

Female criminality: a way out

by Sarmin Akther

IN RECENT times, female offending is widely reported by newspapers and television channels which are getting attention of all quarters. Only a few decades ago, it was believed that crime is in the domain of male. The history of high involvement of men with crimes more than women made the belief stronger. But the situation has been changing day by day.

In the early age, the concept of female offending was an unnoticed matter which has been transformed into an increasing concern for society today. Today, women represent the fastest growing offender portion of the population, growing by almost a third over the course of the 1990s. In Bangladesh, women still commit much less crime than men, but the rate is increasing. As a study shows that the crimes committed by female was only 1.7 per cent in 1971 which increased to 3.8 per cent in 1992 and to 13 per cent in 2008. In addition, in 2003, there were 1,910, or 2.8 per cent, female prisoners in jails of Bangladesh while in 2017, there were 2,772 female prisoners, or 3.8 per cent, having a growth rate of 2.9 per cent. These data indicate a growing trend in female offending in Bangladesh over the years.

However, although the tendency of committing crimes is nearly the same among men and women, women were not engaged in crimes more often because of the lack of access and increased moral strength. A clear gender gap exists there between male and female offending which is larger in case of serious or violent crimes and narrower for crimes such as property and drug offences. The certain categories of criminal behaviour common among women offenders are crimes against property, violent crimes, arranging for or forcing or sheltering women to engage in prostitution, drug crimes and crimes of human trafficking. The Narcotics Control Department mentions that in Dhaka city alone, 33 per cent of the total drug dealers are women. This department along with the police estimate that around 30 per cent of the country's total drug dealers are women.

In a study conducted by Islam and Khatun in 2013, it has been revealed that the mean age of female offenders was 30 years. Prison population statistics of Bangladesh jails also show that



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the average age of female prisoners is 30.78 years, where offenders were primarily young women. This is mainly because in the workplace and other socio-economic activities, it is the young women who participate most. Young women, in general, are more vulnerable to physical and psychological assault which they sometimes contest with unlawful activities.

Another study conducted by Faruk et al in 2009 shows that 77 per cent of female offenders were married. It puts up that married women are more crime-prone than the unmarried. The increased tension and conflict in the family may be a good explanation of this.

Various studies pointed out the main reasons behind female offending as the marginal nature of women, family tension, and economic dependency. Furthermore, in the early age, women had very little scope to participate in work outside their houses. Their main responsibility was to do household chores and rear children. As their movement outside houses was limited, they were not much conversant with the multiple ways of committing crimes. But with the passage of time, women have undertaken many responsibilities which increased their presence in the labour market. As a result, a large number of women have been steeping in the world of crimes today.

Sexual and domestic violence against women sometimes lead to female offending. From the sense of self-defence or being intolerant of

the atrocity committed to them also lead them to retaliate in an unlawful manner. The tendency of committing crimes also has a relation with the ownership, control and use pattern of property. As women are getting more and more involved in property management, they are more engaging in unlawful activities as men did before. Repeated victimisation inside and outside the family leads female to getting engaged in crimes.

Although women from all social classes are engaging themselves with criminal activities, the rate is higher among the slum dwellers and poor women, which often are related to their economic condition or other subjugated position. For the sake of scanty amount of money, these women are getting involved in various criminal activities. Additionally, they are mostly getting involved in crimes induced by men as they are less suspected by law enforcement agencies particularly in dealing with drugs, smuggling goods, etc. Thus, the offences that women do are self-initiated, acquired behaviour and imposed behaviour.

In the age of globalisation, it is not possible to cut out female offending from society and, therefore, concentration on putting down female offending is the demand of the day. The nature of female crime is different from men which demands to be addressed differently. As Mahatma Gandhi once pointed out, 'All crime is a kind of disease and should be treated as such.' In regard to this,

strengthening social control could be one of the most effective means for the prevention of female offending. It is also important to strengthen the legal education among the females as they can distinguish which behaviours are protected by laws and which not. Community and family education, educational institutions, television and print media, and social networking sites could be the medium to disseminate this knowledge.

Poverty or economic dependency of women, another leading cause of female offending, needs to be eliminated by creating more work opportunities for women. As domestic violence often leads to female offending, it is important to address all kinds of domestic violence after identifying its roots. Agencies might be set up to monitor violence as well as to provide support for the victims. Moreover, Section 5 of the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2010, which sets out the appointment of one or more enforcement officers in each upazila, thana, district or in a metropolitan area to prevent domestic violence, needs to be in place. Finally, all socio-economic factors that lead to female offending need to be taken into consideration for finding an effective way out to turn down the growing trend of female offending.

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