

## **Nepali Women as Victims of Violence**

**Ms. Bharati POKHAREL (Nepal)**

It has hardly been a month since Nepal joined many other countries of the world in celebrating the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence, which calls for the elimination of all forms of violence against women with a variety of programs and activities. But, in reality, it seems most of the commitments made so far have been in vain when the trend over the past decade is observed. The incidences of various forms of physical and mental violence against girls and women both in urban and rural areas of Nepal have been steadily increasing over the past years.

The most alarming trend is that very young girls are increasingly becoming subjected to violence and abuse, which, quite regrettably, is happening almost every day. For instance, The Kathmandu Post, Nepal's highest selling English daily newspaper, reported that on 3rd January, 2013, a 24-year-old Wakil Pandit Kumhal was arrested on charges of raping a six-year-old girl in Bara district. The same newspaper reported on 4th January, 2013 that a 65-year-old man identified as Sane Sarki allegedly raped an eight-year-old girl in Maldi village development committee of Dhading district. Sarki fled after committing the heinous crime. It was also reported that on 2nd January, 2013, a gang of four men raped a girl in her twenties after severely beating her boyfriend, who was accompanying her, in Damak municipality of Jhapa district.

According to the latest data released by Women's Rehabilitation Center (WOREC) Nepal, the trend of violence against women is growing in Nepal at an average annual rate of 19 percent, as observed in the data between the years 2008 and 2012. Among the various forms of violence, domestic violence was carried out against women most frequently, accounting for 55 percent of all kinds of violence, as per the monthly report (January to December, 2012) of WOREC Nepal. This was followed by the incidences of rape and social violence at 13 percent each, murder at 11 percent, sexual abuse at five percent and trafficking as the lowest at three percent.

Many factors are cited in various studies as causes behind the increasing trend of the violence committed against girls and women. The main causes cited are: the patriarchal thinking and mind-set of people; weak investigation and security mechanisms; rampant impunity; complicated legal system with abundant backlog cases; discriminatory practices pushing women further towards marginalization; lack of awareness; etc.

Although the recent amendments to the chapter on marriages of the Country Code have raised the age of marriage to 20 for both sexes, evidence suggests that in 2006, 32.3

percent of girls between 15 and 19 years of age were married, divorced or widowed. Likewise, polygamy is illegal in Nepal, but in 2006 the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) revealed that 4.4 percent of married women in Nepal aged 15-49 were living in polygamous marriages. The 2010 Convention on Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) report notes that in polygamous marriages, the first wife occupies a very low status in the family, leaving her more vulnerable to domestic violence than the subsequent wives.

Girls in Nepal have limited access to education, and as a result, they have very few opportunities to engage in activities that would provide a greater degree of economic and social empowerment later in their lives. In addition, particularly Dalit women and women from other socially marginalized groups remain underrepresented in politics and other positions contributing to decision-making and leadership.

Nepal has been quick to ratify international treaties like the CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), etc. The government has also heeded the tireless advocacy efforts of many international and national non-government organizations (I/NGOs) by endorsing the Domestic Violence (Crime and Punishment) Act in 2009 and the Human Trafficking Act in 2007. But, considering the ever growing cases of violence even after the promulgation of these acts, it is high time that the government realized that merely endorsing international instruments and putting laws and rules on paper will not suffice. This is rather a first step, which should be urgently supported by equally efficient and effective regulatory and judicial systems. The civil society, the media and the people of Nepal need to continue pressing the government to do the needful to that end.