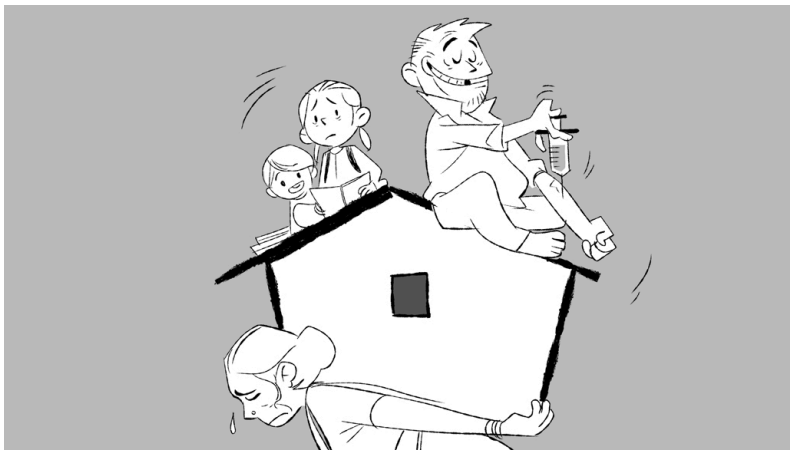
Editorial • Opinion



| — *Mehedi Haque/New Age*

Opinion

Women: the neglected victims of substance abuse

Md Mahmudul Hasan

02 November, 2026, 00:00

Share Post Email Print

WHENEVER I visit Bangladesh, I try to spend a few days in our village in Brahmanbaria. The rural community offers me a mixture of pleasure and pain — the pleasure of returning to my roots, revisiting the rustic landscape and meeting people who I consider part of an extended family; and the pain of seeing social inequality and human suffering up close. In August this year, I spent about a week in the village. I heard, among others, accounts of women facing domestic violence and economic victimisation from their drug addict husbands.

One man with a history of substance abuse was struggling to find a life partner. He eventually married an extremely decent and lovely girl from a humble background. Let's call her Rina. Driven by economic hardship, Rina's impoverished parents arranged her marriage to alleviate expenses. She had her entire life ahead of her, but this marriage trapped her in a distressed relationship with a man who is addicted to drugs. He physically abused her and was incapable of providing her with support, compassion or companionship. Rina's marital troubles worsened and became more complex after she became a mother.

Even after marrying and becoming a father, the husband maintained a persistent pattern of substance consumption. From his previous practice of terrorising his mother for drug money, he now shifted his ill-treatment to his wife. He kept pressuring Rina to ask her poor, vulnerable parents to finance his narcotic habit. As the drug addict husband was incapable of providing for his family, Rina and her daughter depended for their sustenance on his widowed

the young woman finally returned to her parental home with her little daughter. Needless to say, it compounded the financial difficulties of her struggling parents.

Rina is a victim of not only her drug addict husband but also of a social system that often views marriage as a mechanism to reform wayward men. Hopeless families often turn to marriage as a way to shield their sons from substance abuse. They look for decent brides to rectify the behaviour of those men. It is often forgotten what many in the West say: Women are not rehab centres for men.

In rural Bangladesh, such brides are chosen generally from underprivileged families and are expected to mend the behaviour of their derailed husbands. These newlywed women arrive at their in-laws' houses with no miracles or magic bullets to correct the narcotic lifestyle of their husbands. Ultimately, they are subjected to a double layer of suffering: they face mistreatment from their drug addict spouses; and they are often censured for their inability to anchor and reform their errant husbands.

I heard Rina's story from a reliable source. However, I came to know the predicament of the wife of another drug addict first-hand.

As I brought my wife and children with me during that visit to the village, I made sure that we had a domestic helper for housekeeping purposes for the duration of our stay. Accordingly, we employed a woman (let's call her Leena) to help us in household chores. Leena leads a busy life taking care of her four children and managing the needs of her home. I became curious and wondered whether or not she had a husband.

I found out: Yes, Leena has a husband. But he is a drug addict and doesn't work. After managing her own home, Leena goes out to give others a hand with their domestic tasks. Thus, she supports her family and at the same time is forced to fund her husband's substance abuse.

I gave Leena some money, hoping she would use it independently. I strongly cautioned her against sharing any of it with her husband. She told me that she doesn't mind handing the money over to her husband and only wished he would stop beating her. Assuming the role of the breadwinner, Leena supports and looks after her family. Adding insult to injury, her drug addict husband subjects her to regular, unprovoked physical abuse even though she bears the entire financial weight of raising their children and managing the family.

I asked Leena why she didn't run away with her children. She had no answer to my question. I also found it difficult to dwell on this complex family issue for long. What I understood is that Leena had nowhere else to go.

I asked my younger brother (who lives in the village) if the stories of Rina and Leena were isolated cases in the community. He told me that an increasing number of women in the village regularly suffer similar emotional neglect, physical violence and financial exploitation at the hands of their substance-abusing husbands. The widespread availability of yaba and other addictive substances has contributed to a rising trend in drug abuse, exacerbating social problems whose neglected victims are women.

In Bangladesh, drug addiction is more prevalent among men than women. However, women like Rina and Leena experience its adverse impacts more

household resources, driving the family into economic distress. Being multiply vulnerable, women bear the brunt of domestic discord, economic instability, compounding household burdens and the strain of familial crises and emotional pressure resulting from substance abuse.

The number of drug addicts in Bangladesh has been on the rise for years. Currently, roughly 5 per cent of the population in the country is, keeping to official reports, dependent on substance abuse. The percentage would jump dramatically if the survey focused solely on young people. Given the pivotal role the youth play in driving a nation's advancement, this situation is deeply worrying even if we leave aside the grave hardships endured by the wives and other family members of drug addicts.

In Bangladesh, the most commonly abused substances or drugs include cannabis (ganja), yaba, heroin, alcohol, phensedyl and other stimulants. In this regard, what is more unacceptable is that these harmful substances that are ruining our country are not domestically produced.

These destructive substances are imported from neighbouring countries, especially Myanmar and India. The harm to our country is twofold. First, it drains the economy of our country; second, it steals the future of our youth.

Our country spends billions of takas to maintain various agencies to monitor our borders and to control drug release and drug use. They include the police, the Department of Narcotics Control, the Special Response Battalion, the Border Guard Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Coast Guard. These agencies are fully capable of preventing drug smuggling into our country.

Unfortunately, what we see is that law enforcers target and penalise street dealers and drug addicts only and do not dismantle major cartels and higher-tier syndicate leaders involved in the smuggling of illicit substances. Either these agencies are complicit in drug trafficking into our country, or their hands are tied and lips are closed by powers beyond their control. Therefore, what is needed is political will to eliminate the scourge of drug trafficking and addiction among the population.

Dr Md Mahmudul Hasan is professor in the department of English language and literature at International Islamic University Malaysia.

Tag: Bangladesh | Women | neglected victims | substance abuse

For all latest news, follow NewAge's Google News channel.

Masked men set tyres on fire on railway tracks in Jamalpur



Arson attacks, crude bomb blasts continue, trigger concerns



Fire guts 16 houses, 2 shops in Bandarban



Police cordon off bomb-like object outside Savar school



Banned Chhatra League activists block road, set tyres on fire in Chattogram



Read More

Masked men set tyres on fire on railway tracks in Jamalpur

Arson attacks, crude bomb blasts continue, trigger concerns

Fire guts 16 houses, 2 shops in Bandarban

FOLLOW US

Archive About Contact Sitemap Advertisement
Privacy Policy Terms & Conditions

Copyright © 2026
Newage All rights reserved

Editor: Nurul Kabir, Published by the Chairman, Editorial Board ASM Shahidullah Khan on behalf of Media New Age Ltd. and Printed at Jai Jai Din Printers Limited
PABX:+8802226605031-7,Fax :+8802226605038,E-mail : news@newagebd.net