criminal justice system. Challenges of policing street harassment, understandings of the police of what street harassment is and how this affects women are not reported within this research, or indeed in any other existing research in both Bangladesh and the international context. Although Lewis, Saukko and Lumsden (2021) looked at the sexual harassment cases on the London underground trains and included the experiences of the British transport police officers as well as the harassed women. However, their research primarily focused on the harassment committed on the trains only and not on the streets. Research looking at the policing of street harassment from the perspective of police or agents of the criminal justice system will help provide a broader picture of this phenomenon and will allow a comparison between the experiences and perceptions of women, and those of the police.

It is extremely important for the policy makers and the criminal justice system to value and understand women's everyday experiences on the streets. The policy of the country and the criminal justice system will never be able to properly respond to the women's needs on the topics of safety in public places if they do not value and understand their input. Their perceptions will contribute to the understanding of women's disinclination to engage with the criminal justice system as well as what barriers they encounter if they decide to engage after all. This understanding will be valuable to the policymakers and practitioners who want to encourage women to engage with the criminal justice system more, improve the policies in a better way and better educate the public too.

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Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that the vast majority of participants did not report their victimisation experiences to the police, nor do they intend to. Although there are jurisdictions in Bangladesh where some forms of street harassment are legislated as illegal and punishable offences, still street harassment incidents are extremely under-reported to the police (Absar, 2002; Bakker, 2013; Banarjee, 2020) and in fact, it is one of the most underreported crimes around the world (Nielsen, 2000; Chhun, 2011, Fileborn & Vera-Gray, 2017). Participants were not aware of any other formal support network for harassed women and whenever I asked about their willingness to report any incidents to the authority, they focused predominantly on the police service. It was clear that the police were perceived as the only agency they could refer to and for the majority of the time, that is appropriate in the context of Bangladesh. Therefore, the police were considered the official gatekeepers to justice and at the same time though, there were significant barriers for participants to reporting their harassing experiences to the police. For example, a high number of street harassment incidents go unreported by virtue of the fact that the harassed women assume that no action will be taken against the perpetrator without the presence of any concrete evidence. From the conversations with the participants, it became evident that there might be one primary reason for the high rate of non-reporting of street harassment: the difficulty in identifying the perpetrator. This reason has also been identified in some previous literature already (Ilahi, 2009) and has come up several times in my research during the interviews with different participants.

No, never. This is because by the time we will call the police and they will come to the place – that perpetrator will not be there. (Tara, INT 05)

I think the reason why I never complained to the police is I did not have any evidence to show to the police that the man harassed me or touched me indecently. The man will simply refuse to admit it. So, it's my words against his that might not prove anything (Shana, INT 18)

The comments indicate two most important limitations of criminal justice responses to street harassment: the fleeting nature of the crime and the absence of a visible presence of the police. Since the justice system is generally evidence-based to convict the accused, identifying the street harasser, and collecting evidence or witness of what had occurred might be extremely challenging and lack of such tangible evidence might result in the police failing to bring offenders to justice. Moreover, the challenges to obtaining evidence could also be an important factor in preventing participants from reporting the incidents to the police.

Equally importantly, the fact that such experiences of street harassment are so common in the everyday lives of women means that it was difficult for participants to report every single incident. As explored in the previous chapter, some of the participants believed that certain forms of street harassment are not considered crimes because they are not 'serious' in nature. Hence, the women who regularly experience harassment on the streets find themselves pondering whether the incident is 'worth' reporting to the police and whether the police are going to blatantly dismiss it. This was echoed in Tara's comment on her decision of not reporting her experience:

I do not feel like when we will call the police and explain the situation, they will give any importance to our complaint and will not even bother to come. (Tara, INT 05)

Tara was apprehensive about the effective role of the police because she believed that since most of the forms of street harassment are normalised in the wider population, the same perception is likely to be reflected in the agents of the criminal justice system too. Therefore, the women perceived that it is difficult to report the street harassment incidents not only due to their frequent and recurrent nature but also due to the fact that the police will fail to understand the significance of the cumulative

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effect of these recurrent harassing behaviours. It is understandable that these women would not want to dedicate their time and energy taking each incident of harassment to the police if they perceived that the police will not appreciate the nature, extent and harm of the street harassment. However, this pattern of behaviour might unwittingly reinforce a picture of street harassment presented to the police when only the most serious forms of behaviour and assaults are reported. As a result, women find themselves between a rock and hard place: unwilling to report and contribute to a picture that underplays the extent and seriousness of everyday harassment or go to the police investing extra time and energy as well as emotional cost only to have your complaint dismissed.

Moving on from identifying the characteristics of the incidents that worked as one of the primary challenges in the formal documentation of the phenomenon of street harassment, I now focus on other important barriers to reporting: perceptions of procedural justice (Thibault and Walker, 1975). A deeper analysis of the participants' interviews revealed that procedural justice practices have an important influence on street harassment incidents and their reporting to the police. Procedural justice is defined as the perceived fairness of the procedures used to make a decision and it is provided when police: a) engage in a fair and neutral decision-making process; b) behave respectfully towards the victims; c) appear to be trustworthy and honest; and d) allow the victims a voice to express themselves (Tomkins and Applequist, 2008). This research provides a novel understanding of the facilitation and barriers of formal reporting of street harassment incidents which also influence women's future help-seeking decisions.

The majority of the participants agreed that street harassment victims will not receive fair and neutral treatment from the police because they believe that the police would consider their harassing experiences as minor, trivial incidents and will not, therefore, take them seriously. Even though street harassment is recognised as a legal offence in Bangladesh, most of the participants were adamant that the police would fail to understand the seriousness of the case and will not take adequate action because they barely take timely actions against other serious crimes like rape and murder. The following comments help to clarify some of the key concerns raised by participants concerning a lack of understanding and empathy within the police service against street harassment.

I guess, the problem with the police is that when they get these types of complaints, they do not take them seriously. Rather they pretend that we have more important stuff to do and less time for this. We will not be running after this kind of harassment case. Forget about harassment, if you do not have a political backup or strong financial ground, the police do not take even rape cases seriously. I think the police should become more cooperative on this issue; they should consider that if a girl is getting harassed today, she might get raped too after two-three days. They should be concerned. (Diya, INT 22)

Such responses indicate the fact that there was a lack of confidence in the police in their understanding and willingness to take proper actions against the street harassers. Two important factors can be identified from this narrative: a) trivialising and not prioritising the harassing incidents; and b) lack of time and resources for such incidents. Participants of this research believed that depending on the nature of the harassment, their victimisation could be trivialised. For example, if someone wants to report non-physical forms of harassment, like sexualised sounds, gestures, comments and staring, she might encounter a lack of understanding from the police about the nature and impact of such harassment. This is due to the common yet problematic perception that a crime is something that can be evidenced through physical injury (Walklate 1989, Franks, 2011). Therefore, this finding argues that street harassment victims are often denied their victim status by the police and in doing so the police are also supporting the perpetrators in their denial of harassing behaviours. In another incident reported by Diya, the police believed her complaint of being harassed but still failed to consider that as constituting a serious crime, failed to take action and instead tried to

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convince the harassed woman to drop the charges. Diya described the incident where she was groped by a man in broad daylight while crossing the street and her parents were right behind her. Upon her screaming, her parents rushed and caught the harasser red-handed. Then they made a complaint to a police officer and instead of taking any formal action, the police officer said: “Just let him go. What’s the point?” (Diya, INT 22).

The action of the police officer not only prevented fair decision-making process but at the same time, convinced the participant not to make any formal complaint to the police in future. Instead, Diya was determined to protect herself and punish the harasser in ways she can afford. Hence, she started carrying a small knife, hijab pin or safety pin with her and most of the time when she encounters harassment, she yells and screams at the harasser not only to deter him but also to alert the bystanders.

Participants also expressed an understanding that police often do not have the time and resources to deal with the harassing incidents because, firstly, the chances of apprehending the street harasser are slim and secondly, they prioritise other grievous forms of sexual assault cases over street harassment. This leads us to another important point mentioned by Anila:

Police do not give follow-up on street harassment cases. After some time, any kind of updates becomes completely off and if anyone wants to chase them for updates, the situation gets worse, as much like a new kind of harassment. (Anila, INT 3)

When asked why it is important that the police keep them informed about the progress of their report, Anila said that she wanted to be assured that the police did not give up on her case. She wants to know what the police are doing at that point in time and what they are going to do next in order to ensure her own safety from the harasser.

Anila’s point makes a strong connection to another reason for underreporting of street harassment, namely, fear of retaliation. One participant, Bani, voiced her concern about further escalation or aggression from the harassers and the risk of being avenged for reporting.

One of my friends was harassed very badly and she got very angry and annoyed. So, I asked her if she wants to go to the police. But she did not agree, saying, ‘if those harassers see us going to the police station, they might be even angrier.’ (Bani, INT 09)

Fear of retaliation is a common theme in both street harassment and fear of crime literature which deters women from not only reporting the incidents to the police but also responding to the harassers during the harassment which was discussed in the earlier sections of this chapter (Gardner, 1995; Dhillon and Bakaya, 2014; Bastomski & Smith, 2017). Going back to Anila’s point about the lack of follow-up for street harassment cases, it is possible that women who reported their experiences to the police would be less worried about retaliation or aggression from the same harassers if they received regular updates from the police about their course of action.

Spalek (2006) notes that since police officers are the first point of contact victims have with the criminal justice system - the service victims receive from the first point of contact determines their confidence and expectations from the whole justice system. Therefore, receiving poor service and experience with the police can result in victims’ developing a negative view of the wider criminal justice system and potentially discourage them from reporting future incidents. This point on the negative view of police leads us to the next factor in the perception of procedural justice. There was a general agreement among the participants that police officers are extremely sexist when it comes to reporting street harassment and that is also one of the dominant reasons for underreporting.

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Never, because I do not think the police are going to help really. Moreover, if I complain to them, I will have to explain to them in detail what happened, and there is no guarantee that they will listen to me respectfully. Rather they may make fun of me and all the details that I just told them. Another kind of harassment to be honest. (Nila, INT 13)

Bangladeshi police have a poor track-record when responding to and dealing with gender-based violence cases and mocking and blaming the victims for their experiences happened a lot too, although this is hardly unique to Bangladesh (Anwary, 2012). Participants of this research explained that reporting street harassment cases can be extremely challenging because the victims are commonly blamed for the way they were dressed or behaved during the time of the incidents and thus, 'provoked' the harassers. It was a common agreement among the participants of this research that they refrain from reporting their experiences to the police because of the way they perceive the police would respond. Participants who reported their experiences to the police shared that they receive insensitive and disrespectful responses where they were shamed, made to feel embarrassed and asked offensive questions. The insensitivity of such responses can revictimize survivors and exacerbate trauma (Campbell, 2008). Hence, these women did not even consider reporting to the police when they encountered harassment again. More work remains to be done to better understand the impact and experience of feeling harassed when reporting their experiences to the police.

Related to this, my research also found that another most consistent impediment to reporting harassment to the police has been negative stories and incidents women heard from their friends, relatives, and the media. This indicates that victim blaming is a significant barrier not only at the familial and community level (Campbell et al, 2001), as discussed in the informal support network section but in the legal process too where the police officers' endorsement of the rape myth makes women forgo reporting.

One of the most important aspects of procedural justice is whether the action and the behaviour of the police can be considered honest and trustworthy by the public. In this research, a general sense of mistrust can be found in the interviews with different women. Some participants reported that they had been stared at and verbally harassed by the policemen themselves.

Never thought of asking for police help, because the policemen on the streets stare just as creepily as the other men. (Minara, INT 21)

Similar types of harassing attitudes and behaviours from the police were experienced by some other participants too. It is important to note here that action or behaviour from a single police officer or a group can equally damage the reputation of the police as a social institution (Chermak et al., 2006). So, in these cases, it is the actions and behaviour of the individual police officers which present them as apathetic, judgemental, and stereotypical people who themselves can be street harassers in many cases.

A core theme underpinning this section is that the police are unequivocally deemed by all participants as chronically corrupt, inefficient, ill-equipped, and loyal to the rich of society. Few participants were unafraid to accuse the police of taking bribes at every opportunity possible and this was indeed a significant barrier to reporting any incident to the police.

These are hardly reported to the police thinking that police will not do anything and even if they arrest the harasser - he will get out quickly by bribing the police which is a common thing in this country. (Shana, INT 18)

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Corruption challenges the sense that the police have the best interests of citizens at heart. By taking bribes or favours in exchange for personal benefits, the police no longer appear trustworthy. Shila noted that: “our police ... if they get some money, they will work for either side.” (Shila, INT 41)

So, the participants felt that they cannot put their trust in the police anymore even when they might be working on their side after receiving bribes because the police are then wielding their power for their personal interests and not in the interest of justice and citizens.

The vast majority of the participants were generally dissatisfied with the approach of the police in general and perceived that the police will not listen to them and their stories. Walklate (1989) believed that the criminal justice system itself contributes to the silencing of the victims where they maintain a hierarchical approach by separating the victims as deserving or undeserving depending on their type of victimisation. In terms of dealing with street harassment cases in Bangladesh, the police force stands as a clear demonstration of the male domination in the criminal justice system which is underpinned by the patriarchal values that discount women’s experiences and voices. Women who report harassing incidents are often considered as deserving victims, reinforcing the victim blaming attitude here again, and therefore, the police failed to give proper attention to the women while they were reporting their incidents. As Alisha pointed out:

Police will not do anything to help me, I am sure. And since I am a girl, they will not even listen - it is even more likely to get a bad reputation if I complain to the police.

In this sense, listening to a person, allowing her to voice her concern and let her express her emotions like anger, and fear while reporting the incidents not only for the women to sense the fairness in the legal process but also to have a sense of being a valued member of the society. The general mistrust and disrespect towards police by the women of this research is due to the fact they were never treated with respect by the police and therefore, they are not likely to view the police force in a positive light either.

Overall, a lack of confidence and trust in the police – whether stemming from personal experience or the reputation of the police force – is quite possibly the most fundamental reason why street harassment is one of the most underreported crimes in the country.

### 6.5 CONCLUSION

Kelly (1988) noted that coping refers to the actions taken to avoid and control distress and the particular manner in which a woman copes depends on how she defines her experiences, the context within which it occurs and the material resources available to her. The women of this research are defining and living their everyday experiences of street harassment within the hostile structures of patriarchy that routinely trivialises their experiences and denies them their victim statuses. By looking at how they cope and manage such difficult situations, it is also possible to identify their agency. One of the main findings of this chapter is the documentation of various strategies employed by Bangladeshi women in order to minimise their victimisation of street harassment. I have found that women invent and employ different types of preventive measures depending on the context. Women who travel very early or late at night, employ particular measures which are different to the women who travel during regular, rush working hours. Moreover, women who travel on public transport need to be alert and equipped with certain measures which are not similar to the women who can afford semi-public or private transport. Nevertheless, the women employ common strategies while walking and navigating through crowded public places like shopping centres. While the majority self-police their dressing styles to minimise or prevent victimisation, it makes little difference since women wearing all sorts of outfits, including hijab and abaya, encounter street harassment in their daily lives.

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Moreover, modifying their public behaviour or facial expression, being alert all the time and carrying self-protection might also not prevent victimisation but gives women a sense of confidence and preparation to deal with the unexpected. On the other hand, women who can afford to avoid being out at night-time and have male chaperons with them hold more possibility to evade the risk of harassment. I have also documented the immediate responses of the participants after encountering street harassment – passive responses and assertive responses. The analysis of the interviews reveals that women in Bangladesh are constantly observing their surroundings, the harassers, and the overall situation, and after careful observation, they decide whether to ignore and avoid the harassers or protest to prevent the continuation of harassment.

In terms of the support mechanism, most of the participants drew from informal networks of support, such as family and friends and received a mixture of positive and negative reactions. While positive reactions provide the women with the emotional support to deal with the trauma, negative reactions not only add to the existing trauma and victimisation but also can change the course of their lives by preventing them from continuing their education or being married. The last part of this chapter has also identified several important reasons behind participants' reluctance to report the harassing experiences to the police. The majority of the participants believed that police would fail to act and convict the harassers in the absence of any compelling evidence or witness. Moreover, most of the participants agreed that the police would fail to take their experiences seriously and would blame the women instead for provoking the incidents with their dressing styles and behaviour. Furthermore, the predominant image of the Bangladesh police force as an organisation worked as a very consistent barrier to reporting any incident to the police. The thesis will now move on to the detailed intersectional analysis of women's varied forms of identities in the context of street harassment and how these different identities influence the frequency and severity of their experience.

### CHAPTER SEVEN

## Intersectionality: Identities Influencing Experiences

### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

In previous chapters, I examined the nature of women's daily experiences of street harassment in public places and transport in Dhaka city. In doing so, I explored the ways street harassment interferes with and complicates women's use of public spaces and public or semi-public transport. I demonstrated how women employ different types of coping mechanisms in order to carry on with their lives while dealing with street harassment. I argued that different forms of harassment and threats can severely impact women by producing a sense of vulnerability and fear, self-objectification, and self-blaming in them. Besides, I also note that women's mobility and mental health can be impacted by varying restrictions from their families and by instances of victim blaming from their own families, neighbours and even bystanders. In this chapter, I aim to draw on Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) concept of intersectionality to account for the multiple ways in which various factors work together to shape experiences of street harassment. Using the lens of intersectionality, we can infer that individual woman experiences harassment in public places differently according to their social context and also the fact that women's different realities based on their different social identities interact with each other. In chapter two of this thesis, I have discussed how intersectionality highlights the 'multidimensionality' of the experience of marginalised subjects, with a particular focus on the intersections of gender and race (Crenshaw, 1989). I also touched on this in chapter five. Although Crenshaw (1989) primarily explored the intersections of gender and race, she also noted that an intersectional analysis can be expanded to include other social divisions such as class, sexuality, religion, age, and citizenship. In the context of my own data, as I explore in this chapter, I imagine that identities like gender, social class, religion, culture, marital status, and age contribute to women's varying experiences of street harassment. In this respect, Collins and Bilge (2016, p. 4) argue that the core insight of intersectionality is that the

Major axes of social divisions in a given society at a given time, for example, class, race, gender, sexuality, dis/ability and age, operate not as discrete and mutually exclusive entities but build on each other and work together.

By analysing how these axes of power communicate with one another, an intersectional approach can explain how the organisation of power can instigate various complexities in people's lives and experiences (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). This chapter is primarily concerned with the intersectionality of women's varied forms of identities and how it influences the frequency and severity of their experiences of street harassment by shaping their usage and engagement of public spaces. The findings emphasise the variation in women's experiences of public spaces and public transport in Dhaka city and provide rich insights into the spatial realities of women navigating within an oppressive patriarchal structure. This chapter argues that while street harassment is a gendered form of violence, it does not affect all women equally; rather, women who are marginalized due to their varying identities along the lines of social class and religion are likely to be in more vulnerable situations. On the other hand, education opportunities do not always provide better access to public spaces but rather foreclose it for upper and middle-class women. Interestingly, poor working-class women of Dhaka city hold better accessibility and mobility in public spaces in different time periods, including late at night, due to their lack of educational qualification, which prevented them from securing

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decent jobs. This stands in contrast to the norms of the global north, where education is often assumed to provide greater freedom and empowerment. Although, women from the lower working class who stay out late at night also encounter different and sometimes more severe types of harassment than that of upper and middle-class women. Therefore, the effect and prevalence of street harassment cannot be adequately measured without properly recognising the unique barriers that women face due to the intersectionality of their identities, as they are subject to multiple layers of oppression and violence.

The chapter builds on the examination in chapter six about the immediate responses and coping mechanisms women employ in order to minimise or avoid harassment while navigating in public spaces and public transport. The chapter consists of two main sections. In the first section, I present empirical findings to demonstrate how the intersection of gender and patriarchal culture plays an important role in the lives of Bangladeshi women while dealing with street harassment experiences and coping mechanisms against it. In the next section, I consider the intersections of class, religion, marital status, and age with gender to better understand the street harassment cases and coping mechanisms of the women.

### 7.2 GENDERED POWER STRUCTURE AND PATRIARCHAL CULTURE

Gender undoubtedly is the most important social identity for an intersectional analysis of street harassment in the patriarchal society of Bangladesh. For the purpose of this social research, it is imperative to clarify the definition of gender which is often misunderstood and used interchangeably with sex. Gender is a concept that is socially constructed, influenced by our surroundings and upbringing and also, conditioned and constructed by oneself within the society they live in (Corsaro, 2015; Ryle, 2020). In contrast, sex refers to the biological distinction between males and females, which is typically assigned at birth based on an individual's reproductive organs (Corsaro, 2015; Ryle, 2020). Butler (1990) explained that the sex assigned to an individual at birth plays a crucial role in shaping their gender. Therefore, one could argue that one's sex has a formative influence on the development of their gender. As Simone de Beauvoir (1949, p.15) famously stated: "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one". In other words, femininity emerges as a result of environmental factors and contextual circumstances of being a woman in a society where men (and masculinity) are perceived as superior. Rather than being viewed as an innate trait, gender has come to be understood as a cultural concept that pertains to the social construction of masculinity and femininity and the expectations and norms associated with this social construction (Renzetti, 2013). These expectations and norms are 'reproduced and transmitted through socialisation' (Renzetti, 2013, p. 7) and are deeply embedded in social institutions and social practices (Jackson and Scott, 2002). In the context of South Asia, including Bangladesh, the institution of the family and the value placed on family honour are highly esteemed (Ahmed et al., 2009; Shahani, 2013). The family serves as one of the primary agents of socialization, through which women become habituated to societal norms and assigned gender roles (Sooryamoorthy, 2012; Hayes and Franklin, 2017). It is within the family that women learn self-discipline and conform to societal standards, norms, and regulations (Ghosh and Singh, 2017). Gender roles are rigidly defined, however, in the Indian sub-continent, girls' gender roles are enforced more strictly compared to boys (Basu et al., 2017). The patriarchal culture of the South Asian region expects women to bear the responsibility for family integrity and honour and thus their behaviour and movements are closely monitored (Leonardsson and San Sebastian, 2017, Gill, 2013).

As already discussed, the participants in this research shared an array of experiences of being women in a patriarchal society facing traditional expectations from family, differentiating treatment between siblings based on their sex, emphasis on marriage and family roles, having a different or no social life at all compared with the male family members, and having little or no independence compared with

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the male family members. To demonstrate how the gendered power relations within the family influence women's experiences of street harassment, the analysis of the data included several themes such as obtaining permissions before going out, obtaining permissions before going to certain places at certain times, policing and self-policing women's dress and behaviour, mandatory male company while going out and specific return time. The mentioned themes are informed by a number of factors, including the understanding of context, location, temporality and appropriateness of dress and behaviour. By analysing these expectations from women and the various barriers that the women encounter, I want to argue that the intersections between gender and patriarchal culture within the family impact Bangladeshi women in their everyday lives, their experiences of street harassment, the strategies they employ to deal with the harassment as well as their disclosure behaviour.

### ***'Could I go out?' - (Obtaining permission beforehand)***

Most of the families in Bangladesh portray the classic patriarchal family structure where the head of the household is the father, husband, or even eldest son, who dominates as the decision-maker in all respects (Chowdhury, 2009). All the participants of this research agreed that they need to inform the family beforehand about their plans, other than regular education or work and ask for approval from the head of the family. The structural power relations are thus reproduced when women need to seek permission and justify their need to go out. However, the majority of the participants mentioned that the rule of seeking permission does not apply to younger or older brothers. During the interview with one participant, she compared her daily situation with her brother:

My brother can go out whenever he wants – he is allowed to sleep over at his friends, to group study at night – but I am not. (Hira, INT 02)

Here Hira highlighted the gender inequality within the family, which determined her freedom of accessibility and mobility outside her house. While her brother does need to seek permission for a sleepover at friends' - either for pleasure or study - Hira is not permitted at all to do the same for group study and let alone for pleasure. All the participants mentioned that they need to ask the family members about the time, place for leisure activities or shopping and obtaining approval depends largely on the time and place of the plans. Although, it was also generally agreed by all the participants that getting permission for evening or night-time activity is out of the question, and therefore, the plans are always made remembering the 'sunset law' (Amina, INT 23). Further discussion with the participants untangles the concept of 'sunset law,' which was not readily available in any other Bangladeshi research. While not a legal provision per se, 'sunset law' refers to the traditional understanding and requirement within the majority of Bangladeshi families for its women members to return home, whether from the educational institution or work, by sunset/ dark or before the 'Magrib azan' (evening prayer call of Muslims). Additionally, five of the participants who were studying at the most prestigious university in Bangladesh shared with frustration that their family never let them go on any study tour arranged by their school because their male classmates will go on the tour too. As Nadia (INT 30) shared with me:

I have never been on any study tour – neither the one arranged by the school nor the one arranged by the students themselves. My parents never allowed me because my boy classmates will go too and so it might not be safe.

However, one participant, Maisha (Int 34), who also had to abide by the strict family rules about movement and accessibility, joyously shared that her family let her participate in a competition arranged in India, and she had to stay there for a week along with her all-male group mates. Although, she confessed that it was her elder sister who took the difficult task of convincing their father to give her the opportunity suggesting that Maisha had worked hard for the competition. While the male

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members of her group were concerned about getting selected for the group and doing well in the group work, along with all these, Maisha was even more concerned about getting permission from her family for the week-long tour. Maisha's experience indicates how gender complicates and disproportionately discriminates against women in their sociocultural participation.

This discussion on seeking permission or informing about plans raises the fact that society restricts women's mobility and movement due to the patriarchal and widely accepted gendered norms, and hence, gender intersects with patriarchal cultures and traditions of the society. To demonstrate how patriarchal culture or tradition determines the gender role within the family: firstly, the women who took part in this research needed to obtain permission because they were regarded as dependent upon the household head of the family. Secondly, the women did not even expect to receive permission to go out after dark because there was a common concern and worry about their safety and security without the presence of any male chaperone. Thirdly, the participants didn't receive permission to go on a study tour not only because of the concern about their safety from the strangers but also due to the mistrust of their families towards the male classmates. It is also understood from the interviews that a general worry and concern among the participants is that the restrictions inflicted upon them by their families can only increase with more obvious and strict consequences like a total ban on education, job, or mobility outside the home, as a result of the harassing activities on the streets. Hence, it can be said that women's seeking and obtaining permission to venture outside is highly relational with gender as well as the social culture and traditions, and even that can further be complicated as a result of incidents of street harassment.

### ***Where are you going? - (Specific purpose of going out)***

All the participants agreed that they always leave the house for specific purposes, and while in public places, they must uphold the principles of feminine domesticity by displaying goal-oriented movements. Traditionally, Bangladeshi women are expected to manage the private world of household chores and childcare, whereas men's responsibility is to take care of the materialistic outer world (Feldman, 2001). The division of 'ghor' and 'bahir' – 'ghor,' the inner world of tradition and stability is to be maintained by women, and 'bahir', the hustle and bustle of everyday life is to be dealt with by men - was thus normalised. Therefore, if women are accessing public places, they are always forced to produce a sense of purpose in their demeanour because "a purposeless presence in the largely male public domain is fraught with the risk of being labelled as improper or illegitimate" (Paul, 2011, p. 425). As Phadke (2012, p. 79) argued, women always have to "perform purpose" while accessing the public spheres in a variety of manners, for example, by carrying large bags, walking quickly, or waiting at a bus stop. In the previous chapters of this thesis, some of the participants shared their experiences of being harassed by the men who were congregating and chatting in front of a roadside tea stall or at a random corner of a street. Women in traditional Bangladeshi society cannot chat and congregate in public spaces in the same manner because even the public spaces are gendered in a way that tends to exclude women. The participants also suggested that the common cultural assumption is that a woman who loiters on the streets is not a 'good woman' and is usually a prostitute. Jahida, for example, shared how she carefully maintains the impression that she is not loitering on the streets but rather waiting for someone:

Boys can chat and drink tea all day in the corner shops, but for me, even if I have to wait for my friend to go to college together, I wait at the nearby bus stop, pretending for the bus to arrive, but not on the street. (INT 39)

By waiting at the bus stop, instead of on the streets, Jahida attempts to show her purpose of being in public spaces. Aleef (INT 31), who returns home in the late hours of the night, purposefully wears her workplace identification card on her neck to resist the public assumption that she is loitering or

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soliciting on the streets. In societies where patriarchal norms are deep-rooted, the relationships between men and women are segregated and complex and thus, entering public spaces without a valid purpose runs the risk of inviting unwanted sexual harassment or attack. In the context of intersectional analysis, thus, gender is not the single-axis identity for which the women are facing violence on the streets and considering gender alone as a means to understand street harassment will not help to tackle the problem. In this instance, gender intersects with traditional and social norms, which give different roles and attributes to both men and women. When women on the streets differ from such traditional role expectations of staying home, doing housework and thus, upholding the family's honour, even the unknown men on the streets try to exert their power and dominance over unknown women by causing harassment and violence.

In terms of the leisure activities of Bangladeshi women, research on this topic is non-existent. The data from this research suggest that Bangladeshi women are not denied their right to leisure, but the nature, time and place of those leisure activities are completely defined by the notions of safety and honour of the women and their families. Therefore, women walking on the streets, sitting in the park alone or congregating or drinking tea by the roadside tea shops are unimaginable activities for Bangladeshi women, unlike Bangladeshi men. The majority of the participants of this research mentioned gathering in a friend's house or inside restaurants and any other specific venue for which they have to seek permission beforehand from their families. Participants also mentioned going shopping together with friends as one of their leisure activities. One of the noticeable factors regarding leisure activities among all the participants was that differences in their social classes, religion or marital status do not translate into different or better opportunities for leisure activities. None of the women mentioned any leisure activities they pursued by themselves or with friends during the evening or at night. Leisure activities like going out for dinner or walking after sundown are always accompanied by close family members only. The constraints imposed on women's leisure activities, especially after sundown, by the families are solely due to the fear and concern about different types of violence against women, including sexual and street harassment, in the public places of Dhaka. Applying an intersectional approach here will not be effective because, as we can see, women holding all types of different social identities are facing harassment and discrimination. Hence, the intersectional approach has its own limitations too and selecting the social identities in order to effectively apply the intersectional approach is of utmost significance (Collins, 2015).

### ***'When are you coming back? '- (Specific return time required)***

Women's accessibility and mobility in public spaces as well as in obtaining permission from the family is significantly dependent on time. All participants in this research agreed that their families need to be well informed about the return time from work even before stepping out of the house. In terms of engaging in leisure activities, the return time is of utmost importance even for obtaining permission.

For a majority of upper, and middle-class women, the mandatory time to return home is before the evening, or sunset or the Maghrib azan (Muslim call for evening prayer). Participants marked this unwritten yet well-familiar social and family regulation as the 'sunset Law,' as explained in the previous section. Two of the participants, however, mentioned that they needed to return home as soon as their classes finished at noon with the liberty to chat with friends for an hour. Runi (age 25) shared that she strongly wanted to work in a part-time job while studying at the university. However, her family promptly rejected this idea because she might need to return home after the sundown. She was given a few conditions to fulfil if she wanted to take any job: that she can vouch for returning home before sundown, that the job location is in the local area, and that her family will investigate first and approve the types of people she will be working with.

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The experiences of these participants, who are mostly from upper, and middle-class families (based on the women's self-declaration during the interviews and their occupations) and college or university-educated, were in sharp contrast to the participants from the lower social class working in garment factories or shops. All the participants who were working in factories or shops had to return home after evening to late at night. For example, all the women participants of this research who were working in the garment factories were returning home from 7 pm and sometimes as late as even 10 pm. This is because, as Munira (INT 43) explains, the majority of women are taking overtime shifts for extra money and therefore, they are working beyond their usual working hours. Few of the other participants who were working in the retail shops were regularly starting their return journey after 10.30 pm because the shops were closing at 10.00 pm, and then they needed to stay back a while to wrap up for the day. Aleef mentioned that depending on the time of the year, she returns home even later than usual:

Before Eid, on some days, I even returned home at midnight. I needed the job, and therefore, I had to comply with the shifts I was given.

Therefore, it can be said that women belonged in poor families were, thus, allowed new forms of independence in terms of taking jobs and returning home after dark and the families were bound to comply with such arrangements due to their financial necessities of extra income. Although these women from the lower class of society could transcend the gendered boundaries of treading public places at unusual hours, that independence comes at the cost of higher risk of violence and loss of respectability. In this respect, the intersection between street harassment, gender and women's economic status is obvious, however, highly relational to the issue of temporality. Women's increased vulnerability to street harassment is connected to their low economic status and the obligation to access public places in the unusual hours of very early in the morning or late at night. Although the likelihood of encountering street harassment during the daytime is present for women of all social classes, the risk of grievous harm is much higher, specifically for poor class women while using public spaces in the early morning or late at night. Furthermore, we will observe the close intersection between gender, temporality and the patriarchal culture of this society which places utmost value on women's reputation and honour.

Phadke (2012) noted that the time, place, and purpose of women's mobility in public places are tightly connected to the notions of respectability. Patel (2010, p. 4) added that women who are out at night are considered "loose, bold and mysterious". A similar notion was echoed by one participant of this research, who also talked about the concept of a 'good girl' as maintained by the local people of her area. Sarah (INT 26) clarified that a 'good girl' in her area does not go to school/college early, comes home straight after college and does not go or stay out late. She also shared that if a woman comes home after sundown in her area, the neighbours start questioning the family the next day regarding the reason, and if a woman gets harassed after sundown, she is the one to be blamed for being out at night. Sarah's comment revealed how attitudes regarding women's staying out after sundown, regardless of the purpose of education, employment, or errands, intersect significantly with social and temporal constructions of gender. Women's physical mobility and access to public spaces are controlled by a particular stretch of time that limits or even prohibit their presence during and after sundown, especially if they are going out alone. Women who do not abide by these patriarchal rules of society are labelled as 'bad girls.' For the poor women who are working in garment factories, their low-class status combined with their requirements to work after sundown renders them even more vulnerable and they are often socially perceived to be indecent women and even sex workers. Thus, temporality is an important factor in Bangladesh to understand the gendered nature of accessibility and mobility of women in public places and women from different classes are affected differently and significantly due to their varied social identities.

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In order to understand the utmost importance placed on women's return home time, further analysis reveals that both the women and the families are more concerned about what the neighbours and society would think when the women stay out late at night. So, it is due to the patriarchal regimes of surveillance from the neighbours of which the women and their families are more concerned about maintaining a particular timescale to be out of the home. Families are concerned about keeping the family honour because local gossip about staying out late can tarnish both the family reputation as well as the character of the women.

### ***'What are you wearing?'- (Policing clothing and behaviour)***

Goffman (2004) noted that public dress and behaviour are theorised as methods of gender performance through which sexuality is displayed as well as wider social and cultural gender norms are reflected and reinforced. For Bangladeshi women, this 'performance' was a conscious and often tactical choice of clothing, makeup and behaviour depending on the time of the day, place of visit and overall situation in order to enhance their personal security and avoid street harassment. While interviewing the participants regarding their coping mechanisms, using different styles of clothing, or using their regular forms of clothing in different styles depending on different circumstances came up repeatedly from the majority of the participants. While women's self-policing of their own clothing is a part of their internalised control in order to avoid negative and insulting comments, such self-policing resulted due to normative parental control and patriarchal social control of their clothing and behaviour in the first place. Scrutinising and questioning women about their clothes, attitudes and behaviours are a patriarchal process of social control and female oppression (Kabeer, 1995). Such stereotypes question the chastity and purity of the women and suggest that the women themselves were to blame for the harassment or violence by breaking the traditional social norms (Hashmi, 2000) and the interview responses of the participants shed light on this too. Moreover, clothing is an important symbol of religious identification too. All the major religions, including Islam, have a strong patriarchal element and hence, maintaining modesty in women's clothing is associated not only with religious values but also with the gender norms of the society. In this section, we will observe how gender intersects with the dominant culture and religion of the society, which is bound by a tacit set of rules, customs, and rituals.

The majority of the participants admitted that they were asked to wear traditional Bangladeshi clothes from an early age and forbidden to wear western clothing like tops, shirts, jeans etc., both at home and outside. For Sakira, the restrictions and regulations on clothing came from a very early age, and all the restrictions were imposed by her extended family due to the absence of her parents:

From the age of 10/11, I was not allowed to wear frocks with tights or trousers, and after a couple of years, I only could wear salwar kameez while going out. No frocks, skirts or t-shirts were allowed while going out; not even wearing them in front of my male cousins was allowed. (INT 19)

She assumes that the restrictions were stricter than usual in her case because, in the absence of her father, the responsibility to protect her reputation and well-being fell upon her extended families, and so, the families wanted to be as careful as possible to safeguard the honour of their daughter and the family too. Similar restrictions are placed on Amy too by her family, and she is complying with the rule, although somewhat unenthusiastically:

As a Bangladeshi, I need to wear traditional Bangladeshi dresses like salwar kameez. I find western dresses interesting and wish I could wear them, but I can't. My family will not allow that. (INT 24)

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For Neha, the restrictions are slightly relaxed since she is allowed to wear western clothing within the boundaries of home only, away from the eyes of strangers:

I never wear Western dresses outside, although I wear them at home. My family said - 'you are not allowed to wear them outside. Be decent when out of the home.' They don't force me to cover my hair with orna but said that - 'no hanging of orna by the neck.' I don't like that either.  
Neha (INT 6)

This discussion about women's clothing choices conforms to the fact that women in Bangladeshi society need to dress and behave in a certain way to gain respectability from their own families and society. Research suggests that in traditional patriarchal societies, a woman's body is associated with the discourse of honour for her family, the society and even the whole nation, and as a result, multiple forces attempt to control and determine women's behaviour to protect this honour through clothing, purdah, or seclusion (Chowdhury, 2010: 37; Lewis, 2011: 15). Hence, a complex intersection of gender and traditional culture is observed here where Bangladeshi women are bound to uphold the traditional, cultural, and patriarchal values through their clothing while navigating the public spaces and non-conformity to the traditional style of clothing can often cause an adverse consequence. Begum and Dasgupta (2015) signified that in India, western clothing was often associated with the contaminating forces of a hyper-sexualised colonial (western) modernity and cultural loss, whereas Indian clothing was used to imply purity, chastity, and tradition. From the range of interviews conducted for this research, I came to learn that adhering to any form of traditional Bangladeshi or conservative dress code did not provide safety since women in the sari, salwar kameez, or western clothing were at the receiving end of street harassment all alike. However, the change that is achieved through such clothing is the perception of both the families and the bystanders because the women who are wearing traditional clothing are often seen as respectable and hence, acquire a greater legitimacy when they protest against the harassment and tend to get sympathy and help from the bystanders.

Both Bani (INT 9) and Saika (INT 25) believed wearing traditional clothing can protect the reputation of their own selves as well as their families against victim blaming. As suggested by the participants, the common belief among the families was that wearing western clothes would invite more frequent and more severe forms of street harassment, unwillingness from the bystanders to help if needed, and eventually, the blame will fall on the women. Bani (INT 09), who is studying in a local college, believes that wearing western clothes on the street robs her family of the opportunity to confront the harasser. The same notion was echoed by Nila (INT 13), who thinks choosing western clothing means providing opportunities to street harassers. In the previous chapter (chapter 6), Bani (INT 9) shared the daily harassing experiences of her close friend who wears a veil on top of her traditional clothing, and therefore, I asked the follow-up question to her, and some other participants as to – 'why do they still consider veiling as the safest form of coping strategy if they have experienced or witnessed harassment while wearing it?' I can add here that all the participants made it clear that hijab/abaya/burqa would always come first in terms of ranking the most modest way of clothing in Bangladesh. In response to my follow-up question, both Bani (INT 9) and Saika (INT 25) responded that if the women are harassed while wearing religious clothing like hijab/abaya/burqa, they can proudly ask for help from the bystanders because they are dressed up in the most modest way and still received harassment and therefore, it is the perpetrator who is in the wrong and not the women themselves. As mentioned in chapter three, religion and culture are intrinsically interconnected in the context of Bangladeshi society. While the dominant sociocultural and political norms and values of the mass population are greatly influenced by Islamic understandings, Islam, on the other hand, as the religion of the majority, has also been influenced by the social and ideological culture of the country too. Gender roles, in turn, is derived from both the traditional Bangladeshi culture and religion (Feldman, 1992). Therefore, the complex intersection between three different social categories of

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gender, religion and culture is manifested in Bangladeshi women's clothing practices and restrictions as well as its relevance to the street harassment issue.

### ***'Who is going with you? - (Mandatory Male Chaperone)***

Alongside the family pressure to look, act and carry on with their daily lives in certain ways, the participants also described how they are regularly infantilised by their families, which causes emotional stress and agony. Few participants mentioned their mandatory family rules of being chaperoned by a male member almost everywhere they go. One participant was visibly upset and annoyed to announce that her family often makes her and her sisters take male company like brothers, even if the brothers are younger, as a means of enhancing their personal security. Arin (INT 01) who was working in a private university in Dhaka, expressed herself this way:

I used to be really irritated and angry for that, because how someone who is junior to me can be my guardian!

Being accompanied by a male member of the family is part of the cultural and religious norms about gender, space and security which provides insight into individual gendered spatial mobility. While some women were liberally allowed by the family to navigate the public spaces alone, others were allowed only due to the absence of close male family members. Women who were reluctantly allowed spatial freedom by their family members often feared being curtailed of this freedom if the family learns about their victimisation of street harassment. This was the case for Runi who never shared her harassing experiences in public spaces with her mother:

She might tell me that there is no need to go out, stay at home, no need to do late or evening classes. That's why I never share with my mom even if I am in a problem, never.

As such, street harassment and the risk of further possible aggression compel women and their families to seek male company, increase women's dependence on men as a result and can also cause distrust between the sexes (Bowman, 1993). All the women who had to be accompanied by their fathers, brothers or husbands confirmed that they usually do not encounter harassment on the streets in the presence of those male members and hence, they feel safer when being accompanied. As explained by both Tara and Rumana, they only face harassment when they go shopping with their friends:

Well, I don't face any problems on the way to university. This is because my brother picks me up right in front of our house and drops me at the university gate. So, there is no way of any problem (INT 05)

I don't even notice any harassment when I am with my husband because I know he is going to take care of me. I only face harassment when I am on my own or with friends (INT 27)

Similar to Tara, another participant shared that she never thought about taking any precautions, because she is always chaperoned by someone from her family:

No precautions, not at all. I feel like they will take care of the situation if something happens (Pushpo, INT 38)

The above excerpts portray a unique paradoxical situation of women feeling safer under the watchful eyes and constraints of male family members. However, the discourse of male chivalry and women's sexual vulnerability in public spaces is mired both in patriarchal and masculinist ideologies where men

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are charged with the role of guardians and protectors of women from a very early age (Phadke, 2007). Wetherell (1993) suggested that the 'protection of femininity' is a defining feature of masculinity where men offer to provide women safety, guard their reputation and hence, bring with it a range of restrictions. The mandatory rule of the male company is, evidently, part of those restrictions which can reinforce the rigid gender roles of the society instigating feelings of disempowerment among women and can also further limit their free movement in public spaces. Besides, the differentiated roles and rights for men and women are the root cause of gender inequality in society, and it also reinforces gender-based violence like street harassment, among many other forms of violence. In this instance, we can observe that gender as the single-axis understanding cannot be solely employed to analyse the issue of street harassment; rather, the intersection between gender and culture can contribute to understanding women's marginalisation and subordination in Bangladeshi society.

In this section, I have demonstrated the intersection between social categories of gender and patriarchal culture, where one social category influences the other and in turn, also influences women's access to public places and street harassment experiences. While the rules and restriction mentioned by the participants were mostly parental normative control, however, those rules conform to the patriarchal social norms and values, in the broader sense.

### 7.3 SOCIAL CLASSES AND DOUBLE OPPRESSION

Research (Stanko 1990; Valentine 1989) on fear of crime has argued that women who have advantages due to their class, income and education are less fearful of crime in their everyday lives and are less affected by the threat of violence. Discussions in the previous section revealed that Bangladeshi women from lower-class families are already allowed more independence in terms of taking different sorts of employment and staying out late at night. Employing intersectional analysis in the context of street harassment reveals that even though women's varying social class do not necessarily influence their degree of concern regarding facing harassment from the strangers, however, social class may influence how the women deal with the harassment and manage their coping mechanisms.

Studies show that the risk of victimisation of crime is greater depending on the area of residence (Mayhew et al, 1989, Pantazis, 2000; Pare & Felson, 2014). Participants of this research who live in the poor neighbourhood reported facing frequent and regular harassment on the street even in their own area. In contrast, upper-class and middle-class women participants who live in the gated communities of apartment buildings and residential areas confirmed of being feeling safe at least in their own local area. Surma, a 23-year-old young woman who works in a local beauty salon, talks about her daily plight on her way to and from work. She mentioned that men of different ages including school-going boys gather at every corner in her local area and harass women while indulging in chatting and smoking. She shared her most recent experiences of physical harassment from a group of schoolboys who are much younger than her. Surma explained that she was on her way home on a three-wheeler rickshaw when one of the boys slapped her back through the rear part of the vehicle which is usually open. Since the boys were young, Surma asked the rickshaw driver to stop the vehicle so that she can confront them. However, the boys straightway refused to do anything and then left the place.

Another participant, Lina (age 18) who was born and brought up in her local area talked about facing harassment from the local boys since she entered adolescence. She shared with great surprise:

We have been living in this area for around 27/28 years before I was even born. The people who I have considered like elder brothers, you know, local boys, they started giving dirty gestures. I was even teased in the alley near my home. (INT 29)

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On the other hand, participants who belong to middle-class or upper-middle-class families admitted to at least feeling safe in their own area or university campus.

I might have faced harassment everywhere else, but never within the university campus. (Diya, INT 22)

If I am in my university dorm, then there is no restriction, because the campus is safe. I can go out and be back by 10- 10.30 pm - that's fine. (Priya, INT 33)

Most of the time, I feel safe in my own area because I grew up in that area and people know my brother and my dad. But then, new people move into the apartment buildings, and they don't know us, obviously. So, I try to keep myself safe as much as possible (Neha, INT 6)

All these participants felt safer in their local areas of residence because of how well they know and feel at ease with both their social and physical surroundings (Valentine, 1989). However, a small number of the participants from middle - and upper-class families admitted to facing harassment in their local areas too. Nadia (INT 30) who was studying at a university shared her experiences of facing harassment after recently moving into a secure, middle-class residential area along with her family. She frustratingly explained that all the harassers were also students at different colleges and universities around the city and were also residents of that local area. They spent most of the day sitting at a nearby tea stall and verbally harass her every time she comes out of the house. Evidently in both Neha and Nadia's cases, their upper - and middle-class social status does not necessarily affect or reduce their victimisation of street harassment, and this is because the degree of harassment is likely to have a strong bearing on the context and unknown men that women fear and not necessarily on women's varying social classes.

While class is linked to certain privileges like living in a gated and secure community and the low crime rate of the area, middle - and upper-class women are not always protected by their social status alone against street harassment. Some of the participants reported being frightened when passing through the disadvantaged areas on their way to and from home. Some of the participants believed that they have been targets of abuse from the lower-class men of that area because of their comparatively upper-class privilege. When the participants were asked to describe how they perceived certain areas to be dangerous, several variables appeared to contribute to such perceptions. First, the women heard about the crime-prone characteristics of those localities from their acquaintances or media and were influenced by those second-hand images. Secondly, the visible differences between the people of those areas due to their clothing or professions also contributed to creating a perception of a dangerous environment. Research suggests that people feel uncomfortable with variabilities which implies that the behaviour of those people who appear different may not conform to their own and hence, creates a sense of uncertainty and threat (Kennedy and Silverman 1985; Valentine, 1989). Women who faced harassment from lower-class working men sounded especially enraged and disgusted by such experiences.

On my way home from work, there is a guy who begs in the streets, even that guy throws nasty comments at me! I never gave him alms neither I ever replied to him. (INT 42)

Sometimes even the rickshaw pullers give nasty looks - even after knowing that I am studying at this university! Can you imagine! That feels bad! (INT 17)

This quotation gives insight into the fact that class privilege does not always provide benefit to the socially advantaged group due to the intersections with the patriarchal nature of the Bangladeshi society, where women always belong to the oppressed group and their harassment transcends class

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boundaries. Women's sense of superiority due to their upper class makes them especially enraged when attacked by lower-class men but those upper-class women can be just as equally vulnerable to male violence of all classes.

In terms of the coping mechanisms of women to prevent and minimise future harassment in the streets, there are considerable differences due to class privileges. Participants from the upper class admitted to being able to avoid harassment since they have more means and resources at their disposal to employ coping strategies, for example, higher income to stay off the streets and crowded public transportation, instead riding in chauffeured / private transports. Three of the participants shared that they use their own private cars extensively and therefore did not have any harassing experiences to share while travelling. One of the participants, Anila (INT 3) shared that her close friend used to travel by public bus regularly because it was quicker to go to the university that way. However, one day she was badly harassed on the bus and then decided not to use public buses anymore. So, in her case, she has the resource to afford other ways of travelling and prevent further victimisation while on board which cannot be possible for women from middle-, or lower-class families due to their limited income. Upper-class participants also admitted to actively avoiding the crowded shopping centres being fearful of teasing and groping.

In order to carry on with the intersectional analysis, we need to remember that intersectionality is not about only identifying all the social categories or identities of a person, rather it's a complex intersection and interaction of those social identities with one another that contribute to the positive and negative social experiences. In this instance, we will see how gender intersects with social class and influences women's access to public spaces as well as the ability and affordability of coping with the risk of street harassment. While women from upper-class families have the means to afford private or alternate types of vehicles to prevent potential victimisation, women from the middle-class families cannot afford the same flexibility. Some of the participants who belonged to the middle class admitted to taking semi-public transport, like three-wheeler rickshaws, and automobiles even though hiring such transports daily put them under a financial strain.

If I take public buses, then from my home to the university, it costs only 5 taka (Bangladeshi currency). Whereas when I take a rickshaw, then a single trip costs me 60 taka. So, you see, it would be 10 taka by bus, whereas I am spending 120 taka per day by taking a rickshaw only because my mom and I worry about my safety. (Runi, INT 7)

My financial cost especially my transport cost rises because of the insecurities on the street. Sometimes, the journey I could cover by walking, I have to take a rickshaw because it's too late, or somewhere I could go by bus, I will have to take a cab because the buses will be too crowded at that time. (Shana, INT 18)

It is evident from these excerpts that these women have been using different modes of transport, and along the way, they learn to incorporate the suitable mode of transport to manage their risk and level of exposure to harassment while also keeping in mind the cost of doing so. Further, we also need to recognise the fact that the women's perception of safety and affordability of alternate forms of transport is not homogenous, even within the same social class. Maisha, for example, admitted that even though the public bus was never her preference, she had to learn to use it daily because of the rising economic cost of availing alternate modes of transport which she could not afford for long.

I actually struggled a lot during my first year in university when I just started to travel on public buses. Some days, if I missed or skipped the University bus, then I had to hire a rickshaw, which usually cost me around 70 - 80 taka. That was very expensive for me, and my cost was rising. So, I had to learn to travel in public buses. (Maisha, INT 34)

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While all of these three women belong to middle-class households, they do not share a similar kind of affordability. While for Runi and Shana the priority is to become safe from harassment in public places and transport, for Maisha, the priority is to keep the daily travel cost as low as possible. Although both Runi and Shana do not belong to the upper classes and do not have private transport, they are privileged enough to afford the daily high cost of availing semi-public transport like rickshaws or taxicabs, which was not the case for Maisha. Furthermore, we can observe a complex intersection between affordability and coping mechanisms in the following excerpts:

I never like walking because then harassment becomes too obvious – as strangers push suddenly, touch suddenly, or come too close and not to mention the comments and staring. So even if the distance is short and I have to spend extra money, I rather prefer a rickshaw to walk. (Nila, INT 13)

Most of the tuitions I gave were far away from my dorm. So, I used to take the bus to save money. If I could not take a bus for some reason, then I would walk the whole way, but I hardly took any rickshaws because of the expensive fare. You can imagine I have faced harassment of all sorts during this time. (Rihana, INT 8)

While both of the women agreed that walking on the streets alone invite more frequent forms of harassment, only Nila has the resource to avoid potential victimisation by hiring transports. Rihana, on the other hand, has to resort to walking and encounter harassment on the streets even though she is fully aware of the risks.

For the lower-class working women, in contrast, using an alternate mode of transport to prevent further harassment is a privilege which they cannot afford and therefore had to carry on using public transport even after being harassed and groped. All the women in this research who work in different supermarkets, shops, and garment factories admitted that hiring any semi-public transport for their daily travel is not a viable option for them. These working women reside in the poorer neighbourhood of the city and hence, the working places are far away, most of the time. Due to the great distance between the accommodation and the workplace, the fare of semi-public transport tends to be considerably higher and therefore, beyond their daily budget for transport costs. Apart from the working women, seven other women who are students and from low-income families also echoed the similar struggle of limited transport budget for their daily travel.

While the intersection of gender and class is highly relevant in conceptualising women's street harassment experiences, there is a need to acknowledge the spatial and temporal dimensions which add further complexity to women's experiences, for example, they can be susceptible to more severe forms of street harassment as well as sexual propositioning. Some of the participants of this research shared that they need to be extremely cautious about their dress, behaviour, and the time they go and return from work in order to avoid rumours about working as prostitutes. One participant, Meem (INT 31), shared an incident where she was approached by a stranger on the street and asked for her 'price' when she was returning home at almost midnight. She admits that her financial vulnerability had led her to work till late at night and that had also left her highly and visibly vulnerable to others on the streets and thus, the strangers attempted to take advantage of her circumstances. As she explained:

Most nights, all of the transports I take - bus and tempo (6/8 seaters auto-mobile) - I end up as the only woman passenger. I feel very insecure. Some people stare in a very creepy way, and that is scary.... I fear being kidnapped, too, sometimes, and other sexual violence, not to mention. (INT 31)

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Another participant, Tuba, who is a 20-year-old undergraduate student in a local college and part-time sales staff in a local supermarket, shared her experience:

On my way home from work, it usually gets late, like 9 pm or 10 pm. So, I take off my makeup so that people on the streets or bus do not take me for a prostitute. (Tuba, INT 11)

Tuba's comment illustrates that removing makeup is a form of safety strategy for her to present herself as a 'good girl' in society and not a sex worker because labelling women as sex workers is a way of degrading them and then using it to justify the harassment (McInerney & Cappiello, 2015, p. 16). Anthias (2913b) argued that social identities do not hold similar levels of power all the time; rather, the importance of certain identities varies depending on the location and time. For example, how an individual is perceived in one space and time (for example, a lower-class woman navigating public space in the daytime) in comparison to another (the same woman navigating the same space late at night). Munira (age 19), who was working in a garment factory, had to be present at her workplace by 8 o'clock every morning and being late at work meant that she wouldn't have access and might lose the job instantly. She, along with some of her colleagues, takes a public bus which is regularly crowded even in the early morning, and harassment occurs at that early hour too. She noted:

These boys never give any space or leave their seats for any girls ever. They behave badly even at that hour. Girls had to carry on because they had to go to work. (Munira, INT 43)

The first quote of Tuba illustrates how the woman feels more vulnerable late at night because of the lack of presence of other women and how the whole space seems to be controlled by men. In the second quote, Munira explained how she and her colleagues face harassment even early in the morning. This is significant because the presence of fellow women passengers on the bus didn't help. The space was still controlled by men. It is evident from the findings of the earlier chapters that women fear and experience street harassment in the public places of Dhaka regardless of different times of the day, however, times like early morning and late night can definitely contribute to a higher perceived risk of harassment. From the above quotes, it also needs to be pinpointed that women associate their fear of harassment on public transport when it is both crowded and empty. When crowded, the agglomeration of strangers in a closed space like public transport is associated with a higher risk of harassment. When empty with fewer male passengers and no other female passengers, women worry about being harassed or abused with no witnesses around and no helpful bystanders to step in. Additionally, the fear of being 'slut-shamed' by strangers on the streets was not expressed by the participants from upper or middle-class families, which further confirms the importance of considering spatial and temporal dynamics when doing intersectional analysis. As the experiences of the participants reveal, intersections of gender and social class as well as the spatial and temporal dimensions, greatly influence how women's harassment is perpetrated and experienced in the public places and public transports of Dhaka.

To continue on the intersectional analysis of social class and gender and women's subsequent double oppression, participants' discussion on police corruption brings forth further complexity to the scenario. All the participants from lower-income families agreed that they are unwilling to report to the police for formal help because they do not expect fair and transparent treatment from the police either in the first instance or later in the process, and still, they will be expected to pay bribes. Munira explained her predicament here:

We, the poor, do not get police by our side. Police may come and ask me about what has happened, and I may have to give some money thinking that he is going to help me. But

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ultimately, he will take money from the other side too and will support and help the people with more power and money. (Munira, INT 43).

It is important to note that the personal experiences of the participants with police or their vicarious experiences were not always about harassing incidents on the streets but other cases too, like, hijacking and theft. However, what is common among them all is the general lack of trust in police and for the poor women - being fairly treated by police. This research, thus, explored a troublesome and vicious circle where the women already believe that the police are corrupt and behave unfairly and, therefore, do not report their experiences to the police at all, and even if they do, they assume that they are going to be treated unfairly. Therefore, my research contributes important data from Bangladesh that supports a connection between people's lower-class status and unfavourable and mostly negative perceptions of police (Black, 1971; Wu, Sun, & Triplett, 2009), although, however, both of this research (Black, 1971; Wu, Sun, & Triplett, 2009) focused on people from the lower class in general and not on women, specifically. It is clear from the interviews and the analysis that there are differences in the ways that women from different social classes face harassment and negotiate safety, and that proves the need to consider social class as an important social identity in the intersectional analysis. Women cannot achieve unrestricted autonomy over their mobility and freedom by the virtue of their class privileges, educational qualifications, professions, and income alone. While both upper - and middle-class women can achieve respectability due to their higher educational status and professions, it is the upper-class women who are better equipped with their financial ability to avoid the harassing experiences in public places and middle-class women, on the other hand, are constantly calculating and negotiating their way around to navigate the public places safely yet cost-effectively too. Lower-class women, on the contrary, might not be seen with respect in their own neighbourhoods or outside, but they are constantly crashing and rejecting the spatial and temporal boundaries that are systemic for women in the patriarchal society of Bangladesh by working in paid employment and using the public places in unusual hours like early morning or late night. However, their lack of education and low-paid jobs did not provide them respectability, and as a result, they constantly experience severe and frequent forms of harassment on the streets, and due to financial constraints, alternative ways to deal with harassment are scarce too. Therefore, we can say that street harassment is a discriminatory form of violence against women in general, regardless of their social class.

### 7.4 RELIGION AND RESTRICTIONS

In this section, I analyse how the intersection of gender and religion influences violence like street harassment in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Islam being the religion of more than 85% of the population, plays a very important role in Bangladeshi society. At this point, it is important to clarify here that a large number of people in Bangladesh gain their knowledge about Islam from Islamic priests and handbooks written by them rather than the primary source, like the Quran and main hadiths (Hashmi, 2000). Therefore, by religion, I will be pointing towards the conventional sociocultural practices that seem to have more association with prevailing or dominant morality than theological Islam. The secondary sources to understand Islam, for example, handbooks written by a priest, are usually full of misogynistic remarks which are used to promote the subordination of women and the perpetuation of traditional gendered behaviour and roles (Hashmi, 2000). Therefore, while Islam is not inherently based on patriarchal attitudes, those attitudes have been absorbed into Islam by the popular traditional Bangladeshi culture in order to reproduce societal norms of male dominance and female subordination (Ahmed, 1992). In the earlier section of this chapter, I have discussed how the gendered upbringing of women involves controls on their movement, behaviour, and attire and how failure to follow parental regulations can result in immediate or long-term repercussions. In this section, I will demonstrate that women's street harassment experiences stand at the complex intersections of

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gender and religion. Hence, it is essential to undertake an intersectional approach to better understand women's victimisation because these aforementioned aspects of their identities not only define their everyday life experiences but also specifically their experiences and responses to street harassment.

Before connecting the findings of this research with the concept of intersectionality, we need to understand that the purpose of intersectionality is not to provide a framework for investigating all sorts of experiences and differences among women but to focus on only those that are oppressed (Singh, 2015). Previous research on intersectionality has been hesitant to engage faith and religion other than to occasionally list religion as one in a list of relevant differences. Mahmood (2005, p. 1) noted that although there have been "serious attempts at integrating issues of sexual, racial, class, and national difference within feminist theory, questions regarding religious difference have remained relatively unexplored". Singh (2015) believed that intersectionality is expected to address religious oppression in particular and not to engage in condoning or justifying religious identity in general. For example, Mirza's (2012) research in Europe on Muslim women and intersectionality explored how women's hijab, attire, and lifestyle influence how they are seen publicly as dangerous or oppressed because of their religious, gendered identity. To this end, in the context of Bangladesh, when the notion of the 'good girl of the society' is in action, Islam or Hinduism alone does not create a sphere of exploitation; rather, the misogynistic, patriarchal social system is to be blamed for the domination and disparity. Women in Bangladeshi society are taught and learnt from an early age about how to use public spaces and how to behave and dress in a 'proper' or appropriate manner for their gender shaped by the structure of the religious and societal norms (Sultana, 2010). The findings of this section indicate the deep rootedness of patriarchal ideology in Bangladeshi society in the name of religion, where women are systematically silenced by the family and community with institutionalised shaming and victim blaming. Based on this understanding and the rigorous analysis of the participants' interviews, the following sections will now intersectionally analyse the harassing experiences of women along the lines of gender and religion

The discussion around women's attire and subsequent harassment from stranger men on the streets came up repeatedly in almost every interview, and the participants generally agreed that women's safety and accessibility in public places greatly depends on whether the attire they choose to wear reflects the dominant religious and cultural values of the country. In Bangladesh, choices and decisions about different clothing styles are structured by the politics of culture and religion, tied to debates about westernisation, religious values, and cultural authenticity. The data reveals that Bangladeshi women are expected by their families and societies to embody Bangladeshi tradition through their clothing which becomes a site for the expression of patriotic respectability, and for Muslim women maintaining religious modesty is an added variable. From the experiences shared by the participants in chapter five, it is evident that women face harassment regardless of the types of clothing they wear, including salwar kameez, sari or even hijab and even after maintaining the society's rule of decency. At the same time, the concept of 'good Muslim girl' repeatedly appears, too, because the popular perception is that Muslim women are safer on the streets because they are covered in an abaya /hijab. However, my Muslim participants spoke of facing harassment in public places and even being groped on public transportation too. Lina (INT 29) shared that she and her friend faced harassment on the streets even after wearing an abaya and hijab. She mentioned that even abaya-wearing women are not safe from harassment:

...if they wear the loose abaya, boys will tease them like, 'what kind of maxi dress are you wearing?' If they wear the tight-fitting abaya, they will say, 'what's the point of wearing such an abaya? We can see your body shape anyway. You have a very nice body.' You can't win. (INT 29)

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Some of the participants shared their opinions in this regard that even the abaya-wearing women are harassed because other women on the streets are inappropriately dressed, and thus, they are sending a bad impression to men about all women in general. The way the participants blamed other women demonstrates how they regulated and policed their own behaviour by adhering to the masculine code of conduct. Their perspectives about how other women need to behave or should not behave can indicate the fact that they have deeply internalised and reproduced patriarchal and gendered expectations regarding women's behaviour and attire in public spaces (Joseph, 1996).

In the same token, religion has also been manipulated and used to control and restrict women's freedom of movement and mobility, which are one of the most important factors that came up numerous times during the interviews. Further analysis of the interviews reveals that an intersection of gender, social class and education greatly influences women's mobility, accessibility, and empowerment and such social circumstances victimize women of unequal opportunities and facilitate different types of violence against women, including street harassment. In the previous section, I demonstrated how the participants from the upper and middle classes of society were denied proper freedom of movement and physical mobility and how that limited their access to education and higher education, involvement in income-generating activities as well leisure and social activities. Lower-class women, on the other hand, have better access to free movement in public places because of their financial constraints, which led them to income-generating activities that do not require educational qualifications. In the context of Bangladesh, the pressure of saving the respect and honour of the self and the families is high on women, more than men, regardless of the religion they follow. Therefore, upholding the religious and cultural values as well as the reputation of the family controls the lives of women from both upper and middle-class families, and they remain disempowered even after receiving the highest levels of education. Even the highly educated upper and middle-class women in Bangladeshi society do not achieve economic empowerment, nor do they have total autonomy in their own lives. Hira (INT 2) talked about how even as an adult woman, she is not allowed to take the decision to go abroad for higher education because travelling as an unmarried young woman might tarnish the reputation of her family and her prospect of a 'good marriage'. In this respect, Kabeer (2005) suggested that in societies with extreme forms of gender inequality and where women's role in society is measured in reproductive terms, education is considered to be an added feature to increase women's chances of good marriages or becoming better wives and mothers. What ties women from all classes regardless is the fact that the pressure and responsibility to uphold and maintain the family reputation rest on their shoulders, and it is only due to the financial predicament of the lower-class families which compels them to grant their women more access to the public spaces.

Therefore, an intersectional analysis along the lines of religion and culture will not demonstrate differentiated treatment of women because, in the patriarchal society of Bangladesh, women as a subordinate class are oppressed regardless of their different religions. In the patriarchal system, women are bound to obey many social customs, traditions, rules, and social structures which control their labour power, mobility, sexuality, property, and other economic resources (Walby, 1990). Moreover, men can use different kinds of violence too in order to control and subjugate women, and the patriarchal system often condones and legitimise that violence against women (Sultana, 2010). Street harassment, in the same tone, is a social practice embedded in the notion of masculinity and practices of power where even unknown men in public places can harass women to wear traditional clothing, Islamic clothing or hijab and the absence of such clothing can become a legitimate reason to blame women for being harassed.

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### 7.5 MARITAL STATUS AND ACCESSIBILITY

An intersectional analysis of street harassment offers to recognise and explore the multiple ways in which women are oppressed and how these intersecting oppressions shape their experiences of street harassment in the public places of Dhaka. While defining Intersectionality, Collins and Bilge (2016, p. 2) argued that ‘when it comes to social inequality, people’s lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race, or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other’ to ‘differentially position each individual’ (p. 8). At its core, intersectionality offers the potential to explore how gender intersects with factors such as age, disability, sexuality, race, and socio-economic status to shape individual experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). Marital status is a relatively unexamined phenomenon of Intersectionality literature. However, my research will show how this particular social identity, i.e., marital status, can significantly implicate women’s access to public spaces as well as influence their street harassment experiences. In this section, I am going to analyse if the presence of any marital markers on the woman influences her safety and accessibility in public places as well as confrontation of harassing incidents from strangers.

In chapter five, I discussed how many parents in Bangladesh consider marriage as part of a safety mechanism. When the daughter faces harassment on the streets, the parents marry them off early, in many cases even before the legal age of marriage. Now, I ask, does marriage protect a woman from street harassment in public places? The findings of this research suggest that it depends on a few other variables and not on marriage itself alone, and those variables will be discussed in this section.

The usual perception in Bangladeshi society is that marriage protects a woman in public spaces by marking her as sexually unavailable and therefore reduces harassment. The married participants of this research, who were Muslims, shared that since Muslim women do not need to carry any signs or markers with them to display that they are married and therefore, there have not been any changes in the frequency of street harassment they faced in public places. In other words, without any visible signs of marriage, they were still assumed to be single, and in a mega city like Dhaka with millions of people, that is bound to happen. However, one participant shared that she used to face regular harassment in her local area, and the harassment stopped after getting married.

I got married in my local area, so people know who my husband is. So nowadays, I don’t face as many bad comments as I used to when I was unmarried. Although people who don’t know me still throw comments. (Risa, INT 36)

Referring to the coping mechanism of the parents who consider marriage as the protective measure against harassment at this point, marriage might indeed prove to help deter the local harassers who know about the marital status of the woman, but it is not an effective measure against the strangers in the public spaces.

Another variable that correlates being married and protection against harassment is the presence of a child. Rupa, a mother to a 6-year-old child, noted:

Whatever experiences I have shared so far, these are my experiences before I got married. Now I have a kid of my own, and I do not face the harassment I used to face before. (Rupa, INT 14)

As a Muslim-majority society, it is completely unusual in Bangladesh to rear a child born out of wedlock and therefore, the common perception is that the accompanying woman is the mother herself.

In terms of accessibility to public places, married women in this research have confirmed to enjoy better accessibility in public places, especially at night, when accompanied by husbands. The majority

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of the women in this research mentioned going out of the house at night in the presence of their families or with their husbands.

Because of our social background - it's not common to go out alone; either my mom or my husband accompanies me (Anila, INT3)

Either my husband or my brother will accompany me; I never get out on my own (at night) (Hiron, INT 4)

I am married, and my husband accompanies me at night. I don't go out alone at night. (Rumana, INT 27)

None of the women spoke of facing scrutiny or harassment in public places in the presence of their husbands, and therefore, spousal presence indeed plays an important role for women in terms of navigating public places. To analyse from an intersectional perspective, women's marital status plays an important role here in determining easy and safe accessibility in public spaces. However, as discussed in an earlier section, marriage can also appear to be a constraint for Bangladeshi women willing to travel abroad for higher studies. Although, one common theme across both of these contexts is the concern of the families to ensure the safety and reputation of the women and their families.

One of the participants of this research is Dolon, a Hindu married woman who carries visible signs of marriage like wearing 'sindoor' (vermillion in the part of forehead and hair) and 'shakha' (white bangles in both hands). She lives with her husband in a Hindu-majority area of Dhaka city and wearing the visible markers of marriage helps her to avoid scrutiny from her in-laws and neighbours. Dolon, who is 28-year-old and an undergraduate student, noted that her local area is a tight-knit Hindu community area and women who wear sindoor, shakha and lots of gold jewellery are 'good Hindu wives' and failing to follow these customs might indicate to the notion that the woman is ashamed of her religion and customs or simply wants to pretend as single. Dolon takes public buses every day to travel to her college, and she shared many experiences of verbal and physical harassment on public transport even though her marriage markers were clearly visible. In this instance, marital markers didn't ensure complete safety for Dolon, and she didn't confront lesser harassment on the streets.

Therefore, marital status plays an important role as a social identity in the intersectional analysis, which impacts women's accessibility to public places as well as the frequency of confronting harassment on the street. However, it still does not ensure complete safety for everyone. For some women, being married means they are less harassed on the streets by strangers due to the presence of their spouse or child, and hence, enjoy greater accessibility to public spaces than single women. However, at the same time, marital status also prevents them from fully enjoying such accessibilities because the majority of the women are supposed to be accompanied by their husbands or other family members if they want to go out of the house at night-time. Hence, the intersection of gender and marital status proves the need for considering marital status as an important factor in the intersectional analysis of street harassment.

### 7.6 AGE AND INTERACTIVE EFFECTS

Although women of all ages shared their experiences of facing different kinds of street harassment, the intersection of age remains an important factor for consideration. Age manifested as a significant aspect of the identity based on which the participants of this research assessed their previous experiences of harassment as well as the observations about the harassers. All the female participants of this research are aged between 18-29 years, and all of them admitted to facing much more and frequent harassment like staring, verbal comments, groping and stalking in public places when they were younger (in their teen years). Sayeeda noted:

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when I was going to school, some boys used to stand in the way... you know... to propose. They used to follow me around everywhere I went – school, tuition. I never looked at them or talked to them. It happened all the time with new groups of boys. (Sayeeda, INT 17)

More than half of all the participants admitted that they had been followed by boys on their way to and from school in their teen years. Similar to Sayeeda, Diya (INT 22) also noted that even after noticing male gazing and comments every day during her teen years in schools, she never reacted. She has studied in all-girls schools throughout her life and always obeyed the advice of her parents to keep her head down on the way to and from school.

Therefore, all the participants admitted that in their teenage years, they faced more victimization and were more scared to react, as also reported by Shana (18). She used to stop herself from reacting, assuming that the bystanders will think badly of her. However, all of the participants have also agreed that the act of victimization has changed as they age, and nowadays, they are not as afraid to react and respond to harassment as they used to before. Rihana, a 28-year-old college teacher, expressed:

The kind of teasing I used to hear during school days and the kind I hear now are different. Nowadays, I mostly hear comments or teasing on a public bus. (INT 8)

She further explained that her harassing experiences on the public bus include not only teasing from fellow passengers or even the bus conductors but also heated arguments with them. For example, when the bus conductors do not let the women get on the bus because the bus can carry more male passengers in a packed manner than women passengers. The argument can also be with fellow passengers when they occupy the priority seats for women and do not want to leave even after being asked and rather start bickering in a nasty manner. Rihana admitted that she used to avoid altercations and reactions even during her college and university years while encountering harassment.

To continue age as an intersectional identity, older women who are mothers and relatives play an important part in reemphasising patriarchal norms in society. Kandiyoti (1988) argued that in classically patriarchal societies, older women engage in patriarchal bargaining by controlling younger women in order to maintain the domination of men. The older women reflect and reinforce patriarchal rules and regulations on the younger women of the household, and as a result, the older women become the 'cultural guards' in the household dictating the movement, attire, and behaviour of the younger ones (Fenster, 2005). In this research, a majority of the participants shared how their families advised them from an early age about how to dress, behave, return home early, not react to harassment and so on. While the directions came from the male head of the family, it was the mothers or other senior female relatives of the family who enforced the rules. Arin, for example, shared how she always protested the family's decision to be accompanied by a male family member whenever she has to go out and who sometimes can be younger than her:

I had lots of arguments with my parents. Especially with my mother, grandmom, aunts (fupi) and the relative from my mother's side who are more conservative than my father's side – I had loads of arguments. (INT 1)

She didn't mention arguing with any male family member or relative, but all the female members are overtly conscious and strict about maintaining the family rule of being chaperoned. Moreover, analysis in chapter six also revealed how mothers or other female family members of the family, in most cases, were at the forefront to victim blame the women immediately after any street harassment incidents. As Tara (INT 5) explained, the foremost reaction of her mother after learning of any street harassment incident would be to question why did she take that route or why did she go to that crowded space in the first place? Another participant, Neha (INT 6), also shared how the immediate reaction of her mother is to question her dress up, behaviour or lack of 'orna' over her head which might have

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'provoked' the strangers to harass her. Therefore, as Kandiyoti (1988) explained, the only way elderly women can gain more power and agency in a male-dominated patriarchal society is when they manoeuvre and reproduce the existing patriarchal structures. In this instance, by victim blaming, the women, after any street harassment incidents, the older women in the family are influencing women's coping mechanisms. As a result, the victimised women might suffer from many consequences, for example, not disclosing any mental trauma, deciding not to disclose any future harassment, or not formally reporting the incidents to the police.

Another distinctive finding is the unanimous agreement among the participants regarding the correlation between the nature of harassment and the age of street harassers in public places. Almost all the participants mentioned that while younger men would mostly engage in verbal harassment, it was the middle-aged men (from 40 years old to onwards) who usually do the physical harassment like touching, groping and nasty gestures. While describing the middle-aged harassers, a few words came up repeatedly in almost every interview: 'dirty,' 'nasty,' 'creepy.' Therefore, such behaviour of middle and upper-aged men goes against the usual social perception of a Bangladeshi society where with old age comes respectability. As Rupa (INT 14) noted:

It would be wrong if I say that these behaviours are only restricted to the younger generation because sometimes a middle-aged or older man would throw such a nasty comment that we do not expect to hear from his age. (INT 14)

Munira (aged 19) and Nadia (aged 30) noted their observations as such:

Like 40+ or 50+ to 60+ people with white hair and beard, they are even worse than the young ones. They touch the girls more badly than the young men. For example, they push on the upper bodies of the girls from behind, pretending that they are trying the girls to get on the bus, or sometimes some people grab their hands from the bus pretending to help as well. (INT 43)

To be honest, if I am travelling on a public bus, I feel more threatened by middle-aged men than the young men. Middle-aged men stare creepily, and they would stand as close as possible and try to touch creepily. (Nadia, INT 30)

While both participants shared their harassing experiences with middle-aged men on public transport, Diya (INT 22) talked about her groping experience with a middle-aged man in the middle of a busy street. She added:

If you are walking on a road and your one side there is a middle-aged man, and on the other side there is a young man - I would say you are better off walking by the side of the young man.

When asked about the reason for harassment from different age groups of men, participants talked about the bad teachings from their respective families. However, most of them did not have any clear idea or explanation about the behaviour of middle and upper-aged men. Runi (INT 07) shared her insight on this topic:

It might be true that young boys wait in front of girls' schools and colleges and harass them. But while on the streets or the public buses, middle-aged men harass and touch more. I guess the young boys do not dare to do that much physical harassment lest the girls insult them in public or something. But middle-aged men do not fear that type of insult.

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Since older men are considered the ‘guardians’ of a patriarchal society (Fenster 2005) who dictate the boundaries of space and privileges for women, by denying women their right to safe navigation in public spaces and by reiterating their vulnerability to violence, older men create a cycle of fear where the power hierarchies and male dominance are maintained in the public spaces, and sociocultural norms are upheld.

To sum up, age acts as a significant intersectional identity in determining the nature of harassment encountered by women of different age groups, exploring the role of older women as the representative of a patriarchal society who can appear as oppressors instead of victims and also, to confirm the role of older men in perpetuating masculine domination in public spaces.

### 7.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how gender intersects with other forms of identity like culture, class, religion, marital status, and age and shapes the participants' daily experiences of harassment in the public spaces of Dhaka city. I have also highlighted how an array of social, cultural, and religious factors deriving from patriarchy informs the construction of the male-dominated Bangladeshi society, which facilitates gender inequality and, subsequently, gender-based violence like street harassment. In doing so, I have also demonstrated how different kinds of identities and power relations determine and control accessibility and safety in public places for women, and it was only possible through an intersectional analysis which I undertook in this chapter.

Thus, these findings bring significant nuance to the understanding of street harassment and make important contributions to the literature. First of all, by analysing the experiences of different identity groups, the research reflected on the biased sociocultural social rules and norms of the society manifested in the form of women having to take permission to go out and their obligation to dress and behave in certain ways. Secondly, my findings suggested the complex nature of power relations and hierarchy in society that shape women’s experience of accessibility and harassment cannot be generalized and explained based solely on gender. Finally, this research added original facts regarding the marginalized experiences of women from the global South to a global North-centric urban scholarship. It is important to add here that considering only gender would have provided an inadequate and incomplete explanation for differentiated experiences of harassment in the urban context of Dhaka city; this research is extremely informative in the literature on street harassment.

Having used the data to explore women’s lived experiences of street harassment (chapter 5), the nature of their agency and coping mechanism (chapter 6) and how their differentiated identities influence the severity of their street harassment experiences (chapter 7), this thesis now moves onto summarise these findings and to consider the implications of this research for the study of street harassment both in Bangladesh and globally.

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#### Conclusion

This thesis explored women's lived experiences of street harassment in public places in Dhaka, Bangladesh. In order to contribute to the existing literature on street harassment in both the global South and North, 45 in-depth interviews were conducted with women who encounter street harassment in their daily lives. This research provided a vital platform for women's perceptions and experiences of street harassment to be placed at the forefront of the research, ensuring that their experiences were accounted for and their voices are being heard. In doing so, this research is able to present a broader picture of the nature, pervasiveness of street harassment and women's coping mechanisms than previous research. More importantly, this was the first piece of research in Bangladesh that investigated whether women's varied form of identities can influence their street harassment experiences using the lens of intersectionality. As outlined in chapter one of this thesis, the three aims of this research were:

1. To investigate the street harassment experiences of women in public places and public transports of Dhaka city.
2. To explore women's responses to harassment and different sorts of safety strategies and behaviours they employ to navigate safely in public places.
3. To understand if women's multiple social identities - gender, class, religion, culture, marital and age - affect the frequency and severity of their street harassment experiences.

In this concluding chapter, I return to address the purposes of this research and summarize my answers to them, drawing on both the literature review in chapters two and three and my data presented in chapters five to seven. Therefore, this final chapter is organised into two main subsections. The first section outlines the summaries of the findings chapters as well as the key contributions of this research and the second section emphasises the implications of this research.

#### 8.1 KEY CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

##### *Contributing to research on women's everyday experiences in public space*

Chapter five explored the various types of street harassment behaviours that the participants experienced in their everyday lives. Participants had experienced a spectrum of behaviours including gestures/ sounds, staring, vulgar/ insulting/ threatening comments, physical harassment, stalking, indecent exposure, and masturbation. I argue that this thesis provides a wider and more important picture of different kinds of harassing behaviours and actions on the streets because the accounts and experiences of harassment were collected directly from women and it was the women themselves who defined what was problematic and harmful for them. Accordingly, further analysis of the data suggests that women's experiences of harassing behaviours remain relatively consistent and that confirms the understanding of other criminological research (Kelly, 1988) suggesting that mundane and everyday forms of harassment like staring, gestures, comments are no less harmful than violence like sexual assault and sexual violence even though the harassing behaviours are often trivialised and normalised. By acknowledging the harassing behaviours as harmful, chapter five positioned them on the spectrum of the 'continuum of sexual violence,' a theory introduced by Kelly (1988). One of the

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key contributions of Kelly's continuum of violence theory has been to demonstrate the ways in which 'typical' and 'aberrant' male behaviour shades into one another (Kelly, 1988: 75). This concept rejects any kind of linear, hierarchical determination of behaviours or experiences in terms of seriousness or harm. By using this concept of continuum of men's violence in the context of street harassment, I have explained that harassing behaviours in Bangladesh indicate a pattern of practices and behaviours which are usually foreshadowed and overlooked as 'typical' male behaviours in the local culture. However, when the participants were given the opportunity to talk about their experiences and freedom to express their fear and concern, it became clear that the routine and repetitive encounters of even the mundane forms of harassing behaviours can leave a cumulative effect on women. Harassing behaviours like staring, sexualised comments, gestures, and sounds are clearly identified as abusive and traumatising by most of the participants of this research, whereas the same behaviours were not identified as problematic by the bystanders or even by the family or community in many cases. Acknowledging these seemingly innocuous behaviours as harmful challenges the dismissal of such acts as a joke, banter, compliment, flirting or polite conversation and when such behaviours are normalised and trivialised by society, that acts as a societal justification for men's behaviours enabling women's suffering and complaints to be disregarded (Kelly 1988, 104). Apart from the perceptions of women, the law also plays a central role in deciding which behaviours and actions should be condemned and criminally culpable. In terms of sexual violence cases, the focus is almost entirely on the extreme forms of violence while disregarding the mundane forms of women's experiences (Kelly and Radford, 1990). Thus, certain behaviours and experiences are still legally considered in the binary sense – either something is violence or not violence; either something is abusive or not abusive (Kelly and Radford, 1990, Vera-Gray, 2016). Thus, this research is highlighting the importance of understanding the lived experiences of women harmed by routine encounters of street harassment, and at the same time, points to the difficulties of criminalising mundane and routine behaviours. The impact of the cumulative harm of these mundane behaviours is not readily and always visible to those who are not experiencing these and hence, these behaviours are often overlooked and trivialised by family, community, and society.

### ***Contributing to understanding of women's agency and coping mechanisms against street harassment***

Chapter six demonstrated that women adopt an extensive range of strategies in order to manage their perceptions of safety as well as to minimise or prevent the likelihood of being victims of street harassment. Analysis of the interview data suggests that the coping processes and management measures in response to street harassment seem to follow a pattern of 3 stages: prevention, response, and disclosure. In terms of preventive measures, women employ different types of safety strategies and these strategies can also be viewed as a continuum rather than radically different measures that the participants deploy depending on the circumstances. This research investigated how women strategize their use of clothing including 'orna', and hijab depending on the time of their journey outside, the location and surroundings of their destination as well as the mode of their transport. While the majority of the women believed veiling to be the safest form of clothing while navigating public places, many of them experienced and witnessed occurrences of street harassment even while wearing different types of veils. Perceptions of considering veiling to be the safest form of clothing against harassment from strangers stand in stark contrast to the context in the UK and other European countries where veiled Muslim women are at an increased risk of street harassment due to Islamophobia (Mason-Bish and Zempi, 2019). Another protective behaviour that the participants regularly practice, both consciously and subconsciously, was to be on alert all the time while in public places. In order to retain their sense of control as well as to respond effectively to any unexpected situation, women make strategic calculations regarding their dress up, make-up, the time and route of their trip, return time and the mode of their transport. In line with their choices of make-up and

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dress-up, women also modify their public behaviours in an attempt to not draw unwanted male attention to themselves, for example, adopting an 'angry' or 'serious' facial expression, avoiding eye contact with strangers, walking with their heads down. Women's sense of agency regarding their coping mechanisms also emerged through the use of their headphones. While some women shared that they wear headphones to send out an impression of being indifferent to the strangers around as well as to use it as a protective barrier against verbal comments, many other women revealed that they wear headphones but do not listen to any music. This is because blocking out all the surrounding noise might make them oblivious to the potential physical harassment. Therefore, they give the impression of ignoring the harassers by wearing headphones but by not playing any music, they remain alert and prepared for any situation. Another example of women trying to strengthen their spatial confidence and lessen their fear of victimisation is their decision to carry self-protection tools. Although the tools that the women mentioned carrying to defend themselves are mostly everyday objects like small knives, paper knives, scissors, nail-cutter, body spray, safety pins, and hijab pins. The majority of the women avoid going out altogether at night without the presence of any male family member. This research recognises that all these 'self-policing' strategies as employed by the women are due to the implicit societal understanding that it is the responsibility of the women themselves to assess the potential risk and danger on the streets.

A further original contribution of this thesis is that it has uncovered women's responding behaviour immediately after encountering harassment. While existing literature on street harassment in the context of the global North has highlighted women's responding behaviour to some extent (Davis, 1993; Vera-Gray and Kelly, 2020), it is literally non-existent in the context of Bangladesh. The findings of this research, therefore, permit a discussion about the two types of responding behaviour of women, i.e., passive, and assertive, and how women make the calculation and negotiation about whether to ignore or resist the harassment. The mental calculation and negotiations that a woman makes while encountering harassment are varied, including the fear of being identified as a 'bad girl' belonging to a 'bad family,' being blamed for the way they dress and behaviour, and general societal pressure. However, the main point to consider and decide on their responding behaviour is the potential risk of escalation of the violence. Although the majority of the participants admitted that passive responses of ignoring or pretending to ignore the harassers, being silent and avoiding the whole situation are more preferred ways of responding than resisting. On the contrary, the findings of this research also demonstrated that women who decide to respond assertively to their harassers, do so after carefully weighing their options between inviting more determined harassment, escalating towards serious assault, or ending the harassment. Participants who revealed that they regularly try to respond to their harassers, mostly do so in the context of public transport. Being stuck in a confined space of public transport where they are unable to quickly escape the threatening situation, women are forced to fight back in order to secure their own safety. This research has also provided insight into the patriarchal power structure of Bangladeshi society which is more powerful than women's individual agency. The findings revealed that some participants decide to retaliate against the harassers only when they are travelling in a big group of 8-10 people or in the presence of any male figure. Such scenarios reinforce the fact that in the patriarchal society of Bangladesh, the presence of one man is powerful enough to retaliate and otherwise, without the presence of any man, an all-women group needs to be greater in number in order to retaliate. This research has also made a unique and interesting connection between street harassment, poverty, and fear of crime. Further analysis of the data revealed that women's responding behaviour is also largely influenced by their socio-economic status. Women from low-income households prefer to avoid and stay silent since retaliation can wrongly label them as prostitutes and that can taint the honour and reputation of both them and their families.

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This thesis has made an important contribution in relation to women's help-seeking and disclosure behaviour. Existing literature on street harassment has identified that victims can suffer from many mental and behavioural consequences like anxiety, depression, and self-objectification. However, there is scarce research both globally and in Bangladesh regarding women's help-seeking behaviour that can lead to potential negative mental consequences, and this thesis has made an important contribution in this respect. Chapter six examined the availability, responses, and effectiveness of the support network, as experienced by the women participants of this research. Data from this research shows that family and friends (e.g., informal support) functioned as a primary source of emotional and practical support for the majority of women and only a few participants have ever been to any formal support system (police). It also became clear that women often receive a mixture of positive and negative reaction from their informal support network in response to their disclosure of harassment and the kind of support they receive also influence their future disclosure behaviour as well as mental well-being. At the same time, participants also revealed that they would disclose their experiences to that member of the family who is able to provide both emotional and tangible support since positive emotional support without any practical assistance to deal with future victimisation is not considered effective by the participants. Nonetheless, close friends are perceived to be even better and rather primary providers of support than family members. Conversations and disclosure to close friends can generate emotional support as well as strategies to ensure future safety. Encountering negative reactions or the fear of encountering negative reactions was pervasive among the majority of the participants and such reactions included victim blaming, anger, disbelief, trivialisation, and a judgemental attitude. Some participants admitted that they have stopped disclosing to their informal network following such negative reactions because those reactions were even more hurtful and they felt victimised again. Receiving such a victim blaming attitude from the family members can not only add to the participants' existing trauma and stress but also deny them the much-required social support for recovery.

In terms of the formal support network system, it is understood from the interviews that the participants were not aware of any other formal support networks like, victim support workers, and mental health workers except the police. The majority of the participants never reported their experiences to the police and only two participants mentioned that they might consider reporting their cases to the police in future. Data from the interviews suggested a variety of reasons why the participants chose not to report, such as, the incident was too trivial to report, a lack of trust in the police and criminal justice system and perceptions that the police would not take their harassing incidents seriously or would not treat them respectfully. In addition, participants pointed out the most important limitation of the criminal justice system in policing street harassment, that is, lack of concrete evidence against the perpetrator. Due to the fleeting nature of the crime, it can be extremely difficult for the harassed women to identify the harasser, collect evidence or witness against the crime and thus, as a result of the absence of evidence, the harasser can easily get away from the justice system. Although the participants agreed that the cumulative harm of daily experiences of harassment is indeed traumatising, when it comes to reporting the incidents to the police, they ponder whether these daily 'trivial' forms of harassment are 'worth' reporting to the police. They believe that reporting these incidences will not be worthwhile to their time, energy, and effort since the police are going to blatantly dismiss them anyway. Such perceptions of the law enforcement officials of Bangladesh indicate two factors: firstly: the perception that the police will trivialise and not prioritise the harassing incidents and secondly, lack of confidence in the police system in dealing with the harassing incidents in a timely manner since they barely take adequate and timely actions against serious crimes like rape and murder. One underlying reason behind the lack of confidence in the police is also the common understanding among the participants about the police being corrupt, ill-equipped, and loyal to the rich of the society. The majority of the participants do not consider the police to be trustworthy because of the widespread accusations against them for taking bribes or favours in exchange for

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personal benefits and that too is one of the key reasons for underreporting of street harassment incidences. This finding is an important contribution to the slim body of literature on women's understanding of barriers to formally reporting street harassment incidents. The findings point out the patriarchal mindset and male domination even in the criminal justice system of the country where women's experiences and voices are suppressed and they are considered as deserving victims. In doing so, the system is not only reinforcing a victim blaming attitude but also, more importantly, depriving the women of the proper legal attention their situation demands.

### ***Contributing to research on exploring the influence of traditional patriarchal culture on Bangladeshi women's street harassment experiences***

This research offers a novel insight into the influence of patriarchal culture and tradition on Bangladeshi women's street harassment experiences. The findings on this issue are presented in two main overarching themes: firstly, how street harassment functions as a mechanism that upholds patriarchal norms, perpetuates gender inequality and thus, reinforces the existing patriarchal social order (chapter six) and secondly, the influence of tradition and patriarchal culture, along with the other social identities, on gender roles in Bangladesh (chapter seven). The analysis in both chapter six and seven reveals that the patriarchal system in the Bangladeshi society reinforces stereotypical gender roles for men and women through many unwritten societal rules that participants are obliged to follow. Numerous traditional, cultural, and religious practices are used on women, (such as, appropriate public behaviour and clothing styles for women, specific purpose of going out, obligatory return time to home and mandatory male company) to rationalise and enforce the perpetuation of patriarchy and gender discrimination. Participants of this research have also shared the diverse ways in which they have encountered patriarchal oppression in relation to their educational and career opportunities. This was because Bangladeshi women are expected to prioritise their family and uphold family honour more than their own educational and career related ambitions. The findings also revealed that women are expected by their families to be silent and refrain from reacting when encountered with instances of street harassment. Only a few women have shared their occasional assertive responses to harassment and the majority of the participants adhered to the families' directions of remaining silent. This compliance stemmed from a fear that defying their families could result in consequences such as limited or no educational and career prospects, even further restricted freedom of movement, and the potential for early marriage.

The findings demonstrate how deeply traditional patriarchal values are embedded in Bangladeshi society and hence, it is extremely difficult for Bangladeshi women to achieve equal rights, opportunities, and freedom of movement. To that end, street harassment is often rooted in deep-seated gender inequality and misogynistic attitudes of the society. Since the harassment is predominantly directed at women, it reflects a patriarchal system that seeks to restrict women's freedom, autonomy, and right to occupy public spaces without fear. By engaging in street harassment, individuals aim to establish and enforce societal norms and expectations and exerts control over public spaces. This form of harassment operates as a tool to reinforce existing power structures and maintain societal hierarchies. Perpetrators use intimidation, objectification, and verbal or physical abuse to assert their dominance and remind targets of their perceived inferiority or subordination. The intention behind street harassment is to create a sense of fear, humiliation, and discomfort, ultimately controlling the actions and movements of individuals in public spaces. In this way, street harassment functions as a tool of social control by perpetuating oppressive norms, silencing voices, and limiting the freedom of marginalized individuals. It reinforces the idea that certain spaces belong to specific groups or individuals, while others must conform to societal expectations or face the consequences of harassment and abuse. By adopting a feminist perspective, this research enabled the

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voice of the women to be heard on their own terms within a patriarchal environment where their voices tend to hold less value.

### ***Contributing to research on using intersectionality to understand how different social identities can influence women's harassing experiences.***

A further original contribution of this research is the use of intersectionality in the context of street harassment that demonstrates the effect of multiple social identities on women's accessibility and safety in the public spaces of Dhaka. This study demonstrates the importance of looking beyond gender to understand how different types of social identity contribute significantly not only to create socio-spatial inequalities in women's experiences in an urban public context but in their overall life opportunities too. Thus, a major contribution of this research is to bring together the literature on street harassment and intersectionality. There are many studies in the global North that explored different aspects which effect women's restricted use of public spaces (Valentine, 1989, Pain 1991), some research has investigated how gender intersects with race in women's varying experiences of street harassment (Logan, 2015), however, the interconnection of various aspects or identities that causes women's restricted use of urban public space and different harassing experiences is not widely studied yet. Moreover, the majority of the street harassment literature has highlighted the experiences of women from the USA, Canada, and Europe and surely, that cannot be generalised to women's experiences around the world. This research examines the harassing experiences of women in Dhaka and thereby, adds the experiences of a broader range of marginalised women from the global South to the global North-centric literature. The application of intersectionality in the context of street harassment in Bangladesh was approached with careful consideration. It needs to be acknowledged that the historical, cultural, social and political experiences of both the western and eastern context is diverse and dynamic. While applying western concepts, like continuum of violence and intersectionality, can be instrumental and influential in addressing issues like street harassment, the application needs to be with careful adaptation and contextualisation to avoid the risk of perpetuating cultural imperialism or overlooking the unique challenges and forms of oppression experienced by women in eastern contexts. Hence, this research centred the voices and experiences of the women participants and adapted the concepts to address the specific social and cultural contexts of this region.

Researchers in the global South have investigated street harassment as gender-based violence but failed to analyse factors or social identities beyond gender to understand women's differentiated experiences to access and safely navigate public spaces. This thesis explores the differentiated experiences of women from various social classes, religions, marital statuses, and ages and thus, demonstrates the importance of looking beyond gender to recognise how different types of social identities intersect with the particularities of time and place to influence women's accessibility and safety in the public places. For example, the research shows how a poor woman's access to public spaces can be differently treated by strangers due to her lower social status. Lower-class women can be often compared to and approached as a prostitute if accessing public spaces during usual hours, i.e., evening and night - a type of experience which women from the upper and middle social classes do not encounter. However, this research also explores that lower-class women of Dhaka city hold better accessibility and mobility than upper - and middle-class women. Whilst highly educated upper- and middle-class women of society encounter numerous familial restrictions on their mobility and accessibility in public places and their job prospects, lower class family, on the other hand, are bound to permit their women to navigate the public spaces in unusual hours due to their financial necessity which required the women to join the workforce. To express it in a different manner, while education failed to provide better opportunities and accessibilities for upper, and middle-class women, lack of

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education, in contrast, provided independence and better accessibility to public spaces for the lower-class women of the city.

Furthermore, this research widens the understanding of accessibility and safety in the urban public spaces of Dhaka through the everyday experiences of women. By highlighting the everyday experiences of women in the public spaces of Dhaka, this research provides a rich insight into the daily realities of all women alike navigating the oppressive patriarchal structure. More importantly, by employing intersectionality to analyse women's harassing experiences, this research uncovers the endless socio-cultural norms, restrictions, and prejudices that women have to abide by, how that affects different social groups and how those social rules not only pave the way for discrimination in women's accessibility in the public spaces but help to maintain structural power hierarchies of the society too.

### 8.2 IMPLICATIONS

This research has significant potential to inform policy and practice that can effect real change in the lives of women in Bangladesh by improving help-seeking services and access to those services. While this study took place in the capital city of Bangladesh, it provided substantial insight into the issue of street harassment in general and also the available services for women across the country. Apart from the services by law enforcement officers, the only other government organisation in Bangladesh that is highlighting its service for street harassment victims is the National Helpline Centre for Violence against women. However, the website of the organisation is outdated and as mentioned in chapter six, none of the women participants of this research had ever heard of any service as such. In light of this, I present the key recommendations:

Firstly, the findings of this research suggest that there is a pressing need for support services for harassed women. The majority of the harassed women go through a phase of shame, and self-blame as soon as they disclose their experiences, whereas their help-seeking journey should begin in an atmosphere devoid of stigma and shame and filled with empathy and understanding. Therefore, community support services and campus-based services can be set up that will be cognisant of these impacts on women which are often tied to gender norms, socio-cultural restrictions, and stereotypes. This will help to ensure that support services respond appropriately to all harassed women and will also ensure that these services do not reinjure already victimised women—a form of secondary victimisation.

Secondly, as mentioned before, none of the participants was aware of the helpline services for the victimised women and lack of knowledge about the availability of such services is a significant barrier to accessing support services. As such, the support services need to be well advertised in print, electronic and social media and also, in other ways targeting young women who are more susceptible to street harassment.

Thirdly, consideration must be given to the language and labels used while advertising the support services. As explained in chapter two and three of this thesis, there is a lack of consensus regarding the term to explain street harassment behaviours. The term 'violence against women' may not resonate with all harassed women's experiences and this might prevent people from seeking services from an organisation that uses this term in their advertising. This may be because women might not consider their harassing experiences on the streets as 'violence' and might be reluctant to report it as such. Moreover, using the terms like 'sexual violence' or 'sexual harassment' can also deter women from using such services because they might not describe their experiences in the same way. Therefore, care should be taken while advertising such services and further research is required too

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which can explore the most appropriate terms and ways to advertise support services. For example, the service can advertise with the most commonly used term in order to increase the perceived relevance of such services to the harassed women, followed by the definition of street harassing behaviours as well as the terms which should be used in conjunction or replacement of the common terms.

Finally, the majority of the participants had little hope for resolving the problem of the general lack of confidence in the police. In that respect, it can be suggested that the police should design and implement new policies and approaches that will increase public confidence in them and that will also solve the problem of under-reporting the harassing incidents, to some extent. Women might feel more interested to engage with male police officers if they know that the officers will not be dismissive of their experiences. In this respect, it is also highly necessary for the police to receive relevant training if they wish to offer high-quality services to the harassed and traumatised women. Moreover, there should be ample opportunities and flexibility to access female police officers while reporting their experiences since many women might feel more at ease to open up about their experiences to a female staff member.

### 8.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

I initiated this research process with an understanding and knowledge foundation built from my own experiences of street harassment and also, an academic enthusiasm to explore women's lived experiences and struggle of navigating public spaces. A desire to better understand women's daily experiences of street harassment, to explore their negotiations to cope with the intrusive behaviour and to present the whole picture from the perspective of the women themselves have driven this research from the beginning. From an academic standpoint, this research on street harassment is significant, firstly, because of the lack of empirical studies on the subject in the context of Bangladesh, secondly, for investigating the issue through the lens of intersectionality which drawn out previously unrecognised or ignored aspects of the harassing experiences. Moreover, an intersectional analysis has identified the extent of patriarchal power by demonstrating the importance of looking beyond gendered identity only to understand women's differentiated experiences to access and safely navigate public spaces. This thesis as a whole, therefore, makes an important contribution to our understanding of street harassment as it provides insight as to how women experience different forms of harassment, react to the behaviours, prepare, and negotiate to minimise or prevent future victimisation and how their varied social identities influence their experiences. Furthermore, a methodological contribution to knowledge of this thesis has been to centre the voices of the harassed women participants by using a feminist methodological approach, by undertaking qualitative research and by focusing on their lived experiences.

This research is intended to open up the conversation towards de-normalising the harassing behaviour of strangers on the streets, highlight the impact it has on women's everyday accessibility, mobility and also, life opportunities. Using Kelly's (1988) theory of 'continuum of sexual violence', the research has drawn attention to the cumulative effect of the most mundane forms of male violence, i.e., street harassment. During the fieldwork process, it became clear that women are considering the intrusive behaviours of street harassment as 'ordinary' and an unavoidable compromise of accessing male-dominated public spaces. However, at the same time, finding research participants who wanted to talk about their daily harassing experiences and negotiations was not as challenging as I had anticipated. These women wanted to share their stories of struggle but they had never been asked. Therefore, this research has employed the feminist methodological approach in order to bring to the forefront the voices of women who embody a double minority and that provides a rich insight into the multi-layered nature of street harassment in public spaces. In addition, my position as both insider

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and outsider researcher has been a key element of my research framework and I value the focus on the reflexivity. My positionality as an insider researcher has influenced the whole research process – from finding participants, approaching them, and arranging interviews, translating, transcribing, analysing, and the writing of the thesis. On the other hand, as an outsider researcher, although I have received respect as a professional researcher working abroad, in many cases, I had to spend additional time building rapport with the participants before asking the relevant questions.

Finally, it is necessary that more research is conducted into the lived experiences of women from different social groups as victims of street harassment. By listening to women's experiences and understanding their perspectives - we can hope to address the fear and vulnerabilities in their everyday lives, the struggle of being dismissed as victims both by the criminal justice system and society as a whole. Ultimately, however, the persistence of women's harassment on the streets over the centuries suggests that this behaviour will remain a constant. It is necessary to remind ourselves that street harassment is another variant of the violence, oppression and hatred towards women that comes along with living in a patriarchal society. This research reminds us that we need to look at the societies in which we live and the ways in which we as women are oppressed, disempowered and othered in every step of our lives. It demands that we look again at the intersections of the power structure in our society that normalises different forms of oppression in the gendered society. In the end, the research calls for a thorough change on a structural level to deal with patriarchal oppression and even though such calls for action might sound cliché, there is no other alternative but to challenge the institutions, resist the oppression and fight back however possible. This thesis which provided women's own accounts of street harassment experiences is one form of calling out the violence and oppression.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recruitment Notice (English)

**Recruitment Notice**



**Are you a 18-35 year old  
Female student/ Working woman ?**

**Talk to me about  
what it is like for a woman to use public  
places or public transport in Dhaka City!**

**Female PhD researcher from Aston University, UK is  
conducting one to one interviews to understand  
Bangladeshi women's Daily Experiences of Street  
Harassment (Eve Teasing) and fear of violence in  
Public places of Dhaka city.**

For more information or to schedule an interview, please contact:  
**Amanee at 01741100793**

Appendix A: Recruitment Notice (Bangla)



আপনি কি ১৮-৩৫ বছর বয়স্ক ছাত্রী / কর্মজীবী নারী ?

ঢাকা শহরে পথ চলতে অথবা গণপরিবহন ব্যবহার করা নিয়ে আপনার অভিজ্ঞতা ও মতামত দিন !

কথা বলুন অ্যাস্টোন ইউনিভার্সিটি, ইংল্যান্ডের মহিলা পিএইচডি গবেষকের সাথে। ঢাকা শহরের মহিলাদের দৈনন্দিন পথ হয়রানি, ইভ টিজিং এবং পাবলিক প্লেসে অন্যান্যভাবে নির্যাতিত হবার ভয় সম্পর্কিত গবেষণায় আপনার অভিজ্ঞতা ও মতামত যোগ করুন ।

আরো তথ্য জানতে অথবা সাক্ষাৎকারের সময় ঠিক করতে যোগাযোগ করুনঃ আমানী - 01741100793

## Appendix B: Interview Guide

Start by introducing the research and the researcher. Explain the Informed Consent Form and Participant Information Sheet, mentioning about right to withdraw consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. Ask for permission to record the interview and store the data

### Background Information

1. I'd like a little background information. Can you tell me your age?
2. What is your educational background?
3. What do you do for living? Can you describe your work?
4. Can you describe your neighbourhood for me? If you spend time in other neighbourhoods, what are they like?
5. How do you go to your workplace? Which modes of transport do you use regularly?
6. What do you do for fun or entertainment?

### Gender role

7. Who was in the home when you were growing up?
8. Did your parents treat all the siblings in the same way? Did the differences in treatment impact you or your siblings in any way?
9. What messages did your family give you about gender, specifically the roles of men and women?
10. How would you incorporate the meaning of being female with your individual identity? Do you consider yourself a traditional female or less traditional?
11. Would you say your parents had specific ideas about gender roles they wanted to communicate to you?
12. Did your parents' idea about gender role impact the way you think about gender roles?

### Perceptions of Fear and Safety

13. How often do you think about your safety?
14. What types of crimes or violence worry or scare you most? Do any specific incidents, things or situations come to your mind that make you feel afraid?
15. Do you think about street harassment or being harassed by strangers when you're in public? If so, when, under what circumstances?
16. Who are the victims of violence or harassment, do you think? When you imagine a woman who is a victim of men's violence, what comes to your mind, in terms of her clothing or behaviour?

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17. Where do you get your messages about the dangers of public space?
18. What do the news and newspapers reveal about crime and violence? What about national and social media? How does that influence your feelings of safety?
19. Where and when do you feel most safe? What makes you feel safe and most at risk?
20. Have you and your friends/family ever had discussions about crime in public and how to keep yourselves safe? Please give details.

### Street harassment

21. Have you ever experienced sexist remarks or behaviors from a stranger?
22. How frequently have you experienced sexist remarks or behaviors from a stranger?
23. How do you react / respond to such behavior – overlook, answer/protest, take it as compliment/joke?

### Uses of Public Spaces

24. Do you think that society allows for all of its members to use public spaces equally? Please explain.
25. What barriers exist for women's safe and full use of public space?
26. Have you ever felt fearful or afraid for your safety in travelling to and from work/school? Please tell me about it.
27. What was the source of the fear? (Explore all answers with participant)
28. In your view, what are the main sources of women's fear in public?
29. Have you ever experienced fear or been uncomfortable with the people around you when travelling to or from work/school? Tell me about this.
30. Have you ever changed your route to or from work/school because of fear of crime, harassment, or other reason? Explain.
31. Are you comfortable in leisure/shopping/social situations alone? Please explain.
32. Have you ever gotten someone to escort you because you did not feel safe? Please share your experiences with this. How did you make sense of this?
33. Do you change your behavior in any way when you are in public for leisure and socializing? Please give specific examples and situations in which you've done this (for example, do you avoid eye contact, wear a wedding band, travel on well-lit streets, avoid parks, etc.?).
34. What are some of the techniques and strategies that you or other women you know use to keep yourselves safe in public?
35. If you felt safer, would you participate more in leisure or social activities? Ask to elaborate if

## APPENDICES

answer is yes or no.

36. Are there any areas that you may avoid conducting business in or shopping at due to the reputation of the area? Please explain. (If she says she has not avoided any areas because of reputation, ask if she is aware of any areas in her town/city that have negative reputations and to explain this).
37. In our society, we often hear ideas about appropriate behaviour for women in public that is different from men's behaviour. What are your ideas about how women are expected to act in public that might be different than for men, including places they should or should not occupy?
38. Please tell me anything else about your experiences with public space for errands and tasks that we havenot mentioned.

### **Coping strategies and responses**

39. How do you keep yourself safe?
40. What safety precautions do you routinely practice?
41. How much you think about your clothing while going out to avoid harassment?
42. When you feel worried about or afraid of violence, how do you handle that?
43. How safe do you feel after dark when outside home? Do you feel safer when within your own area? Do you take any precautions when you go out alone? Do you take any additional precautions when you go out at night? If so, what precautions do you take?
44. Do you take the same precautions when you're with other women? Do you take precautions when you're with man or men?
45. Has anyone ever teased you or made you feel like you were overreacting because of fear of safety or precautionary behaviours?
46. Is there any place which you think of as particularly unsafe or dangerous; describe (a) is that place dangerous for everyone? (b) what would make that place less dangerous?
47. If you've ever been scared of being victimized, of whom were you scared? Can you describe the person or persons, where you were, what was happening?
48. In general, what do you think would help women like you be safe? How about women in general? How does age play into this?
49. Did you or anybody in your family blame you for what has happened on the streets? Tell me why did you blame yourself? Tell me what did your families say/ react?
50. Do you think I've left anything important out of the interview? (Are there any questions I havenot asked that you think I should have asked?)

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### Barriers:

51. Did you tell anybody about what was going on- Friends, family or relatives?
52. Did you ever try to get help from police or seek any legal advice? If not, why?
53. What are the factors that inhibit you from reporting the incident?

### General questions

54. Have you been previously victimised in your private life? If yes, please describe. (Ask about relationship to offender(s), type of victimisation, approximate duration and frequency, and other details as necessary).
55. Are you more fearful of being victimised in public or private because of this previous victimisation? Please explain.
56. Has fear of victimisation ever changed your level of enjoyment when using public space?
57. Has thinking about and implementing safety strategies ever changed your level of enjoyment when using public space?
58. Why do you think women are more likely to fear victimisation than men in public?
59. Do you think that women who are not taking precautions like you, are 'asking for it' or can be blamed?
60. How much of a role do you think the community/law/police should have in helping women to feel safer in public? Please elaborate.
61. Do you think that enough is being done to make women feel safe in their communities? What else could be done?
62. What recommendations would you give to police, politicians, and people who design and manage public places to help women to feel safer in public?
63. Has fear of being victimised or avoidance/restriction of public space ever affected your finances, academic progress, friendships, family relationships, or romantic relationships?
64. Have there ever been financial costs associated with trying to keep yourself safe, i.e., taking taxis when you could (and want to) walk or use public transit, buying cell phones, personal alarms, or pepper spray, etc.?
65. Do you think about your safety in the same way when you are home compared to when you are in public? What is the same? What is different?
66. Is there anything that I missed that you feel represents your experiences, behaviors, and emotions relating to public space?

## APPENDIX C: INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM



### Research Participants Information Sheet

#### **Research Title: Street Harassment in Bangladesh: Women's Experiences and Perceptions in Urban Settings**

#### **Aims of the research**

The aim of this research is to explore the experiences and attitudes of urban women towards street harassment. The research will also try to find out the coping strategies women use to avoid future victimisation and the kind of barriers they encounter while disclosing and reporting the harassing incidents.

#### **Invitation**

You are being asked to participate in research entitled "*Street Harassment in Bangladesh: Women's Experiences and Perceptions in Urban Settings*". This research will be carried out by Tasneema Ashraf Amanee, student at Aston University, Birmingham, United Kingdom, and it has been granted favourable opinion by the Aston University Research Ethics Committee. This research is supervised by the university academics Dr Chrissie Rogers and Professor Phil Mizen.

#### **Why have I been selected?**

You have been selected to express your experiences and opinions about street harassment as someone who has encountered street harassment at some point in her life.

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<sup>1</sup>Version 1 (08/07/2016)

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### **What happens if I do not wish to participate or if I change my mind?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. We believe that by consenting to participate, you will be able to make an important contribution to this research. However, if you do not wish to take part, you have the full right and freedom to do so.

If you do decide to participate, you will be given this information sheet to keep as well as a consent form to sign. You will still have the full right to leave the research process without giving any reason at any time before submission of the final thesis or publication. If you decide to leave the research process before the final thesis or publication, your interview data will not be included anywhere.

### **What happens if I take part?**

If you do wish to take part in this research, you will be asked to read this information sheet first, and then sign the consent form and return it to the researcher. Next, the researcher will make adequate arrangements at your convenience, in terms of the time and place, in order to conduct the interview. The interviews will be recorded using a digital recorder and the researcher will carefully maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of information.

In case you need any help, the researcher will be able to provide you with contact details for relevant government and non- governmental organisations.

### **What could be the possible benefits of taking part?**

It is difficult to claim that this research will bring any immediate benefit to the participants and the research location. However, this research is giving participants an opportunity to share and discuss their experiences and opinions concerning street harassment. The findings of this research can make the governmental and non-governmental organisations more conscious of the problem of street harassment in Dhaka city and may prompt them to take more effective measures to improve the situation.

**What could be the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

This research does not have any known risks and disadvantages except that describing your own experiences can make you emotionally distressed. However, none of your personal details will be recorded anywhere and only your experiences and opinions on street harassment will be recorded. All your information will be handled carefully to ensure confidentiality and anonymity and the transcripts will be made by the researcher herself. No one except the researcher will have access to the transcripts.

**Will my information be confidential?**

All your information will be stored in a confidential manner. Only the researcher herself will have access to that information. Throughout the process of data collection, storage and analysis, the principles of the Data Protection Act in the United Kingdom and Bangladesh will be maintained.

**Will the outcomes of the research be published?**

The findings of this research will be included in the doctoral thesis of the researcher and will also be used in research papers. However, all necessary steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of the participants in all publications. You will be offered a summary of the research and the published research papers through email, if you are interested. In case you do not have access to Internet, summary and research papers can be sent by post too, if you wish.

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<sup>2</sup>Version 1 (08/07/2016)

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If you have any concerns about anything to do with this study, you should speak to the research team and they will do their best to answer your concerns-

*Researcher:* Tasneema Ashraf Amanee

Email: [amaneeta@aston.ac.uk](mailto:amaneeta@aston.ac.uk)

Phone: 01741100793 (*Bangladeshi number*)

or [REDACTED] (*UK number*)

*Supervisors:* a) Dr Chrissie Rogers

Email: [c.rogers3@aston.ac.uk](mailto:c.rogers3@aston.ac.uk)

b) Dr Phil Mizen

Email: [p.mizen@aston.ac.uk](mailto:p.mizen@aston.ac.uk)

If they cannot help you and you still have concerns or wish to make a complaint about the way in which the study has been conducted, then you should contact the Aston University Director of Governance, Mr John Walter, at [j.g.walter@aston.ac.uk](mailto:j.g.walter@aston.ac.uk) or telephone +440121 204 4665.

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**Consent Form**

**Research Title: Street Harassment in Bangladesh: Women's Experiences and Perceptions in Urban Settings**

**Researcher:** Tasneema Ashraf Amanee

Department of Languages and Social Science,

Aston University, email: amaneeta@aston.ac.uk

**<sup>3</sup>Please put your initials in the boxes next to the statement if you agree with them:**

I have read and understood the information sheet for the above research	
I understand that participation in this research is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time before thesis submission and publication, without giving any reason	
I understand that all my personal information, which might potentially identify me, will not be used in any published material	
I understand that the interview will be recorded and the interview data will be kept in a secure database	
I agree to take part in the above research	
I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in any publications	

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<sup>3</sup> Version 1 (08/07/2016)

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**Participant**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_