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Patterns and Aftermath of Sexual Health-related Misuse of Digital Media in Bangladesh: A Public Health Concern

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Dear Editor,

Digital technologies have never had so many uses in our everyday lives, yet improper use has diminished our positive qualities. The issue of misusing digital media in terms of victimizing aspects of sexual and reproductive health has been identified as a serious concern in a variety of literature from various backgrounds around the world, including the study among US women on cyber harassment [1], the ground-breaking research on cyberbullying and middle school children [2], and the linear relationship between the rate of sexual offenses against children and internet availability in India [3, 4]. The Crimes Against Children Research Center, Thorn, and other well-known organizations, on the other hand, have addressed how the misuse of technology is impacting our ability to live moral lives.

The effects of these types of abuse are severe, as shown by important studies such as those that found a connection between cyberbullying victimization and low self-esteem, family problems, academic problems, school problems, and offline delinquent behavior [5], a significant link between pornography and sex trafficking [6], and cyber-bullied youth who attempted suicide who reported suicidal thoughts [7 - 9], which is also considered one of the most serious consequences of mistreatment. Research revealed the extent of online sexual harassment, but the goal was to understand the phenomenon rather than find a solution [10]. Bangladesh currently has insufficient and inefficient legislation that addresses sexual harassment on social media and other digital platforms [11]. In a survey on the inappropriate use of technology and the engagement of kids, a local NGO made suggestions based on the situation, scope, causes, and effects of child pornography. This survey has found that about 77% of adolescents watch

pornographic videos [12]. The extent of various sorts of abuse has been rapidly expanding in Bangladesh. Social networking platforms have seen a 200-fold increase in the number of cybercrime charges involving the distribution of pornographic images and videos of women [13]. According to a government assessment, more than 17000 claims have been made in the previous two years, with almost 70% of the accusers being women, signifying that women are more vulnerable than their male counterparts [14].

The following stages provide a macro-level categorization of incidents involving the abuse of digital media. Firstly, cyberbullying describes instances in which teenagers utilize technology to annoy, threaten, degrade, or otherwise bother their classmates [15]. A survey found that 49 percent of Bangladeshi kids were harassed online [16]. Second, according to an FBI agent [17], sextortion occurs when someone threatens to reveal your private and sensitive information if you do not provide them with sexually explicit photographs, sexual favors, or money. The victims may become the target of cyberbullying by visiting various websites, mostly social networking ones. A teenager was detained in Dhaka on suspicion of disseminating pornographic images and videos of a seventh-grader [18]. Compared to phone conversations, text messaging is seen as a preferable method of communication. Girls are under more pressure to send "sexts," and are criticized harsher when the photographs are shared with others other than the intended receiver [19]. A professor at a university was charged with sexual harassment and using extortion to get sex [20]. Thirdly, the practice of disseminating explicit or sexually explicit photos of an adult without the person included in the image's photo or video is referred to as revenge pornography [21]. A sexually explicit photograph can be posted on a website where millions of people can access and distribute it, whether by an angry ex-partner, a hacker, or anyone else [22]. For performing this deed, a cricket player from Bangladesh was detained [23] (Fig. **1**).

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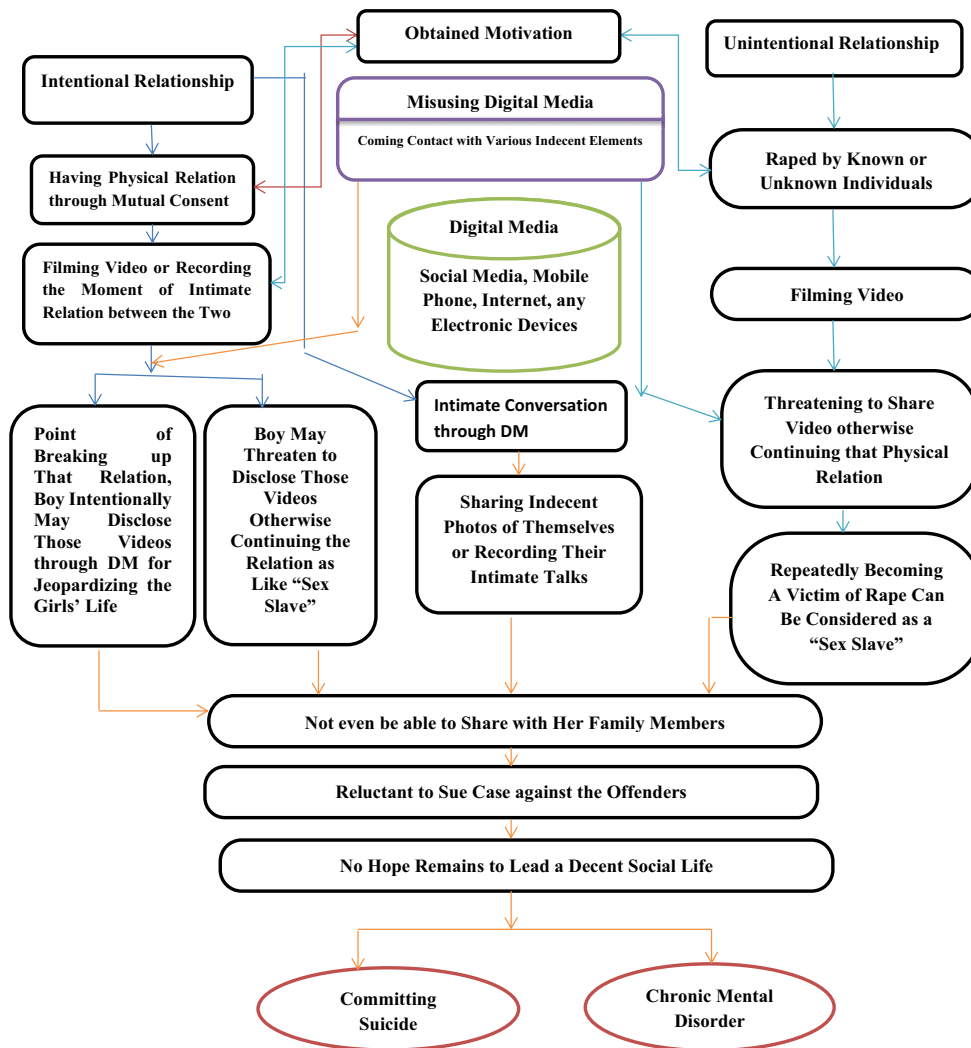
Fig. (1). Patterns of the misuse of digital media.

The aforementioned macro-approaches can happen in one of two ways, namely, online-to-online and offline-to-online, depending on how they happen. The first type suggests that the whole harassment process occurs online, where both parties (miscreants and victims) may be physically acquainted outside of the online setting and where both purposeful and accidental nexuses may be identified from the web of connections. The victim's desire to deepen her relationship with the perpetrator even if she has never met him in person is referred to as an 'intentional relationship' in the online-to-online context. Once the offender has his desired images and films, he begins to blackmail, and demand money in certain situations and additional naked photos and movies.

In the online-to-online connection category, an unintended relationship arises when the victim and the offender do not personally know one another, but the victim purposefully falls into the offender's trap and decides not to carry out the obscene deeds that the offender threatens. Offline to online implies that both the victim and the perpetrator are familiar with one another in real life, such as through friends, family, known people, and so on. The joint consent of the victim and the perpetrator signals the beginning of the purposeful connection.

They can be eager to further their friendship by posting inappropriate images on social media. After that, they may develop such close ties that the offender may covertly or against their consent, film the video of the intimate moments. Therefore, there are two possible outcomes. First, once the relationship has ended, the perpetrator has the option of publishing those private details online, and second, the victim's life becomes endangered.

A woman should intervene to protect her social standing if the offender (particularly a male) starts blackmailing and forcing her to have sex with him whenever he wants. This is known as "sex slavery." Regarding inadvertent partnerships, whether the victim is acquainted with the perpetrator personally or not, she is no longer interested in engaging in a sexual relationship with him or her. By any means necessary, the offender can record an intimate moment on camera, and the next stage is similar to an intentional relationship. The schematic picture that follows can be used to illustrate these little misuse-related stages (S. 1). The victims make an effort to dissuade them from taking any legal action since doing so would make them uncomfortable and lower their social standing. In the end, there is little prospect of living a

respectable life in society, which leads people to either commit suicide or suffer from a persistent mental illness. A remarkable public health response is needed to address this phenomenal issue.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest financial or otherwise.

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