

Nature and Causes of Secondary Victimization of Rape Victims in Bangladesh: A Review Analysis

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Abstract

Rape victims often experience emotional distress, social isolation, and psychological trauma from their society and surroundings, which can be called the secondary victimization. Even though they have such an emotional burden on them, this secondary victimization is overlooked most of the time. The objective of this study is to describe the nature, causes, and consequences of the secondary victimization of rape victims with offering suggestion and strategies to mitigate and prevent these issues. This study is analytical in nature, and secondary data are used to fulfill the objective. This study found victim-blaming, stigmatization, and negative experiences with the police, court, and community are some of the natures of secondary victimization. The causes of secondary victimization include patriarchal attitude of society, rape myth acceptance, socioeconomic status, and the prevailing culture of impunity. The consequences of the secondary victimization include post-traumatic disorder, fears, phobias, anxiety, and ostracism, among others. These negative consequences disrupt victims' lives, often preventing their return to normal life. Preventing secondary victimization requires transforming societal attitudes, enforcement of legal protections, increase of victim support, and promoting responsible media reporting to ensure dignity, reduce stigma, and foster a justice system that safeguards survivors from secondary victimization.

Keywords: Secondary Victimization, Rape Victims, Victim Blaming, Stigmatization.

Introduction

Secondary victimization of rape victims is one of the silent brutal natures of criminal justice system and community organization. Secondary victimization, according to a different study, is the harm that victims endure when they interact with the justice system as

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witnesses or complainants¹. Secondary victimization means the victimization of victims by government officials after a crime has occurred². Secondary victimization, as defined by the UNODC, is harm resulting from how people and institutions react to the victim rather than the actual crime. Worldwide, rape is a common crime that is notably underreported, and victims and survivors suffer grave physical and mental health repercussions³.

Secondary victimization is the adverse experiences brought on by criminal proceedings or social responses to the first victimization, which the victim may see as a further infringement on their rights⁴. Secondary victimization is the term used to describe these negative interactions with system staff since many victims claim that the distress they experience from subsequent meetings is just as severe as the initial assault. Legal secondary victimization, such as the police dismissing the case as not serious, was positively associated with greater symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, according to a study on rape victims⁵.

Secondary victimization happens when members of the social system and/or criminal justice system treat rape victims insensitively⁶. More rapes occur as a result of the victim-blaming culture and actions of community service providers, which causes the victims to experience more stress and trauma⁷. Research has shown that victims of sexual assault who tell others about their experiences such as neighbors, law enforcement, or medical professionals run the risk of becoming victims again⁸. Police, medical personnel, and other community-based institutions' victim-blaming actions, attitudes, and practices are the primary cause of the secondary victimization that rape victims experience⁹. Rape is a chronic problem in Bangladeshi society, and the majority of research on secondary victimization concentrates on the psychological impact on rape victims rather than their

¹ Debra Patterson and Rebecca Campbell, 'Why Rape Survivors Participate in the Criminal Justice System' (2010) 38 *Journal of Community Psychology* 191.

² Jennifer Temkin, 'Rape, Rape Victims, and the Criminal Justice System', *Rape and the Legal Process* (Oxford University Press 2002).

³ Karen Rich and Patrick Seffrin, 'Police Interviews of Sexual Assault Reporters: Do Attitudes Matter?' (2012) 27 *Violence and Victims* 263.

⁴ Malini Laxminarayan, 'Procedural Justice and Psychological Effects of Criminal Proceedings: The Moderating Effect of Offense Type' (2012) 25 *Social Justice Research* 390.

⁵ Rebecca Campbell, 'The Community Response to Rape: Victims' Experiences with the Legal, Medical, and Mental Health Systems' (1998) 26 *American Journal of Community Psychology* 355.

⁶ Dr Abdullah Al Faruque and Md Sazzatur Rahaman, 'Victim Protection in Bangladesh: A Critical Appraisal of Legal and Institutional Framework' (2013) 13 *Bangladesh Journal of Law* 33 <<https://www.biliabd.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Dr.-Abdullah-Al-Faruque.pdf>> accessed 24 May 2025.

⁷ Campbell, *supra* note 5.

⁸ Alan C Acock and Nancy K Ireland, 'Attribution of Blame in Rape Cases: The Impact of Norm Violation, Gender, and Sex-Role Attitude' (1983) 9 *Sex Roles* 179.

⁹ Rebecca Campbell, 'What Really Happened? A Validation Study of Rape Survivors' Help-Seeking Experiences with the Legal and Medical Systems.' (2005) 20 *Violence and victims* 55 <<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16047935/>> accessed 24 May 2025.

interactions with the legal, medical, and mental health systems¹⁰. Furthermore, about 87% of rape victims stated that they experience secondary trauma as a result of the criminal justice system¹¹. Approximately half of all rape victims have been secondary victimized by law enforcement, according to earlier study, and there is evidence that this treatment is related to how their legal cases turn out¹².

Rape is an illicit sexual which is now a worldwide problem and most of the victims are women and children. Rape is defined as an unwanted act of oral, vaginal, or anal penetration committed by force¹³. The number of rape incidents in Bangladesh has been alarmingly increasing; in January 2017 alone, some 134 women were raped, six of whom were later killed, and four of whom committed suicide¹⁴. Just 2% of rape cases go to trial each year. In the months of January to May, 2025, approximately 383 women were raped and 311 reported rape cases found around these 5 months¹⁵. According to several reports, the criminal justice system and community support systems in Bangladesh have mainly ignored research on the subsequent victimization of rape victims. Those rape cases are more vicious and more heinous than the one before. In the case of Bangladesh rarely a study found related to secondary victimization of rape victims. Rape victims are deprived of societal advantage including degradation of quality of life, feeling of embarrassment in the society which are societal consequences of rape victims¹⁶. In Bangladesh, a culture of victim blaming has seen in most of the rape cases¹⁷.

Secondary victimization is one of the hidden natures of the criminal justice system and almost half of the victims of rape face this situation¹⁸. Because women are usually dominated by men and expected to stay obedient, they are frequently linked to vulnerability and helplessness in Bangladesh's patriarchal society. When rape victims are subjected to secondary victimization, they fall into the depths of despair and cannot live their life as before. While the 2022 amendment to Bangladesh's Evidence Act, 1872 abolished Section 155(4) and restricted Section 146(3) to court-sanctioned scrutiny, which

¹⁰ Rebecca Campbell, 'The Psychological Impact of Rape Victims.' (2008) 63 American Psychologist 702.

¹¹ Ulrich Orth and Andreas Maercker, 'Do Trials of Perpetrators Retraumatize Crime Victims?' (2004) 19 Journal of Interpersonal Violence 212.

¹² Patterson and Campbell, *supra* note 1.

¹³ Campbell, *supra* note 10.

¹⁴ 'Violence Against Women – Rape: January-December 2017' (*Ain o Salish Kendra*, 2017)

<<https://www.askbd.org/ask/2018/01/17/violence-women-rape-january-december-2017/>> accessed 24 May 2025.

¹⁵ 'Violence Against Women- Rape Jan-May 2025' (2025) <<https://www.askbd.org/ask/2025/06/19/violence-against-women-rape-jan-may-2025/>> accessed 27 June 2025.

¹⁶ Nelufer Yesmen, 'Sexual Assault Victims in Bangladesh' (2019) 24 Journal Of Humanities And Social Science 51 <<https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jhss/papers/Vol.%2024%20Issue4/Series-4/H2404045155.pdf>> accessed 24 May 2025.

¹⁷ Faruque and Rahaman, *supra* note 6.

¹⁸ Patterson and Campbell, *supra* note 1.

effectively prevents character assaults on rape complainants in trial settings¹⁹. However, these reforms do not extend beyond the courtroom. Police processing, investigative practices, media narratives, and public opinions continue to reflect deep-rooted victim-blaming²⁰. Therefore, addressing this issue is essential since secondary victimization increases the victim's susceptibility due to its nature and effects. This study will be helpful to address the environment in society and the criminal justice system which causes secondary victimization of rape victims. The primary objective of this study is to analyze the nature, causes, and consequences behind secondary victimization of rape victims encounter how to prevent and mitigate these issues.

Method

This study uses secondary sources to collect data and is analytical in nature. Books, reports, internet articles, and peer-reviewed journals are the sources of these secondary data. In this study, no specific timeframe has been set, as this kind of literature is very limited in number. This research mainly analyzed the secondary victimization of rape victims in the context of Bangladesh. However, some information from around the world has been added for deeper understanding. Following the queries and retrieval of the literature, a comprehensive desk review has been conducted to understand the relative matters of this study and then the data has been interpreted following thematic analysis. The thematic analysis was conducted manually by the authors for better comprehension. No software was used for the analysis. The themes and sub-themes emerged through a process of open coding and subsequent categorization, following a comprehensive literature review conducted by the authors. In this research, all kinds of research ethics have been maintained, all sources have been properly cited, and all references are included in the bibliography section. Also, all the data used in this study are publicly available secondary sources, and no personally identifying or sensitive information has been used in the text.

Findings

Nature of secondary victimization of rape victim

The researcher must investigate the elements of primary victimization that contribute to or impact the incidence of secondary victimization in order to comprehend its characteristics. While secondary victimization encompasses the wider circle impacted by the incident, such as family, friends, or encounters with institutions like the police and courts, primary victimization refers to the direct suffering experienced by the victim, such

¹⁹ Rashidul Hasan and Nilima Jahan, 'Rape Victim's Character Can No Longer Be Questioned' *The Daily Star* (2022) <<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/rape-victims-character-can-no-longer-be-questioned-3159976>> accessed 27 June 2025.

²⁰ Israt Jahan Orne, 'A Growing Problem: Victim-Blaming Is Becoming an Increasingly Problematic Phenomenon in Bangladesh' *Dhaka Tribune* (2023).

as in the instance of a rape survivor²¹. Relevant research papers have been discussed below to understand the nature of secondary victimization of rape victims:

a. Rape as a culture of victim-blaming

The inclination to blame victims of negative events for their own suffering is known as victim blaming²². In contrast to traditional protective theories, researchers discovered that blaming victims for their misfortunes is a social stigma that is acquired rather than rooted in innate or genetic characteristics²³. Another study examined how people assign blame to rape victims, emphasizing how victims of crime are frequently perceived by outsiders as being in charge of their own destiny²⁴. Victims' coping mechanisms for difficult life experiences are greatly influenced by social reactions. Negative social reactions can seriously impede victims' ability to rehabilitate and adjust, according to research conducted on a variety of victim groups²⁵. Environments that are controlled by men often encourage sexist beliefs and actions, which raise the possibility of sexual assault and the frequency of victim-blaming myths.

b. Secondary victimization and stigmatization through family, friends and relatives

Rape survivors may feel as though they are being raped repeatedly due to the stigma attached to the crime. Many individuals are unaware of how further humiliating and harmful their disparaging comments and responses are to victims of sexual assault²⁶. Rape victims often face intense social stigma, reinforced by dominant patriarchal attitudes, prolonged court procedures, inadequate police investigations, and legal gaps such as the lack of rape shield laws; as a result, endure severe psychological and social pressures²⁷. Not only does rape cause the victim to undergo severe suffering, but it is also the only crime in which the victim is frequently stigmatized by society²⁸.

²¹ Patricia Yancey Martin and R Marlene Powell, 'Accounting for the "Second Assault": Legal Organizations' Framing of Rape Victims' (1994) 19 Law & Social Inquiry 853.

²² Kathryn M Ryan, 'Rape Mythology and Victim Blaming as a Social Construct', *Handbook of Sexual Assault and Sexual Assault Prevention* (Springer International Publishing 2019).

²³ Orth and Maercker, *supra* note 11.

²⁴ Rich and Seffrin, *supra* note 3.

²⁵ Sarah E Ullman, 'Social Reactions, Coping Strategies, and Self-Blame Attributions in Adjustment to Sexual Assault' (1996) 20 Psychology of Women Quarterly 505.

²⁶ Samantha Gluck, 'Getting Raped: The Stigma of Being A Rape Victim' (*HealthyPlace*, 17 December 2012) <<https://www.healthyplace.com/abuse/rape/getting-raped-the-stigma-of-being-a-rape-victim>> accessed 24 May 2025.

²⁷ Nowsher Ali and others, 'Rape in Rural Bangladesh' (2015) 3 Delta Medical College Journal 31.

²⁸ Diana EH Russell, *Sexual Exploitation: Rape, Child Sexual Abuse, and Workplace Harassment* (Beverly Hills CA Sage 1984) <<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/sexual-exploitation/book307#description>> accessed 24 May 2025.

People prefer to put victims at a distance and frequently do not treat them with empathy or respect in a competitive environment²⁹. Rape victims are stigmatized as a result of this pervasive societal contempt and lack of empathy, which frequently leads to their being held responsible for their own ordeal. The state of rape victims is still extremely concerning, since their interactions with law enforcement, attorneys, and medical professionals are frequently marked by a lack of support and estrangement³⁰.

After blaming and social stigmatization rape victims become mentally vulnerable when their own family members, friends and relatives don't believe or support them. The survivor's family, friends, and close relationships may experience significant emotional and psychological strain as a result of dealing with the aftermath of rape³¹. When their family members don't help them return to normal life, they become more traumatized³².

c. Forms of secondary victimization and by the criminal justice system and negative experience of victims

In the criminal justice system, insensitive attitudes of professionals and poor communication between agencies are the most common types of secondary victimization. Victims frequently characterize their treatment as distressing, humiliating, and unjust, with little consideration for their feelings, needs, rights, or general wellbeing³³. Furthermore, the majority of the work on the criminal justice system's response to rape has focused on evaluating how documentary components affect decision-making processes or on investigating the effects of extralegal factors, such as the traits of the victim and the perpetrator³⁴.

In such cases, victims often have been treated in the criminal process in ways that can be stated as barbarous. In this way, victims who report crimes are often subjugated to secondary victimization at the hands of police, prosecutors and courts³⁵.

Police's negative attitude toward victim

Many victims experience secondary victimization at the hands of law enforcement as many victims have reported being told that their stories were out of the ordinary or that their cases were not serious enough to be looked into³⁶. Moreover, frequently, investigators

²⁹ Kurt Weis and Sandra S Borges, 'Victimology and Rape: The Case of the Legitimate Victim' (1973) 8 Issues in Criminology 71 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/42909686>>.

³⁰ *ibid*.

³¹ Campbell, *supra* note 9.

³² Gluck, *supra* note 26.

³³ Anna Gekoski, Joanna R Adler and Jacqueline M Gray, 'Interviewing Women Bereaved by Homicide' (2013) 19 International Review of Victimology 307.

³⁴ Rachel M Venema, 'Police Officer Schema of Sexual Assault Reports' (2016) 31 Journal of Interpersonal Violence 872.

³⁵ Faruque and Rahaman, *supra* note 6.

³⁶ Campbell, *supra* note 5.

would ask rape victims about their sexual history and what they were wearing before the attack³⁷. The police seemed uninterested and unhelpful, and some even threatened to file criminal charges against them if they didn't give a detailed account of what happened³⁸. About half of rape victims who call the police to report their attacks have upsetting reactions from law enforcement. As a result of secondary victimization, many of these victims frequently feel abused and dehumanized. About 50% of rape victims have been secondary victims of law enforcement, according to earlier research, and there may be a link between this mistreatment and the outcome of their cases in court³⁹. Three categories of rape myths have been identified as circumstantial statements (blame victim based on situation or context of rape), character logical statements (blame victim's personality, behavior, or moral character), and investigatory blame statements (blame victim for delays or actions during investigation)⁴⁰. These can include beliefs that victims are partially responsible for their own victimization which in turn declines the perceived responsibility of the offender⁴¹.

Negative experience in the courtroom and in justice system

Rape survivors may experience secondary victimization as a result of things like confronting the offender in court and remembering specifics of the incident⁴². Over 35% of women worldwide have been the victim of sexual harassment. Less than 40% of women who experience sexual assault seek assistance of any kind, and less than 10% contact law enforcement in the majority of nations where data is available⁴³. The nation's laws against rape are unfairly harsh and discriminating toward women, according to another article⁴⁴. In the context of Bangladesh, although the 2022 amendment to the Evidence Act, 1872 repealed Section 155(4) and restricted Section 146(3), thereby prohibiting the use of a rape character or sexual history of victim to impeach her credibility during trial, such protections are largely confined to courtroom proceedings (The Evidence (Amendment) Act, 2022)⁴⁵. This is evidenced in the Khulna University student rape case in February, 2024 when a male assailant was sentenced to life imprisonment for repeatedly raping a female

³⁷ Campbell, *supra* note 9.

³⁸ Martin and Powell, *supra* note 21.

³⁹ Patterson and Campbell, *supra* note 1.

⁴⁰ Jessica Shaw and others, 'Beyond Surveys and Scales: How Rape Myths Manifest in Sexual Assault Police Records.' (2017) 7 *Psychology of Violence* 602.

⁴¹ Pamela Tontodonato and Edna Erez, 'Crime, Punishment, and Victim Distress' (1994) 3 *International Review of Victimology* 33.

⁴² Orth and Maercker, *supra* note 11.

⁴³ UN Women, 'Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women' (2024)

<<https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/stories/news/2024/11/facts-and-figures-ending-violence-against-women>> accessed 27 June 2025.

⁴⁴ Afroza Begum, 'Rape: A Deprivation of Women's Rights in Bangladesh' (2004) 5 *Asia-Pacific Journal on Human Rights and the Law* 1.

⁴⁵ Hasan and Jahan, *supra* note 19.

student by promising marriage; her survival underscores both the horror of the offence and the perseverance required for justice⁴⁶.

A 21-year-old Hindu woman in Muradnagar (Cumilla) was raped. A video of the assault was widely circulated online, which rights groups decried as “a second assault” on her⁴⁷. The footage exposed the identity of the victim which cause secondary victimization. A female student at Dhaka University withdrew a harassment complaint due to outcry over the “orna incident.” Islamist vigilantes blamed her attire for the abuse and publicly threatened her with rape and murder for filing charges⁴⁸. Despite these legal reforms, systemic insensitivity toward survivors persists, reinforcing the perception that the justice system remains discriminatory against women⁴⁹.

d. Medical and post-rape exams penetrate secondary victimization

A different study shows that 58% of rape survivors said that mental health providers played a role in their experience of secondary victimization, and 89% of them felt the medical and post-rape assessment to be upsetting⁵⁰. Even judges who hear rape cases are frequently insensitive; victims are routinely denied credibility, attacked as individuals, or given unfairly lighter terms for the perpetrators⁵¹. The requirement for victims to submit to a medical examination and deliver testimony within a short period of time following the assault is one of the harshest parts of rape cases. Critical evidence is frequently lost or destroyed in Bangladesh due to the procedures involved in the First Information Report (FIR) filing process and forensic testing⁵². Similar unfavorable actions by doctors, such as declining to do forensic examinations, failing to describe the processes, and adopting an impersonal or distant demeanor, have also been described by rape victims⁵³.

e. Deprived from societal advantage

Rape victims are deprived of societal advantage including degradation of quality of life, decreased social reputation, feeling of embarrassment in the society, which are societal consequences of rape victims⁵⁴. The way society views rape victims, especially those in

⁴⁶ Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha, ‘Man Gets Life Term in Khulna Rape Case’ *New Age* (2024).

⁴⁷ Namita Singh, ‘Bangladesh Reels after Rape of Hindu Woman Filmed and Shared Online’ *The Independent* (2025) <<https://www.the-independent.com/asia/south-asia/bangladesh-sexual-assault-video-protest-fazor-ali-b2780038.html>> accessed 10 July 2025.

⁴⁸ Shamima Rita, ‘Is Justice for Rape, Harassment Victims Halted by Their Clothing?’ *Dhaka Tribune* (2025) <<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/375685/is-justice-for-rape-harassment-victims-halted-by>> accessed 10 July 2025.

⁴⁹ Begum, *supra* note 44.

⁵⁰ Campbell, *supra* note 5.

⁵¹ Dipa Dube, ‘Secondary Victimization of Rape Victims in India’ in Gerd Kirchhoff, Palit and Sahani (eds), *Global Victimology- New Voices Theory Facts Legislation* (2017) <<https://ssrn.com/abstract=3398088>> accessed 24 May 2025.

⁵² Begum, *supra* note 44.

⁵³ Campbell, *supra* note 9.

⁵⁴ Yesmen, *supra* note 16.

highly stigmatized roles, frequently depicts them as "damaged goods" with a lower social standing⁵⁵. The trauma of secondary victimization is inflicted on rape victims in addition to the immediate consequences of primary victimization, which include fear, phobias, anxiety, increased motor activity, somatic symptoms, obsessions, and even suicidal thoughts⁵⁶.

A 16-year-old girl in Ramgati Upazila (Lakshmipur) was raped by a local man. After her mother filed a case, a local arbitration committee was convened and scolded and blamed the girl during the meeting. Facing this humiliation and lack of protection, the girl became distraught and tragically committed suicide⁵⁷. This is a clear example of victim-blaming and social shaming as secondary victimization. In February 2024, a woman and her 12-year-old daughter were gang-raped at their home in Subarnachar (Noakhali). The powerful accused pressured her to drop the case⁵⁸. All these secondary victimizations happened because the victims were not as influential as the accused.

Rape victims are further impacted by this, as well as gender insensitivity on the part of attorneys, physicians, and sometimes judges. Additionally, the criminal justice system's systemic issues restrict the assistance and justice that they can get⁵⁹. Two significant traumas are experienced by a woman who has been raped: the actual assault and the ensuing investigation and trial. Ain O. Salish Kendra reported that because no case can be registered at a police station without money, rape victims frequently encounter financial obstacles when trying to file a complaint. Victims' distress is further increased by the fact that male police officers frequently cross-examine them⁶⁰.

Causes of secondary victimization of rape victims

Secondary victimization in rape cases is increasing in an alarming rate. The reasons behind the increase of secondary victimization are explained below through the use of various research paper reviews:

⁵⁵ Christine A Smith and Irene H Frieze, 'Examining Rape Empathy From the Perspective of the Victim and the Assailant 1' (2003) 33 *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 476.

⁵⁶ Dominic Abrams and others, 'Perceptions of Stranger and Acquaintance Rape: The Role of Benevolent and Hostile Sexism in Victim Blame and Rape Proclivity.' (2003) 84 *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 111.

⁵⁷ VB Desk, 'Teenage Girl Commits Suicide Not Getting Justice for Rape' *Views Bangladesh* (2025) <<https://viewsbangladesh.com/teenage-girl-commits-suicide-not-getting-justice-for-rape/>> accessed 10 July 2025.

⁵⁸ '2024 Subarnachar Rape: Survivor "Facing Death Threats" from Accused' *The Daily Star* (2025) <<https://images.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/2024-subarnachar-rape-survivor-facing-death-threats-accused-3933286>> accessed 10 July 2025.

⁵⁹ T Huda, 'Beyond Criminal Justice: Towards Tort Liability for Sexual Violence Against Women' (2017) 17 *Bangladesh Journal of Law* <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3595168>.

⁶⁰ 'Violence Against Women – Rape : January-December 2018' (*Ain o Salish Kendra*, 2018) <<https://www.askbd.org/ask/2019/01/14/violence-women-rape-january-december-2018/>> accessed 24 May 2025.

a. Acceptance of the Rape Myth

Rape myths refer to "prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists" that serve to justify sexual aggression and minimize offender responsibility⁶¹. Within the criminal justice system, across police investigations, courtroom procedures, and correctional practices, rape myth acceptance distorts justice outcomes. As example, when police officers internalize such myths, they are more likely to dismiss cases prematurely, question the credibility of victims, or pressure them to retract complaints⁶². In court, rape myths may influence judicial reasoning and jury perceptions, leading to leniency for offenders or undue scrutiny of victims' character and behavior⁶³.

Three categories of rape myths were found by researchers in police case files: investigatory blame statements, character-based claims, and circumstantial statements⁶⁴. These can include beliefs that victims are partially responsible for their own victimization which in turn declines the perceived responsibility of the offender⁶⁵. This perception impacts people's attitudes to victims while the more a person is seen as having precipitated the rape, the less likely it is that something will be done about it. While sexual assault training and firsthand victim experience were strongly associated with improved interviewing skills, acceptance of rape myths had the biggest detrimental effect on police officers' understanding of interview tactics, according to a poll of 429 officers⁶⁶.

b. Male-dominating society and Socioeconomic status

Bangladesh is a patriarchal society and here women are stereotyped as passive, obedient, illiterate and fertile so on. This stereotype remains women invisible in ruling social organization. Gender base discrimination makes the rape victims more vulnerable to secondary victimization and its results are: victim blaming attitudes, neglecting victim rights and male-dominating culture in the society⁶⁷.

Interactions with medical, legal, and mental health experts can result in secondary victimization, frequently when victims receive blame rather than assistance and are confronted with insensitivity, incredulity, or insensitivity. Secondary victimization is most

⁶¹ Martha R Burt, 'Cultural Myths and Supports for Rape.' (1980) 38 Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 217.

⁶² Amy Dellinger Page, 'Judging Women and Defining Crime: Police Officers' Attitudes Toward Women and Rape' (2008) 28 Sociological Spectrum 389.

⁶³ J Temkin and B Krahé, *Sexual Assault and the Justice Gap: A Question of Attitude*. (Hart Publishing 2008) <<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2008-07147-000>> accessed 27 June 2025.

⁶⁴ Shaw and others, *supra* note 40.

⁶⁵ Tontodonato and Erez, *supra* note 41.

⁶⁶ Sarah L Cook and others, 'Emerging Issues in the Measurement of Rape Victimization' (2011) 17 Violence Against Women 201.

⁶⁷ Begum, *supra* note 44.

common among women of color and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and even white, middle-class rape victims have reported feeling more hostile when interacting with systems that are supposed to help them⁶⁸. Women from ethnic minority groups and victims of non-stranger rape are particularly vulnerable to secondary victimization within the criminal justice system⁶⁹.

c. Prevailing Culture of Impunity

From 2023 to May, 2025, Bangladesh recorded alarming levels of sexual violence. In 2023, 574 women were raped, with 33 deaths and 5 suicides⁷⁰. In 2024, 401 rape cases were reported, including 34 deaths⁷¹. By May 2025, 383 rape occurred, with 16 murders and 5 suicides⁷². Despite ongoing advocacy, underreporting and secondary victimization persist, revealing systemic gaps in survivor protection and justice delivery. The great number of rape victims seem to be excluded from the legal system, which encourages a culture of impunity for those who commit rape⁷³.

Victims of rape frequently face an inhospitable criminal justice system where their rights are violated by police corruption, ineptitude, and gender insensitivity⁷⁴. Besides, gender-based discrimination, patriarchal attitude, language barrier (lack of translation services at the police station for indigenous women), and lack of reformatory laws for rape victims are the causes of secondary victimization in the community and criminal justice system⁷⁵. The acceptance of rape myths, patriarchal social structures, the commodification and subordination of women, gender discrimination, and the representation of rape in movies are the main causes of secondary victimization.

Consequences of secondary victimization of rape victims

a. Social impact

Secondary victimization isn't directly realized but it is an oppressive and hidden nature of ancient society and the justice system that has been going on for ages. Aftermath of the incident of rape, victims spend a lot of time alone because of insecurity and separate themselves from social events. The consequences of secondary victimization on rape

⁶⁸ Campbell, *supra* note 5.

⁶⁹ Campbell, *supra* note 9.

⁷⁰ 'Violence Against Women -Rape (Jan-Dec 2023)' (2023)

<<https://www.askbd.org/ask/2024/01/08/violence-against-women-rape-jan-dec-2023/>> accessed 27 June 2025.

⁷¹ 'Violence Against Women -Rape Jan-Dec 2024' (2024) <<https://www.askbd.org/ask/2024/12/31/violence-against-women-rape-jan-dec-2024/>> accessed 27 June 2025.

⁷² Ain O Salish Kendra (ASK), *supra* note 15.

⁷³ Burt, *supra* note 61.

⁷⁴ Huda, *supra* note 59.

⁷⁵ 'Violence Against Women -Rape (Jan-Dec 2019)' (*Ain o Salish Kendra*, 2019)

<<https://www.askbd.org/ask/2020/01/06/violence-against-women-rape-jan-dec-2019/>> accessed 24 May 2025.

victims make them more vulnerable than before. Victims who opted not to report their assaults to the police frequently did so out of fear of additional harm and emotional distress, stating that they were protecting their delicate mental health by not being prosecuted⁷⁶.

b. Physical impact

Research suggests that the consequence of secondary victimization go through two ways: emotional trauma and physical trauma. Emotional response to trauma occurs: shock and denial, anger and acting out, confusion, fear, sadness, numbness, and self-blame⁷⁷. As a result, victims of rape experience not only the immediate consequences of the attack, including anxiety, phobias, terror, increased motor activity, physical symptoms, obsessions, and even suicidal thoughts, but also the trauma of secondary victimization⁷⁸. The European Court of Human Rights noted that rape inflicts profound psychological scars on victims, which often heal more slowly than those caused by other forms of physical or mental violence. A rape victim also runs the danger of contracting an STD and becoming pregnant, among other things⁷⁹.

c. Psychological impact

Post-traumatic stress disorder, sleeplessness, bodily pain, agitation, difficulty concentrating, exhaustion, and nightmares are some of the other physical effects of trauma⁸⁰. Survivors frequently endure social exclusion and ostracism in addition to the inevitable psychological anguish, which drastically affects their personal and professional lives and further damages their self-esteem⁸¹.

The extensive prevalence and substantial effects of secondary victimization were brought to light by a statewide study of mental health providers who assist rape survivors⁸². Victims' mental health is significantly impacted by secondary victimization. According to self-reported assessments, rape survivors reported feeling violated (89%), despondent (71%), self-doubting (53%), and unwilling to seek additional care (80%) as a result of their interactions with judicial system professionals⁸³. The harm of secondary victimization is also visible in objective measures of PTSD symptomatology. Interestingly, 16.5% of rape victims still met the criteria for PTSD 17 years after the attack; this is nearly 1/5 of all rape victims experiencing lifelong consequences as a result of the secondary trauma⁸⁴. According to a different study, interacting with outside support networks, such as the police, was more

⁷⁶ Campbell, *supra* note 10.

⁷⁷ Orth and Maercker, *supra* note 11.

⁷⁸ Abrams and others, *supra* note 56.

⁷⁹ Begum, *supra* note 44.

⁸⁰ Patterson and Campbell, *supra* note 1.

⁸¹ Faruque and Rahaman, *supra* note 6.

⁸² Campbell, *supra* note 5.

⁸³ Campbell, *supra* note 9.

⁸⁴ Debra Patterson, 'The Linkage Between Secondary Victimization by Law Enforcement and Rape Case Outcomes' (2011) 26 Journal of Interpersonal Violence 328.

likely to result in unfavorable social reactions, which were then connected to increased symptoms of PTSD⁸⁵.

Suggestions and Strategies to Mitigate and Prevent Secondary Victimization

Effective prevention of secondary victimization requires a comprehensive transformation of societal attitudes and cultural norms⁸⁶. This begins with reshaping public perception to develop empathy, respect, and a sense of responsibility toward victims. Cultural norms must be refined to discourage victim-blaming and promote a supportive and sensitive environment⁸⁷. Public awareness is essential to reduce stigma and encourage individuals to take collective responsibility in supporting victims. A critical step in this process is the consistent and strict enforcement of the Evidence Act across all sectors of the criminal justice system, including law enforcement and the judiciary⁸⁸.

Victims must be treated with dignity throughout legal proceedings, and their rights must be protected through adequately resourced victim support services⁸⁹. Expanding the number and capacity of support centers for survivors of sexual violence is vital⁹⁰. The media, including social media platforms, must act responsibly when reporting sensitive cases. Revealing an identity of victim should be criminalized, as it worsens their trauma⁹¹. Media can play a proactive role to aware public about secondary victimization⁹². Finally, policymakers must implement legal and institutional reforms to prevent secondary victimization and ensure justice.

Discussion and Implications

This study explores the nature, causes, and consequences of secondary victimization experienced by rape survivors. Secondary victimization refers to the additional trauma inflicted on victims by societal responses, criminal justice procedures, and even personal networks. In the male-dominated society of Bangladesh, women are frequently oppressed and subjugated by men. Women's status, respect, and authority are usually determined and governed by men in such a patriarchal environment. In the communities of Bangladesh, the general public frequently does not view discrimination against women as improper or even illegal⁹³. Non-friendly criminal justice atmosphere has been faced by the rape victims,

⁸⁵ Ullman, *supra* note 25.

⁸⁶ Israt Jahan Orne, 'A Growing Problem: Victim-Blaming Is Becoming an Increasingly Problematic Phenomenon in Bangladesh' *Dhaka Tribune* (2023).

⁸⁷ Campbell, *supra* note 9.

⁸⁸ Hasan and Jahan, *supra* note 19.

⁸⁹ Yesmen, *supra* note 16.

⁹⁰ Sarah L Cook and others, 'Emerging Issues in the Measurement of Rape Victimization' (2011) 17 *Violence Against Women* 201.

⁹¹ Patterson, *supra* note 84.

⁹² Hasan and Jahan, *supra* note 19.

⁹³ Faruque and Rahaman, *supra* note 6.

police inefficacy, corruption, and gender insensitivity are responsible for violating the rights of rape victim⁹⁴.

It's interesting to note that rape is one of the few crimes where victim-blaming is a typical social reaction and blame frequently moves from the perpetrator to the victim⁹⁵. According to the majority of victims, the police were unhelpful, and some even threatened to file criminal charges against them if they didn't give an accurate version of what happened⁹⁶. The rights of rape victims are frequently violated due to police ineptitude, corruption, and gender insensitivity⁹⁷. When police, court and community people (family, friends, relatives) do not help enough to rape victims, they are consequently secondary victimized by them⁹⁸. Victims of rape are more likely than victims of other interpersonal crimes to be held accountable for their assault⁹⁹. A prolonged and intricate consequence of some acts, secondary victimization can result from unfavorable, critical views toward the victim, a lack of assistance, and occasionally even social exclusion¹⁰⁰.

Victim-blaming, rooted in rape myths and patriarchal norms, remains as primary contributor, often leading to disbelief, social exclusion, and emotional neglect from family, friends, police, courts, and medical personnel. Despite legal reforms such as the 2022 amendment to the Evidence Act in Bangladesh, survivors still face hostile police attitudes, repeated interrogations, and humiliation in courts and medical exams. These systemic failures, compounded by social stigma, economic marginalization, and cultural impunity, further deepen the trauma of primary victimization. Socioeconomic status, gender bias, and lack of legal support worsen outcomes for marginalized victims. The consequences of secondary victimization are profound, including social isolation, job loss, physical trauma, and long-term psychological impacts such as PTSD, insomnia, depression, and suicidal ideation. Studies show that 89% of rape survivors feel violated by institutional responses, while nearly 1 in 5 continue to suffer PTSD symptoms decades after the assault ¹⁰¹.

In Bangladesh, occurrences of secondary victimization of rape victims remain evident. Notable examples include the recent "Orna incident"¹⁰² and the "Muradnagar rape case,"¹⁰³ where victims were denied dignified treatment. Also, social media facilitated the unlawful

⁹⁴ Ryan, *supra* note 22.

⁹⁵ *ibid*.

⁹⁶ Patterson and Campbell, *supra* note 1.

⁹⁷ Huda, *supra* note 59.

⁹⁸ C Villacampa, G Filella and J Tamarit, 'Secondary Victimization and Victim Assistance' (2010) 18 European Journal of Crime, Criminal Law and Criminal Justice 281.

⁹⁹ Claire R Gravelin, Monica Biernat and Caroline E Bucher, 'Blaming the Victim of Acquaintance Rape: Individual, Situational, and Sociocultural Factors' (2019) 9 Frontiers in Psychology.

¹⁰⁰ Joyce E Williams, 'Secondary Victimization: Confronting Public Attitudes about Rape.' (1984) 9 Victimology 66 <<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1988-29977-001>> accessed 24 May 2025.

¹⁰¹ Campbell, *supra* note 9.

¹⁰² Rita, *supra* note 48.

¹⁰³ Singh, *supra* note 47.

exposure of the identity of victims. Societal responses sometimes intensify victim's trauma which was seen in the cases of rape of 16-year-old girl in Ramgati Upazila¹⁰⁴ and 12-year-old gang-rape in Subarnachar¹⁰⁵. In these cases, the victims had low social status and for that they were stigmatized by the society.

This study underscores the urgent need for trauma-informed, victim-sensitive justice and support systems to reduce re-traumatization and uphold the rights of rape survivors. In this regard, the police can establish mandatory gender-sensitive, trauma-informed protocols in dealing with rape cases. Police can also increase victim support centers across the nation, which can serve as proper shelters for rape survivors. The court and prosecution can form a dedicated sexual-offence docket with a proper timeline for the sexual-offence trial process. Also, the 2022 Evidence Act amendment should be strictly implemented to ensure the privacy and security of rape victims. Psychological counseling and therapies, such as family-group counseling and mindfulness training, can be arranged to help repair the harm suffered by victims. Mass media and society can raise awareness about secondary victimization issues. At the community level, local leaders (imams, teachers, Union Parishad members) can be trained to support victims psychologically. Moreover, comprehensive efforts from all stakeholders in the criminal justice system and society altogether can combat and prevent the secondary victimization of rape victims.

Conclusion

Secondary victimization of rape victims is not only a simple problem but also identified as a devastating trauma for victims. Rape victims face more vulnerable situation when they are not supported by their own family and friends; society blame them and last of all they don't get enough support from the criminal justice system. Secondary victimization and its dominant causes that affect the victim's life aftermath of such a second rape termed as secondary victimization. After such a situation occurs, it is very difficult to figure out the difference between real rape and second rape caused by criminal justice professionals and community members. Multiple research projects find that secondary victimization is experienced by rape victims and it is increasing at an alarming rate. Moreover, post traumatic disorder is the ultimate consequence of secondary victimization and most of the rape survivors take mental health support from medical professionals. To find and address the underlying reasons for this detrimental phenomenon, research on the nature and causes of secondary victimization of rape victims in Bangladesh is essential. Since women are subordinated in the traditional society in Bangladesh due to patriarchal norms and values, secondary victimization is a problem that is mostly concealed in the community and the criminal justice system. To better understand the reasons behind rape victims becoming

¹⁰⁴ Desk, *supra* note 57.

¹⁰⁵ '2024 Subarnachar Rape: Survivor "Facing Death Threats" from Accused' *The Daily Star* (2025) <<https://images.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/2024-subarnachar-rape-survivor-facing-death-threats-accused-3933286>> accessed 10 July 2025.

secondary victims, primary study on this issue is crucial. In Bangladesh, initiatives to address secondary victimization of rape victims require the cooperation of NGOs, scholars, activists, and the media.

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