



Exploring the use of public relations in organising activism: Implications for addressing gender-based violence in the developing world

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Abstract

Public relations (PR) offers strategies that may create positive change in response to gender-based violence (GV). It can be transformative in influencing people's attitudes and choices. However, PR has traditionally focussed on managing relations with stakeholders to build the image of corporate institutions. This has meant that the professional and academic interests of PR have often become aligned with profit-making institutions. Instead, from a critical perspective, PR can be used in non-profit sectors, including non-government or voluntary organisations with an interest in organising campaigns to promote community health and wellbeing. It can function as a discursive tool to promote the voices of marginalised people to transform society and promote equality. Such an example can be found in activism against GV. Literature on activism against GV is reviewed in this paper to identify how PR strategies are used amongst activists to organise campaigns. The use of PR has appeared as a community action tool and as an individual communicative technique to organise activists, to promote the GV agenda, and to attain public support for eliminating GV. The value of PR in addressing difficult issues such as GV offers hope, especially in the developing world where large scale social intervention programs are not feasible.

Keywords: Activism, discourse, gender-based violence, human services, non-profit organisations, public relations.

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GV) is a serious international problem underpinned by unhelpful societal attitudes and myths. Methods of public relations (PR) has the potential to challenge these underlying attitudes and create positive change and action. This review paper examines scholarly papers on activists working with NGOs using conventional and unconventional PR methods, either intentionally or unintentionally, to organise activism against GV. In doing so, it provides a foundational knowledge base for more applied research to be conducted on the use of PR to stop GV in the developing world.

Public relations (PR) is increasingly seen as a tool for grassroots and non-government organisations to create discourses that promote change with regard to various social problems (Demetrious, 2013; Somerville & Aroussi, 2013; Soriano, 2015; Weaver, 2013). Examples are emerging where PR methods that create attitudinal change and community action have been used to prevent GV (Baker, 2007; Kabeer, 2003; Spadacini & Nichols, 1998). GV is a serious and widespread social problem with health, social, emotional, and economic consequences for victims and their families (Ellsberg, 2006; Heise, Ellsberg & Gottmoeller, 2002; Nakrey, 2013). Globally, it affects one in three women (WHO, 2013). It entails “physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (Article 1, United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women’s, 1993), as well as sexual assault, rape, acid violence, female genital mutilation, dowry, family violence and human trafficking (Baker, 2007; Burgess, 2012; Chowdhury, 2007; Cole & Phillips, 2008). The perpetuation of GV is maintained by societal attitudes and values that disempower women, children and marginalised groups. Sustainable change to reduce and eliminate GV therefore requires the transformation of societal attitudes in combination with policy and legal responses. In an expanding technological age, PR can be used by communities at grassroots, national and international levels as a tool to create discourses that challenge GV by using a variety of media including print, electronic, and social media. PR tools offer the potential to facilitate community transformation on critical social issues such as GV.

Since there is no empirical discussion on the use of PR by NGOs and their activists to address GV, this topic evolves as an academic consideration examining examples of activism where the use of PR can be located. By reviewing the literature on activism in GV broadly across the European, North American and Australasia countries combined with examples from developing or mid to low income countries, the authors of this paper investigate what PR strategies are being used in activism and how they are used. There is some evidence of its effectiveness, but it is neither strongly nor empirically well supported in the literature. It is evident that activism against GV occurs globally in the form of creating resistance, influencing public policy and promoting behavioural change. While the focus of this paper is largely on the developing world, examples from other contexts have been included to illuminate how PR can be used to address GV globally and to elucidate implications for responding to GV in developing contexts.

Understanding PR in relation to activism

Understanding PR in the context of organising activism against GV is a challenging task, because the available definitions of PR are contested and specific to perspectives that focus on managing relationship between organisations and the public especially in the corporate sectors (Demetrious, 2013). From a functionalist perspective, PR was developed to create communication managers and communication technicians mainly for corporate organisations (Daymon & Demetrious, 2013; Edwards, 2011). It was understood and mostly recognised as

“the management of communication between an organisation and its publics” (Grunic & Hunt 1984, p.6-7) in a tightly bound scholarly territory where PR is emphasised, theorised, researched and taught as a response tool to protect the interest of corporate organisations, and thus activists are specified as the problem of organisations (Demetrious, 2013; Falkheimer & Heide, 2016; Holtzhausen, 2000; L’Etang & Pieczka, 2006). This perspective presupposes that PR is an organisational activity that utilises communication tools to serve corporate and commercial interests of the organisation and the public.

PR is also discussed from a non-functionalist perspective where rhetorical scholars highlight the rhetorical heritage of PR, in which PR is conceptualised from symbolic and persuasive viewpoints (Heath, 2009; Toth, 2009) using, for example, symbolic techniques such as narratives, storytelling, dialogue, advocacy and counter-advocacy to promote changes (Heath, 2009). In this context, organisational PR practitioners are considered to be analytical, decision-makers that are creative with the use of their communicative, planning and research skills. Another non-functional approach to PR, however, which is referred as a critical approach, has recently begun considering activism and PR in relation to different social issues (Demetrious, 2013; Somerville & Aroussi, 2013; Weaver, 2013). From this approach, PR can be understood as a discursive tool at various sites of social change for challenging the domination of power groups and promoting the voice of social justice activists and marginalised people to transform unequal power relations (Daymon & Demetrious, 2013; Demetrious, 2013; L’Etang, 2005; L’Etang, 2008). It is used strategically to create discursive effects on communicative spaces and materials with the aim of emancipation from the dominant powers in society. Motion and Weaver (2005) argue that in various PR activities, “discourse is deployed as political resources to include public opinion and achieve political, economic and socio-cultural transformation” (p.52). PR in this context is “a communicative activity used by organisations to intervene socially and between competing discourses in order to facilitate a favourable position within a globalised context” (Daymon & Demetrious, 2013, p. 3). This definition hints at the use of PR as an interventional tool in the struggle to create and establish discourses. However, it largely overlooks how PR can be used as a resistive or discursive tool for organising activism or transforming societal values and attitudes at a grassroots level, focusing instead on promoting global discourses and focusing on positioning as their prime or intended task.

Our paper addresses this gap in PR literature by exploring the use of PR strategies by NGOs in which activists organise activism against GV at a grassroots level. In this paper, the term NGOs can be identified as those groups “who do not hold the political appointees of government agencies, and do not have the profit motivation of corporations” (Bowen, Rawlins & Martin, 2010, p.121). Throughout the discussion, the term NGO has been used to describe activist organisations that serve humanitarian and social causes. NGOs and their activists typically organise activism through researching, monitoring, conducting advocacy, educating and interacting with target people and organising campaigns on various social issues such as health and the environment, while seeking to empower marginalised communities including women and children (Laverack, 2013). We conceptualise activism as “the intention to work with collective consciousness to promote, block or influence social, political, economic and/or environmental change or maintenance of the status-quo” (Morley, Macfarlane & Ablett, 2014, p.180). Activists and their organisations adapt various conventional and non-conventional strategies such as organising dramas and songs or using online media to educate and engage community members to create a collective consciousness about various social problems (Dutta, 2011; Weaver, 2013). In this context, PR can be perceived as a creative form of human action and interventional tool, because NGOs and their activists devise their written, verbal and strategic techniques through available communication channels to create discourses and affect the understanding of the audience to bring about change (Grier & Bryant, 2005; Jiang & Ni, 2009; Somerville & Aroussi, 2013; Soriano, 2015; Taylor & Das, 2010; Weaver, 2013).

However, to date there is no comprehensive account of the use of PR in activism that addresses GV, and therefore a review of literature on activism against GV can delineate how the activists use PR techniques in their activism on this issue in developing countries.

Methodology

Two qualitative approaches were used for this research. First, a review of literature was conducted using specific search criteria. Second, to analyse the texts located in the identified literature, discourse analysis technique was used. In different texts, authors are assumed to create discourses that “systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972, p.49). For the purpose of this paper, discourse was examined to understand how concepts about PR are constructed, developed and applied (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). By applying discourse analysis, the authors have focussed on discussions by different scholars and writers, who have objectified various PR methods to address GV in their respective contexts.

Prior to the review process, it was evident that literature directly addressing the use of PR in activism against GV is scarce. Activists frequently started their activism without any organisational back-up or platform. Therefore, literature that implicitly discussed the use of PR in organising activism against GV was located for this review. Literature has been included if it focuses on strategies, interventions and campaigns addressing GV, or if it discusses the use of PR strategies in activist campaigns. The peer-reviewed literature was located through systematic searches of academic electronic databases: JSTOR, ProQuest Central, and SAGE Journals Online. Google and Google Scholar were utilised to find additional literature and working papers. The search strategy used Boolean Logic with relevant terms and phrases such as “Activis*” and “Gender-based Violence” or “Violence against Women”. In addition, key word searches were utilised by using the phrases such as “Social Movement*” and “Gender-based Violence” or “Violence against Women”; “Feminism*” and “Gender-based Violence”; “Campaign*” and “Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)”; “Activism*” and “Rape”; “Public Relations*” and “Non-Profit Organisation”; “Public Relations*” and “Human Rights”; and “Public Relations*” and “Activism”. Some of the papers relating to GV are descriptive in nature without any empirical evidence, as the authors analysed the events and processes of activism without methodological discussion. With the exception of one study (Potter et al., 2011), the majority of the existing studies were qualitative in nature and employed structured and unstructured interviews, observations, document analysis and self-reflection methods (Anwary, 2007; Burgess, 2012; Cole & Phillips, 2008; Deo, 2012; Peacock & Levack, 2004).

A total of 70 sources were identified and reviewed to understand how PR strategies have been used by activists in addressing GV. Of these, there were 35 peer-reviewed journal articles, eight books chapters and two working papers directly related to activism and GV. The remaining 25 sources comprised of 14 peer-reviewed journal papers and eleven book chapters from PR, communication and public affairs that are focused on activism. The period of publication related to GV was selected from 1990 to 2014, as many nations such as Bangladesh, Brazil, India and other developing nations have experienced significant social, political and economic transformation over the last twenty-five years.

Emergent themes

Five dominant themes emerged after reviewing the literature, which related to how activists have organised activism against GV. Firstly, PR is used by activists to organise societal and behavioural change. Secondly, activists often act as PR workers in their campaigns. Thirdly, PR is used by activists as a strategic communication tool, with victims’ narratives, fourthly, serving as a framing tool for activism. Fifthly, PR keeps activists’ activities visible to the general

public. The first theme reflects the use of PR in activism in the developed world. The remaining four themes encompass various countries in the developing world.

PR to organise societal and behavioural change: Experiences from the developed world

In organising activism against GV, the fundamental task of activists in the developed world has been to bring together similar minded people – such as feminists, women activists, victims, human rights workers, social workers and members of the public – to form a group identity and create societal behavioural change. The PR activities have involved talking with similar minded activists to make the issue of GV known in the public domain through news stories in print or online media, and organising formal demonstrations in public places (Baker, 2007; Matthews, 1994). It reflects the thought of Dutta (2011) on the application of process-based communication to create a shared space for communicating and generating social realities on change. This is facilitated by activists' sharing and disclosing their personal experiences that unite them. An example of such activism against sexual violence can be found in the US in the 1970s, when women came together to expose their second-class status in the workplace, schools, and in public (Matthews, 1994). As activists began to speak about hidden sexual violence, they sought to raise consciousness and create shared meanings through exchanging personal experiences (Matthews, 1994). The activists volunteered to raise awareness on sexual assault, undertake research, build a library and support public policy initiatives (Baker, 2007). Community volunteers were motivated to help victims with donated materials from their own homes. Additionally, in activism against sexual assault, volunteers from Working Women United (WWU) sought to increase awareness about sexual harassment by publishing news in the media and public speaking (Baker, 2007). The members of this organisation also established the Alliance Against Sexual Coercion, another non-profit-organisation focused on conducting research, public education and advocating for the legal concerns of working women. The activists used PR in this context to organise not only the activists, victims and community services at a grassroots level, but also to unite their voices against the structural factors that perpetuate GV. In this context, activists organise groups through articulating or naming a problem that negatively impacts the community (Dutta, 2011).

In the recent times, activists have used online mediums in developed countries to communicate their message and create behavioural change. In Spain in 2002, nine long-standing feminist organisations formed a state network in order to combat GV (Nunez Puente, 2011). They used an online portal named *Red Feminista* to organise their collective consciousness, political influence and collaborative empowerment (Nunez Puente, 2011), and they published articles related to the mobilisation of activism against GV. The portal served as a PR tool by maintaining databases of events of domestic and sexual violence, and communicating the information amongst activists and organisations. In response to the activism, an Organic Law of Measures of Comprehensive Protection against GV was approved in 2004, and the State Observatory on Violence against Women was created in 2005. The internet has become a tool for activists to build networking and alliances to share thoughts, resources and strategies that ultimately frame and package GV issues (Nunez Puente, 2011). By using digital PR techniques, activists have created a collective identity, generated interventions and protested to put pressure on local and international institutions to bring changes in norms, policies and laws.

There has also been activism on adaptation of international norms protecting the rights of women in conflicts and wars zones. A study carried out by Somerville and Aroussi (2013) provided an example of transnational activism, by exploring how a group of international activists used PR strategically to lobby for the passage of the United Nations Security Council

(UNSC) resolution 1325 in October 2000. Their qualitative analysis, which reflected the approach of critical PR, shows that the translational activists and their NGO Working Group used lobbying and face-to-face techniques to persuade the UNSC members to adopt the resolution. Although there was a discursive difference among the activists on framing women whether as victims of war or as peacemakers after war, the NGO Working Group went beyond these discourses to frame it as a human rights issue. The authors attributed the success of the work to the strategic use of PR by the activists in securing access to UNSC using a human rights discourse.

The use of PR in activism against GV has also manifested in the way organisations employ various promotional techniques such as poster campaigns, networking, and building alliances among similar-minded organisations to bring about individual and institutional changes. In poster campaigns, social norms marketing is used to change behaviour at an individual level in schools, colleges and in universities. For example, in a university in the US they used social norms marketing in a poster campaign portraying students as peers who were preventing sexual assault in their campus (Potter et al., 2011). The research findings indicated that the students were more likely to intervene to prevent sexual assault upon seeing the posters. The use of a social norms marketing approach for individual and institutional change is also evident in Australian campaigns against GV involving men and boys “as participants in education programs, as targets of social marketing campaigns, as policy makers and gatekeepers, and as activists and advocates” (Flood, 2011, p.359). For example, the White Ribbon Campaign, which originated in Canada in 1991 and was established in Australia as a national campaign in 2003, began as a result of men seeking to speak out and eliminate GV (Donovan & Vlasis, 2005; Kaufman, 2001). The campaign serves as a major PR event conveying the urgency to prevent GV at a societal level, and creating a discourse on the need for men or boys to participate in this activism. Its messages are spread during organised rallies, but also through posters, banners and leaflets, and during news and media events involving high profile advocates. The ready availability of resources and infrastructure have clearly played a part in the way that activists use PR in developed countries. This can be relatively more challenging in developing contexts where resources can be scarce and infrastructure is limited. Added to this, structural and political freedoms are often restrained making activism more difficult and sometimes dangerous.

Activists as PR workers in social reform: experiences from the developing world

Historical discussions in the literature on the developing world context show that activists have been involved in preventing GV and reforming society from different social barriers by creating advocacy and media strategies. In particular, activists have used journalistic and communicative skills. For example, in the Indian sub-continent, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, a social activist, conducted PR campaigns for social reforms through his publication efforts in three different languages: *Brahmanical Magazine* in English (1821), *Sambad Kaumudi* in Bangla (1821), *Mirat – Ul – Akbar* in Persian (1822) (Aggarwal & Gupta, 2001). The aim of activism through such media was to educate and persuade the public about the importance of freeing society from superstitions, and stand against racial discrimination. Furthermore, he orchestrated social reforms on widow immolation (*Sati*), caste system, and idol worship (Aggarwal & Gupta, 2001; Huda, 1997), as well as child marriage and polygamy, and in doing so focused on the importance of educating women, and creating a fund for widows (Deo, 2012; Huda, 1997). Roy's passion for promoting women's rights stemmed from witnessing the death of his sister-in-law, who was forced to die in a fire at the funeral of her husband (Huda, 1997).

The role of women in organising activism against GV in South Asia has been intrinsically linked to establishing equal rights for women. It had been part of the social reform effort against colonialism in India with active support of transnational feminists and local women. For instance, Deo (2012) discussed how an Irish Woman, Margaret Cousins, arrived in India in 1915, and “continued her fight against British imperialism and patriarchy” (p.154). She was one of the co-founders of the All India Women’s Conference in 1927 and a campaigner on various issues that affected women in Indian society. During the period of British imperialism in North India and Bengal, Muslim women activists such as Bibi Tahurnessa, Faizun Nessa Choudhurani, Karimunnessa Khanam, and Begum Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain organised activism to establish educational institutions and equal rights for women. These activists served the discursive and informational role of a PR worker for emancipating women from male domination, as their activism process included writing and publishing articles in the print media, covering the need for women’s education (Huda, 1997). After India gained independence, the activism against GV was newly formed, particularly in the 1970s at political, racial, class, and grassroots levels using a leftist paradigm. It was aimed at protecting the income of poor women and labour, preserving the natural environment, lobbying for amending laws, and carrying out research and intellectual activities to symbolise indigenous feminism (Grewal, 2008; Ray, 1999). Similar to the role of their predecessors, Bengal/ Bangladeshi women also took part with their male counterparts in the liberation war with Pakistan in 1971. After independence in Bangladesh, women came together to raise awareness about their legal rights and socioeconomic status in the new society. However, it was only in the 1990s that organised activism against GV, especially against acid violence and human trafficking, became apparent through the representations of NGO activists, media, other members of civil society, and donor involvement (Anwary, 2007; Chowdhury, 2007).

The role of activists as PR workers became evident in China and India when activism against GV arose through research-based organisations with the aim of conducting advocacy, surveys and documentation on activism against GV (Grewal, 2008; Milwertz, 2003). As a lobbying organisation on the welfare of women, the Women’s Research Institute and the Centre for Women’s Law Studies and Legal Services in China carried out research on social issues related to gendered-unemployment and prostitution, and provided counselling and free legal services to the victims. In India, the Centre for Women Studies and Development located in Punjab University fought for eliminating female-foeticide with various lobbying services. An Indian scholar and activist Vandana Shiva (2006) coined this problem as a part of “new levels of violence against women” (p.134), which is practised under capitalist and patriarchal control to sustain male dominance in society. By using ultrasound medical technology, the sex of a foetus is detected in various health clinics, and the female foetus is terminated at times against the mother’s will. The activists comprising of teachers and graduates of the Centre for Women Studies and Development raised the issue, and carried out a situational analysis on the status of women in various sectors of the state of Punjab to explore the rights of women and the declining ratio between men and women following the practice of female-foeticide, while also providing education about equality among men and women (Grewal, 2008).

Activists in developing countries have tried to organise activism or social change programmes with similar groups or people by using various PR techniques under limited resources in the face of structural and social challenges. It seems that there are still some significant challenges in how activism can be mobilised into PR activities, because there is a lack of political support, funding, and technical knowledge.

PR as a strategic communication by the activists

Activists in the developing world have adopted various PR techniques as strategic communication tools to achieve their goals on eliminating GV from grassroots to national level.

Sometimes, these strategies are used in public demonstrations or in other forms of mass communication to symbolise their demands to legislators and the general public. They often use discursive techniques created through images and symbols.

Several examples can be found of activism in the developing world that seeks to create debate and persuade societal and political change. For example, the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association (EWLA) organised women to assemble in the centre of Addis Ababa for a series of candlelit vigils wearing t-shirts with the message "It's time that the violence stopped" (Burgess, 2012, p. 166). Such strategic communication is a form of resistance, seeking to draw attention to the activists' narratives in public spaces (Dutta, 2011). The final day of this campaign included the submission of a petition to the office of prime minister with a demand for more police protection for women and punishment for offenders. In recent times, the gang rape and murder of a girl in India has sparked protests and activism against GV (Patel, 2014) by students, politicians, teachers, activists and journalists (Simon-Kumar, 2014) to demand greater dignity, equality and rights of women. The rape and murder was covered and discussed in social and mass media stimulating awareness about the social construction of women in India, while thousands of people and groups submitted online petitions to initiate a new law to prevent rape and guarantee a helpful criminal justice system for the victim (Patel, 2014). The use of PR in a strategic form is elucidated by feminist activists' work in Brazil and Ecuador since 2000 where they have used techniques to frame issues, build alliances and networks with political parties, in order to influence political agendas (Cole & Phillips, 2008). For example, President Lula in Brazil was re-elected in the election of 2006 with the support of a socialist feminist group (Cole & Phillips, 2008). Feminists came into mainstream politics strategically with the goal of influencing change by creating various senior positions to monitor the status of women. In this region, feminist activists worked with government, journalists, civil society and international organisations in responding to GV.

Other examples can be found where activists have used PR communication tools strategically to create change at a local level. For example, with the aim of eradicating and raising awareness about female genital mutilation (FGM), an Ethiopian NGO, the National Committee on Traditional Practices (NCTPE) along with the Italian Association for Women in Development (AIDOS), trained Ethiopian health workers, trainers, teachers and students by using multi-media materials and seminars (Spadacini & Nichols, 1998). These people were targeted because of their influential role in society as opinion leaders. Campaigns at the community level also included audio-video and printed materials that informed the audience about the negative health consequences of FGM from a health and human rights approach. Additionally, in Bangladesh, grassroots activists have formed alliances under the structure of non-government organisations working for land reform and social development (Kabeer, 2003, 2011). By creating networks among the women members, Nijera Kori, a local grassroots organisation in Bangladesh, provides them with information about their legal rights and entitlements. The activists in this organisation also train members to participate in arbitration as well as dispute resolution so that the women members can participate actively in the *Salish*, a village level dispute resolution forum (Kabeer, 2011). The training and group activities also help their members to challenge the pronouncements of *Salish* where local members and leaders usually dominate with self-made regulations (Kabeer, 2003). PR has appeared in this context as a tool for confrontation with dominant power at grassroots level for protesting the unequal distribution of resources.

Victims' narratives serve as a framing tool

A significant part of activism work includes the effort of victims and the use of their narratives in pushing the GV agenda in the public domain. In this context, activists use the narratives of their victims' stories laden with words, facts, values and emotion so that it attracts the attention

of the audiences (Surma, 2006). It is a framing strategy to create meaning on a given topic. Frames are used in PR materials and actions to “select and call attention to particular aspects of the reality described, which logically means that frames simultaneously direct attention away from other aspects” (Entman, 1993, p. 54). In turn, narrators or activists create discourses by specifying their goals in public discussion and frame the stories in the media. In practical public relations work, narratives are used to create feature stories, press release, and entertainment programmes to persuade the stakeholders and public policymakers (Heath, 2009; Surma, 2006; Toth, 2009). Discussion ranging from Brazil (Cole & Phillips, 2008) to Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2007) focuses on how victims have become activists to organise campaigns to receive public attention and to influence public opinion on this topic. This is a part of PR work based on media relations, by which activists have used the victims’ narratives in press conferences to receive sympathy for the victims and urge action against crimes involving GV. Maria da Penha, a poor woman who was left a paraplegic through spousal abuse, for example, campaigned for 20 years drawing from her experiences, to criminalize domestic violence in Brazil. A law was eventually created in her name: the *Maria da Penha Law* (Cole & Phillips, 2008). It resulted in the criminalisation of GV in Brazil, greater support for shelters and other medical and psychological services, the establishment of a free national 24-hour hotline to assist women victims, the expansion of women’s police stations, and more trained personnel in institutions dealing with GV (Brazil, 2014, as cited in Cole & Phillips, 2008). Her activism transformed her pain into struggle and solidarity amongst similar minded activists.

A similar example of using victims’ narratives has been evident in Bangladesh in the case of acid violence to highlight victims’ sufferings with the aim of creating impacts on the audience and stakeholders. Nurun Nahar, an acid victim, became an activist with a job in Naripokkho, a national NGO in Bangladesh. In 1997, Naripokkho, the NGO where she worked, organised workshops with acid survivors with the final workshop used for victims and their families to describe their suffering to invited media, members of civil society, and politicians including the Ministry of Women Affairs (Huq, 2003). On another occasion, a journalist covered her story and revealed the gaps in medical and legal services to the victims (Chowdhury, 2007; Huq, 2003). As a result, the problem of acid violence began to be noticed in Bangladesh, with the government responding by developing the Multi-sectoral Project to Combat Violence against Women in 1998, and enacting the Acid Crime Prevention Law 2002 and Acid Control Law 2002 (Chowdhury, 2007). Describing her physical and mental sufferings and injuries resembles the framing technique articulated by Dutta (2011) by which “particular symbols are picked from the cultural framework and positioned in specific alignments to craft particular narratives around a specific set of selected events...” to attract and impact the audience and to mobilise them for social change (Dutta, 2011, p.231).

PR is used for keeping activist activities visible

Activism against GV relies on various PR activities such as building alliances and networks with journalists to receive media coverage (Abirafeh, 2009; Chowdhury, 2005; Milwertz, 2003). The discussions by Huq (2003) and Chowdhury (2007) illustrate how the use of media in exposing the framing of acid violence in Bangladesh brought about changes in laws dealing with the problem. The organisations and activists used media for promoting their events to keep their activism and services visible. In addition to using media, the activists and organisations employed networking activities with donors for securing funds for their projects. For example, the acid violence campaign and anti-trafficking campaign in Bangladesh relied on funding from donors such as United Nation’s Children’s Emergency Fund and United States Assistance for International Development (Anwary, 2007; Chowdhury, 2007) in order to formulate projects on raising awareness on acid violence and human trafficking, and enhancing public education and capacities among legal professionals, journalists, administrative officials and social workers. This aid came for various purposes depending on

the nature and context of the activism and the states where the activism was facilitated. For example, in China, donor groups granted support to activists to facilitate contacts between Chinese and European activists (Milwertz, 2003). GV is a global issue and development aid is one process of bringing together transnational actors to support local initiatives while also shaping collective and cultural specific identities in activist organisations.

Discussion

This paper highlights the use of PR in organising activism to speak out against GV and create positive societal change. In various sites of activism, PR has appeared as a discursive, informational, organising and resistive tool, by offering a mechanism to raise awareness and change attitudes towards GV. Developed countries have used techniques such as social norms marketing and internet campaigns, while in developing countries interpersonal communication, framing techniques, advocacy, journaling, and audio-visual communication methods have revealed positive results from PR strategies (Aggarwal & Gupta, 2001; Burgess, 2012; Chowdhury, 2007; Donovan & Vlasis, 2005; Grewal, 2008; Huq, 2003; Kabeer, 2003; Kabeer, 2011; Kaufman, 2001; Milwertz, 2003; Nunez Puente, 2011; Potter et al., 2011; Spadacini & Nichols, 1998). For example, upon seeing anti-sexual violence posters in a university in the USA, recipients were found to be more motivated to intervene to prevent sexual assault (Potter et al., 2011). In Bangladesh, the 'framing strategy' in press conference drew attention of stakeholders, leading to the creation of two laws on stopping acid violence (Chowdhury, 2007; Huq, 2003). These two examples provide a basis to better investigate PR methods to prevent GV.

In other contexts, it is also marked that activists and their organisations initiated activism within civil society, organising education and awareness raising campaigns on various sites of struggle, and by creating protests in local settings (Baker, 2007; Burgess, 2012). In addition, activists utilised interpersonal and verbal communication skills to share their struggles, and organise their voices to shape their identity as feminists, activists (both male and female) and community workers. Their work involved formal demonstrations in public places with various symbolic protesting tools like posters, media conferences and public speaking (Baker, 2007; Burgess, 2012; Chowdhury, 2007; Huq, 2003). Activism in this way turned into a discursive struggle when victims and their families used - knowingly and unknowingly - framing techniques in media conferences and public spaces to communicate the impact of GV on their life and society. By using the voices of victims as a framing technique, activists have improved knowledge about GV among journalists, policy-makers, social workers, administrative officials and the public. These overall PR activities were organised to educate the audiences about the negative side of GV and then to create an urgency to prevent it from the respective communities. However, the literature did not use any theoretical premises of PR to reflect and situate their discussion, with the exception of Somerville and Aroussi (2013), who used the critical approach of PR to delineate their discussion.

Incorporated in activism against GV, activists also used networking and alliance-building techniques with similar minded stakeholders in areas such as medicine, journalism and criminal justice (Chowdhury, 2005, 2007; Huq, 2003). PR has been revealed as a form of community action to help victims who need support from other allies. Activism in the developed and developing world have similarities but there are important differences. The examples from the developed world show that the use of PR in the prevention of GV is more organised, situation-oriented and applies a service-delivery approach. Developed world activism often seeks to create political pressure to create legislative and policy change, whereas this is not always possible in the developing world. Grassroots activists have tried to identify the issues and gaps where they can use PR tactics to organise their voices and pressurise the legislators

with public opinions. In the developing world, similar events are ongoing and sometimes face obstacles due to a lack of proper support and resources. However, the example of community action on GV is more historical in the developing world context with the legacy of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, a man who was found to come forward as a PR worker and activist to stop GV some two hundred years ago. Since the realities in the developing world are shifting towards modernisation and industrialisation, raising people's consciousness on issues such as the position of women in society and GV are important. Recent activism in India highlights a readiness to challenge taken for granted societal attitudes and responses to GV.

A key finding in the review of the literature is how activists become PR workers by organising awareness raising activities about various social problems including GV. They have used research institutions to monitor GV cases, media reports and government responses, and to offer ways of raising awareness and social change for this problem (Grewal, 2008; Milwertz, 2003). They have educated the public about the impact and prevention of GV and have used PR tools to engage vulnerable people and stakeholders who have knowledge about GV, legal rights and ways of eliminating it from society. This is a long-term, grassroots and fund-based strategy, because educating a group of people means planning broader strategies involving organising campaigns, recruiting educators and maintaining overall activities under a banner of an organisation. PR is used in every part of this process. The historical literature in the Indian sub-continent provides one such example where men and women have helped reform society from colonialism and cultural superstitions as writers in print media, as educators among the public, and as researchers in think-tank organisations. Further, in India, Bangladesh, and the US - amongst other countries - PR has emerged as an intervention tool used by activists to develop campaigns and community services to prevent GV. Such initiatives have also included men and boys, and their roles are projected as allies of women in preventing GV. The above discussions about the use of various PR strategies in both developed and developing worlds can be considered as a compiled lesson for social work and communication professionals, who are engaged in educating people about positive social changes in preventing GV especially in the developing countries where resources are limited.

The critical approach to PR in this discussion can be linked with a social change framework where activists appear as PR workers using various conventional and unconventional PR strategies to create the discourses of social change. These discourses are often focused on preventive strategies used to organise social development and formulate public policies. PR experts in social change or activist organisations use a mixed or interdisciplinary approach by applying both the techniques generated by activists, and the social marketing, lobbying and advocacy strategies used by various organisations (Grier & Bryant, 2005; Jiang & Ni, 2009; L'Etang, 2008; Somerville & Aroussi, 2013; Taylor & Das, 2010). PR is used as a strategic form of human action, which is applied depending on the nature of issues and the availability of more suitable and accessible communication channels (Somerville & Aroussi, 2013; Soriano, 2015; Weaver, 2013). For example, PR is used in public health campaigns in the form of social marketing to change behaviour or change cultural attitudes that support prevention activities such as immunisation and sanitation at local level (Grier & Bryant, 2005) while GV activists use their own creativities to devise various PR strategies such as narratives and personal communication that ultimately create the discourses and knowledge of change from grassroots to transnational level (Baker, 2007; Chowdhury, 2007; Huq, 2003; Somerville & Aroussi, 2013).

Despite discussion in the literature about the initiatives and innovations of activists to address GV, the literature largely overlooked the need for funding and donor support to sustain such activism, especially in developing contexts. It can be assumed, however, that running a group of activists requires monetary and technical support. The activists and their organisations likely depend on various PR techniques to link their activism to donor agency

priorities. In this context, PR would be used to set and shape the agenda of GV with a key aim including the establishment of equality and safety among men and women. Such a focus would be considered favourably amongst western donor groups, because many donor organisations also work from a feminist perspective to eliminate GV globally. Since fundraising is a major part of PR work in such organisations, the activists of these organisations would use various PR techniques for their survival and for serving society.

This is an exploratory paper and therefore has some limitations. It is not a traditional systematic review, which suggests that the authors followed an implicit process to explore the PR methods used in the activism against GV. Whilst specific search and content criteria was used to identify literature on the utilisation of PR in particular contexts, the search did iteratively refer to diverse and grey literature such as book chapters and working papers. This enabled an analysis aimed at stimulating further discussion and shaping further research. There was not scope to conduct a meta-analysis or provide a basis to measure or evaluate the impact of effectiveness of PR. Consequently, further research must be undertaken to understand the effectiveness of PR campaigns in preventing and reducing incidences of GV. Further, more empirical research is needed to understand how activists in the developing world use PR strategies in their work.

Conclusion

Activists and organisations have deployed various PR techniques to form alliances, frame issues, organise campaigns and make visible their activism in various communicative spaces. The use of PR has appeared as a community action, as a method of strategic communication, and as an individual communicative technique to organise activists, promote the GV cause, to engage stakeholders, to attain public support and to create positive societal changes through discursive interventions for eliminating the problem of GV. It can be conceptualised as a socially constructive process by activists (Falkheimer & Heide, 2016), who use PR intentionally and unintentionally as a method of creating discourse and constructing a space to change attitudes and cultures that perpetuate GV. Due to resources and structural barriers in the developing world context, PR can be an efficient way to create positive change in community attitudes and ultimately societal responses to GV. The knowledge found in this review demonstrates PR can be used to prevent GV and can be used as a base for further activism. Gaps in knowledge remain and as a result the need for more research to better understand and explore how PR can be used as an effective tool to reduce incidents of GV in the developing world. This knowledge will help improve the practice of social change programmes, and lays the basis of evaluating PR as a tool for social transformation.

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