

How long do women have to suffer this?

Ms.Yojana POKHAREL (Nepal)

It's been a long time since gender-based violence became prevalent in Nepal. And these days, about three rape cases are being reported almost every week. It is an alarming situation in many ways, as often times mothers are scared to send their daughters outside their houses. The majority of the rape cases reportedly occur in rural areas; however, most of the victims do not report to the police due to the fear of dishonoring their family names, and in some cases due to their geographically remote locations as they have to travel, usually walk for hours, to reach the police office at district headquarters. There have been some cases reported in urban areas in the last few months, but this number appears to be relatively smaller (than the actual number of cases in rural areas) as people in the urban areas have more access to basic services including police and health posts.

For example, recently a 17-year-old girl from the Eastern Region was raped by a man, and it seemed this man was having fun as he had asked his friend to record the crime on his cell phone while the girl was unconscious and being raped. This case was discussed in the Eastern Region in great details and the girl filed complaints against the rapist. Later, due to the pressure from powerful locals in the village, she was asked to withdraw her complaints from the police. Ultimately, the girl was forced to marry the rapist.

Likewise, sisters aged four and six became rape victims lately. Nobody else other than their grandfather, who was 72 years old, could be the perpetrator. In the same way, another 14 year-old girl was raped by her own grandfather, and upon complaining to her mother, she was threatened by him. These are only a few examples of girls who became victims of sexual assaults and violence. In fact, there are many cases wherein female maids are victimized by their employers.

Furthermore, there are cases where school girls are raped by their school teachers, but these cases are underreported. There are many more such cases which are unreported. Many of the victims are minors who were violated by their neighbors, teachers and relatives. These cases are settled within the family instead of being reported to the police. The rapists who are from powerful families never get punished, whereas the victims who are poor never get justice. It's a paradox in itself.

Women of any age, at any places, are not safe these days. For example, a month ago a 69 year-old woman from the Far Western Region was raped. One can easily imagine that elderly women are targeted, which is scary in many ways for women of

all ages to travel alone. Be it a domestic violence at home or sexual assaults in public places, women of any age, race and creed are not spared from these inhuman acts.

The problem is getting worse in the absence of adequate rehabilitation centers for victims to recover from the violence in rural areas, while these women are forced to quietly suffer the violence due to fear and lack of protection. The majority of these victims are illiterate and have no courage to stand against their family members.

Our government has a plan and many non-governmental organizations are working to put a system in place to address this problem. Nevertheless, they have taken only a few steps forward and government authorities seem not to be serious about this issue. We cannot prevent such incidences from happening unless the government upholds the rights of citizens to live without fear in the society.

However, the Women, Children, Senior Citizen and Social Welfare Committee under the Legislature-Parliament has issued a directive long before to the government to introduce provisions for taking actions to support those involved in sexual abuse and rapes. But the anti-rape law has not been revised yet and its effective implementation is always a problem here in Nepal. We have a male-dominated society and females are treated as a weak gender and often times forced to endure domestic violence carried out by their own family members as well as assaults by strangers. I believe it is of critical importance for the government to take serious measures to punish these perpetrators and provide justice for the victims. Until the day when it is achieved, the women will never stop crying, "How long do women have to suffer this?"



Victim of domestic violence forced to struggle for livelihood