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Women face abuse in Tajikistan: Don't keep it in the family

The authorities in Tajikistan must properly prosecute violence against women as a criminal offence, Amnesty International said in a report published today.

[Violence is not just a family affair: Women face abuse in Tajikistan](#), documents the physical, psychological and sexual abuse women face in the family and urges the authorities to address it as the crime it is and not to dismiss it as a “private family matter”.

“Women in Tajikistan are beaten, abused, and raped in the family but the authorities tend to reflect the societal attitude of blaming the woman for domestic violence. They see their primary role as mediator, to preserve the family rather than protect the woman and to safeguard their rights,” said Andrea Strasser-Camagni, Amnesty International’s expert on Tajikistan.

“The traditional Tajik family values, reinforced after the break-up of the Soviet Union, impose further discrimination on women by narrowing their identity to that of wife and mother, or pushing them into the lowest paid sector of the job market.”

“By writing off violence against women as a family affair the authorities in Tajikistan are shirking their responsibility to a large part of the population. They are allowing perpetrators of such crimes to act with impunity and, ultimately, denying women their human rights.”

Violence against women, and especially in the family, is widespread in Tajikistan. One-third to one-half of women have regularly been subjected to physical, psychological or sexual violence at the hands of their husbands or their in-laws.

Often, Tajik women are economically dependent on their husband’s family. They have told Amnesty International that upon setting foot in the in-law’s home after marriage they may be subjected to harsh treatment not only from their husbands, but also from their in-laws, and in particular from their mothers-in-law who themselves may have been abused as young brides.

“Women are being treated as servants or as the in-laws' family property. They have no one to turn to as the policy of the authorities is to urge reconciliation which de facto reinforces their position of inferiority. This experience of violence and humiliation in the family makes many women to turn to suicide,” Andrea Strasser-Camagni said.

There are insufficient services to protect the survivors of domestic violence, and most of these are provided by internationally funded local non-governmental organizations. The police, judiciary and medical staff are not sufficiently trained to deal with cases of domestic violence.

Education is a key factor in developing girls' empowerment and providing an escape route from violence and poverty. However, girls drop out early from schools; instead, they enter into early and often unregistered or polygamous marriages, all of which increase the dependency on their husbands.

Initial measures undertaken by the Tajikistani government to combat domestic violence have proved largely insufficient.

Although Tajikistan has ratified relevant international human rights treaties, it is falling short of its international obligation to protect and fulfil women's rights.

Amnesty International calls upon the Tajikistani authorities to:

- prevent and prosecute violence against women in the family through the introduction of an effective domestic law and nationwide support services;
- carry out a nationwide public awareness campaign in order to address the unlawful practices of unregistered, polygamous, and early marriages;
- remove all barriers to girls' education and address the root causes of girls dropping out of education.

Cases

Zamira got married at 18 in a traditional Islamic marriage. The marriage lasted for five years, and in all those years Zamira was never allowed to leave her husband's house. "It was like in prison," Zamira said. She told Amnesty International that when she asked his permission to go out or when they had a quarrel, her husband would beat her. One day her husband divorced her according to Islamic tradition and she was thrown out of the house by his parents. Now Zamira and her nine-year-old son live with her parents in an over-crowded house. She dreams of a home for her and her son.

Tahmina, mother of three children, has been married for 13 years. She said that she had three stillbirths and after that her husband began to beat her. As a result of a beating another baby died; then she miscarried while five months pregnant and her first child was born deformed. She once went to the police when she was black and blue and had a knife cut on her arm. They said she could write a complaint, but otherwise did nothing. She felt they blamed her for having provoked the violence.

Risolat, a 17-year-old girl from a small town, was raped by her "boyfriend", who threatened to kill her if she told anyone about it. He forced her to have sex continuously for a period of four months. He also beat her. A year later she went to the police and wanted to file a complaint, but she was mocked by the officers, and sent away.