











## Violence against Women in the South Asian Context

**The cycle of disadvantage and violence begins long before birth and continues throughout women's lives in South Asia.**

In South Asia, gender bias and violence against women is institutionalised at all levels – home, family, community, society and the State. Social, cultural, political, economic and legal factors in the region combine to leave women vulnerable to community-sanctioned violence. Sharp gender bias and violence has led to 50 million fewer women in the population. (Oxfam Briefing Paper 66 August 2004, *Towards Ending Violence against Women in South Asia*, Oxfam International, London)

The cycle of disadvantage and violence begins long before birth and continues throughout women's lives. Unborn girls are killed through sex-selective abortions. One in six deaths of female infants in India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan are due to neglect and discrimination. Many girls and women endure daily beatings, harassment for dowry, verbal abuse and acid attacks for refusing to comply with male demands. They live their everyday lives with control over their behaviour, appearance, expression and movement.

Other women become targets of extreme forms of violence like incest, rape, forced marriage, child marriage, being traded for settling disputes and debts, public humiliation, trafficking, 'honour' killing and dowry deaths. There are only 94 women for every 100 men in the region. The scale and severity of violence against women is on the rise.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report 2005 and another UN report titled '*The World's Women 2005 - Progress in Statistics*' (that has reviewed data from 204 countries between 1975 and 2003) expose how women in South Asia remain deeply vulnerable and disadvantaged and their status amongst the lowest in the world. Maternal mortality is the second highest in this region and one out of every three child deaths occur here. (Human Development Report 2005, *International Cooperation At A Crossroads: Aid, Trade and Security In An Unequal World*, Oxford University Press, New York; *The World's Women 2005 - Progress in Statistics*, United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, New York.)

A World Bank report has placed violence against women on a par with cancer as a global cause of incapacity and death among women of reproductive age, calling it a greater cause of ill-health than traffic accidents and malaria combined. (World Bank 1993)

But in a region affected by a high level of volatile human conflict, violence against women is viewed as just 'another form of violence'. There is no acceptance of violence against women as a serious human rights issue; an issue that adversely affects the entire community or one that severely limits women's choices in practically all spheres of life.

Despite punitive legislation, most women have to abide by the rules of a patriarchal social system which reinforces gender inequalities. State interventions to protect women through effective implementation of legislation have been consistently impaired by the

lack of support from dominant interests within the community, who legitimise violence against women as 'normal'.

The situation will not just be changed by state laws and international agreements. Until men's and women's belief that violence against women is a 'private' matter and culturally acceptable is challenged and changed, the violence and discrimination will continue.

Discussions on women's safety must, therefore, begin from the recognition of women's right to a life free of violence. As violence against women violates their fundamental human rights, such 'private' matters need to be brought into the 'public' discourse. And, the involvement of communities – both men and women – is critical in ending abuse against women. Individuals and communities need to be empowered with ideas to change the relationships among men, women and children.

## 'We Can' and Violence against Women

**'We Can' believes the question of power is central to gender inequality and violence. It hopes to build knowledge and capacity of men and women in communities on how to transform the way power is used and to what ends.**

Violence against women is now recognised as a human rights violation. The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women 1993 defines it as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm done towards women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life." ([United Nations Declaration on the Elimination on Violence Against Women 1993](#))

'We Can' endorses that violence against women encompasses physical, sexual or psychological harm done towards women and recognises violence in, among many others, female foeticide; female infanticide; girls and women dying prematurely through neglect, discrimination and violence; lack of access to food, education and health care; childhood drudgery with work within home and outside; early and forced marriages; early pregnancy; verbal abuse; domestic violence; harassment for dowry; psychological abuse; acid attacks; rape; 'honour' killings; public humiliation; trafficking; exclusion from employment; unequal wages; lack of representation in all spheres of society; lack of voice and decision making rights in their own homes and exclusion from the process of development and its gains.

It believes that as much as violence itself, it is also the fear of violence that controls women's lives. This is because it restricts their freedom, curtails their mobility and ability to work, access resources and opportunities and participate in social activities.

'We Can' also emphasises that the question of power is central to gender inequality and violence. Renowned economist Amartya Sen says it throws into sharp focus the real 'capabilities' that women and men respectively have -- the powers they respectively have to do or be what they value. This can vary from such elementary powers as not being subjected to physical abuse or violent assault and the freedom to lead unsubjected lives (where power can enter in a very crude form) to having the opportunity to develop one's talents and to achieve self-respect and the respect of others (where power can take more sophisticated forms). In most societies, and especially in South Asia, the more powerful party (men) obtains a more favourable division of the family's overall benefits and chores. 'We Can' attempts to transform unequal power in personal relationships. ([Amartya Sen 2006, Capabilities, Freedom and Equality: Work from a Gender Perspective, eds. Bina Agarwal, Jane Humphries, Ingrid Robeyns, Oxford University Press, Delhi, pp. 347-353](#)).

Allies and people associated with 'We Can' see themselves as catalysts and advocates, rather than as service providers. They hope to build knowledge and capacity of men and women in communities on how to transform the way power is used and to what ends. The aim is to play a role in the transformation of power relations for gender equality by supporting families, schools, media, civil society organisations and the State.

Though it is too early to measure impact, it is clear that the campaign is enabling thousands of men and women in five countries to speak up and act against gender discrimination and violence in homes. What was considered a 'private' matter is increasingly becoming a visible 'public' concern.

Women are no less valuable than men and violence against them is unacceptable are the two messages repeatedly communicated as people are beginning to talk about it and discuss it at public and private gatherings. Reflective spaces for sharing, thinking, analysis and creative writing are also helping break the culture of tolerance and silence.

### ***Alone, Together***

"I used to be a silent witness to sexual harassment before. After being sensitised to the campaign, I know how important it is to resist such advances and help other girls stand up for their rights and dignity. I was teased by a man recently. Instead of walking away without reproaching him as I would have done earlier, I berated him. He actually backed off and this has made me feel confident of handling situations like this. I hope they do not occur in the future but if they do, I am confident I can handle it." **Beena Rawat, New Seema Puri, Delhi, India**

"I campaign on my own for change in people's attitudes towards domestic violence because I think something needs to be done and someone needs to do it. I go from house-to-house and talk to people and students in particular. I have managed to change the perceptions of my father, my immediate family and some of my friends. I have spoken to a 1,000 families living in my neighbourhood. I am sure others will soon join me in my efforts." **Mohammed Mostaque Ahmad Ronju, Gaibandha, Bangladesh**

"A group of adolescent girls in Kathmandu have banded themselves into '*kishori*' groups with the help of an organisation called *Shakti Samuha*. Our aim is to help women combat violence in homes and in the society at large." **Kishori group, Kathmandu, Nepal**

"Violence in the family affects children. As teachers it is our duty to take care of our pupils and ensure that they get a proper environment to grow up and blossom as citizens and responsible human beings." **Thimilai Thimulan, a noted Tamil poet and teacher from Batticaloa, Sri Lanka**

"We have the voice  
We have the strength  
We are the 'awakers'  
We are the Change Makers  
We can create new paths  
We can change the inhuman laws  
We can end all violence against women." **Verse on 'We Can' penned by Khalida Brohi, Sind, Pakistan**

### Statistics on Violence against Women: At A Glance

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>50 million women are missing in South Asia due to violence and neglect</i></b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>In South Asia, there only 94 women for every 100 men in the region</i></b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>One in six female infants in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan die due to neglect and discrimination</i></b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Around 150,000 women are trafficked every year in South Asia</i></b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Bangladesh recorded 267 acid attacks in 2005, 66 percent were against women</i></b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>'Crime clock 2005' of the Indian National Crime Records Bureau's reports one molestation every 15 minutes; one crime against women every three minutes; one dowry death every 77 minutes; one rape every 29 minutes; one murder every 16 minutes; and one sexual harassment case every 53 minutes</i></b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>The sex ratio in India is declining: there were 92.7 girls per 100 boys in the 0-6 age group in 2001</i></b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>An average of 1,000 Pakistani women are murdered in the name of 'honour' each year</i></b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><i>Over 5,000 women are detained in Pakistani prisons under the hudood ordinance</i></b></li> </ul>

Qualitative and quantitative data on the nature, prevalence and incidence of various types of violence against women is the first step towards classifying it as a defined social problem, setting policy priorities and enabling effective intervention. Yet after a decade after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (PFA) and the initiation of the 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) -- both of which call for gender-disaggregated data -- there is a lack of reliable national statistics on gender issues in many parts of the globe.

A recent UN report on the condition of the world's women, titled '*The World's Women 2005 - Progress in Statistics*' (that has reviewed data from 204 countries between 1975 and 2003) says the gender math is missing in national data across the world. It has criticised governments for insufficient national data on basic demographic and gender

analysis, particularly in the areas of population, health, education and employment. See <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/>

There is currently no official international data collection on the issue of violence against women. Most countries still do not have an established system to gather and report statistics on the subject. After the Beijing PFA, several countries now conduct national surveys on violence against women and have made attempts to develop methodologies and procedures to collect data

<b>Some significant gender/violence against women reports:</b>
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- *In-depth Study on all Forms of Violence*, UN Study released by the UN Secretary General at the 61 UN Assembly, October 2006. See <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/>
- The UNDP Human Development Reports (2004 and 2005) look at extreme gender inequalities. See <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/>.
- In 2005, WHO conducted a multi-country study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women. This report covers 15 sites and ten countries: Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Japan, Peru, Namibia, Samoa, Serbia and Montenegro, Thailand and the United Republic of Tanzania. See [WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women 2005, World Health Organization, WHO Press, Geneva](#)
- Some of the biggest victims of domestic violence are the smallest. According to the latest report from UNICEF '*Behind Closed Doors: The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children*' (2006), nearly 275 million of children worldwide witness abuse in their everyday life. In South Asia, the estimates range from 40.8 million to 88 million children. See [www.unicef.org/media/files/BehindClosedDoors.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/media/files/BehindClosedDoors.pdf)
- The International Center for Research on Women recently released a study *Property Ownership and Inheritance Rights of Women for Social Protection – The South Asia Experience* (2006) that is a synthesis report of three studies. Based on a multi-site study, it explores the links of women's ownership of property and inheritance rights and their experiences of domestic violence. See [http://www.icrw.org/docs/2006\\_propertyrights-southasia.pdf](http://www.icrw.org/docs/2006_propertyrights-southasia.pdf)
- A new Harvard School of Public Health study, published in the July 2006 issue of the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* demonstrates conclusively that physical abuse by husbands and boyfriends compromises a woman's health during pregnancy, her likelihood of carrying a child to term and the health of her newborn.
- In early 2006, UNIFEM launched a pilot project in Afghanistan to identify the types of violence perpetrated to systematise recording and reporting of cases. The database will form a central repository of information for law enforcement agencies and will also be used to inform recommendations to policy.
- GenderStats is an electronic database of gender statistics and indicators that include national statistics, United Nations databases, and World Bank-conducted or funded surveys. See <http://genderstats.worldbank.org/home.asp>
- The study *Ending Violence against Women and Girls- Protecting Human Rights 2005*, GTZ, Eschborn, says violence against women generates poverty, hampers education, imperils gender equality, kills infants, threatens health of girls and women and accelerates the spread of HIV/AIDS. See <http://www2.gtz.de/dokumente/bib/05-1048.pdf>

## Domestic Violence in the South Asian Context

### One in every two women in South Asia faces violence in her home.

One in every two women in South Asia faces violence in her home. These are not just numbers. They speak of extreme injustice and inequality in every second family in the community.

The incidence of domestic violence in this region is among the highest in the world and women are most vulnerable in homes, a place where they should be the safest. Many men in South Asia believe that they have certain privileges over women and it is their right to abuse their wives, and that's what they regularly do.

In Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, 60 percent women suffer at the hands of their intimate partners. In India, one in five married women experience domestic violence from the age of 15 and in Pakistan, 80 percent of women are subject to physical violence at homes. In Afghanistan, 50 percent women live with domestic violence. Levels of abuse range from the verbal and psychological to extreme physical violence, including murder. (Bangladesh: *'Wife Abuse in Bangladesh'* 2005, Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association and International Center for Diarrhoeal Disease Research-Bangladesh (June 2006); Sri Lanka: Ministry of Child Development and Women's Empowerment 2006, Sri Lanka; Pakistan: United Nations Declaration on the Elimination on Violence against Women 1993 and Oxfam GB Pakistan 2005; Afghanistan: Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2005, Kabul. Also see [www.wecanendvaw.org](http://www.wecanendvaw.org)).

### Recent and Revealing Studies on Domestic Violence

- The World Health Organization (WHO) study on domestic violence in ten countries reveals that intimate partner violence is the most common form of violence in women's lives - much more so than assault or rape by strangers or acquaintances. (WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women 2005, World Health Organization, WHO Press, Geneva).
- The United Nations Women's Development Fund (UNIFEM) estimates that domestic violence to be the leading cause of death and injury among women worldwide.
- According to the latest report from UNICEF, nearly 275 million children worldwide witness abuse in their homes. In South Asia, the estimates range from 40.8 million to 88 million children. (UNICEF 2006, *Behind Closed Doors, The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children*, New York). Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan still do not have laws to curb domestic violence. Laws exist in India but implementation remains weak. ([www.wecanendvaw.org](http://www.wecanendvaw.org))
- An International Center for Research on Women report says that direct costs of domestic violence include loss of income; production; health care costs and costs of accessing other services. Specific losses include compromises on personal security; household security; ability to be gainfully employed; household income; access, control and decision making; negotiating and bargaining power over resource allocation, mobility, access and participation in overall developing programmes. (Property Ownership and Inheritance Rights of Women for Social Protection-The South Asia Experience 2006, International Center for Research on Women, Washington DC)

## 'We Can' and Domestic Violence

**In South Asia, the greatest risk of violence for women continues to be within the safety of their homes and by their intimate partners.**

Domestic violence is a pattern of coercive tactics -- including emotional, physical, sexual and/or economic abuse -- adults or adolescents use against their intimate partners to gain or maintain power and control over them.

Abusers do not batter because they are out of control. Domestic violence is not a response to stress or an angry outburst, and is not caused by outside circumstances. It is a learned behaviour. It is further reinforced when abusers are not arrested, prosecuted or otherwise held accountable for their actions. Abusers often receive the message from society at large that violence against women is acceptable. ([Washington State Coalition against Domestic Violence](#))

'We Can' has chosen this largely hidden violence in homes as its focus area because for the majority of women in South Asia the greatest risk of violence continues to be within the safety of their homes and by their intimate partners though violence is perpetuated across a range of relationships and areas. The campaign sees this as the first step when addressing the larger crisis.

The issue of domestic violence is intractable because it is believed to be situated within the 'private' sphere of the family. It remains an invisible, silent crisis that happens with impunity behind closed doors and within close relationships across all ages, socio-economic and ethnic groups. In many settings, women internalise social norms that justify abuse and accept it as 'normal'. They do not talk to anyone about it, seek help or leave an abusive relationship due to fear, the lack of affordable housing, child care, employment opportunities, effective legal protection from the abuser and lack of alternatives. More importantly, religious and cultural beliefs and the desire to keep a family together make leaving difficult.

To address domestic violence 'We Can' aims to transform power in personal relationships, alter gender-biased beliefs and practices to negate the social sanction given to violence against women in their own homes and the society at large and spread the message that women can bring change their lives and seek to end violence in their personal relationships.

Sufia Begum of Jatrapur district was married at the age of 14 and became victim to mental and physical torture. She had her first child at 16 and was sent back to her father's home but he soon died. Her brother denied her any right to her father's property. Sufia broke her silence and fought for her rights through legal means. Though her own struggle started before 'We Can', through it she has gained awareness, courage and the potential for wider change. Now he fully understands the devastation that domestic violence can cause a woman, the family and the community. She has so far mediated with 300 families and interacted with more than 1,000 individuals for the campaign. "My message to all women is that they must break the silence, talk about abuse and stop it. Only I, Sufia Begum cannot stop it, we all have to work together to achieve peace."

**KNOWN AND UNKNOWN FACTS ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>One in every two women in South Asia faces violence in her home</b></li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>60% of women in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka face domestic violence</b></li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>In Bangladesh, 70 percent of sexual abuse suffered by women occurs within their own homes</b></li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>200 women are killed every year in Bangladesh for not bringing sufficient dowry</b></li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>44 % of pregnant women in Sri Lanka suffer harassment</b></li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>In India, more than 15,000 women suffer dowry-related violence</b></li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Every six hours, a young married woman is burnt alive, beaten to death or forced to commit suicide in India</b></li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>50% women in Afghanistan live with domestic violence</b></li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>80% women in Pakistan are subject to physical violence in their homes</b></li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>88 million children witness domestic violence in homes in South Asia</b></li></ul>

### Some Unknown Facts about Domestic Violence

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 153,397 deaths - Tsunami, 2004</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 10 million deaths - Bengal famine, 1943</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 73,000 casualties - Pakistan earthquake, 2006</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 19,727 deaths - Gujarat earthquake, 2002</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1 million deaths - Afghan wars</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 500,000 deaths - Bangladesh cyclone, 1970</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 10,000 deaths - Orissa cyclone, 2000</li></ul>
<b>THE NUMBER OF 'MISSING WOMEN' IN SOUTH ASIA IS NEARLY FIVE TIMES MORE THAN THE LIVES LOST IN NATURAL DISASTERS</b>

## Learning to Combat Violence within Homes

### The impact 'We Can' in transforming personal and societal values

***"I believed teasing and harassing girls were acceptable social behaviour and did just that when I was in high school. But I do not any longer."*** Ravi Tomar

Ravi Tomar, a student of P.G.Satna College in Madhya Pradesh (India), says, "I believed teasing and harassing girls were acceptable social behaviour and did just that when I was in high school. The turning point in my life came when I attended a debate organised by 'We Can' allies on equal rights for men and women. It opened my mind to new ideas and I took the campaign material home to read. I stopped teasing girls. I began talking to my friends to stop teasing girls as well. I have changed in other ways. Earlier my sisters used to wash my clothes. Now I wash them myself and help with household chores. I also sit in my father's cycle shop and talk to customers on issues like domestic violence, men's control over women's mobility and sexual harassment in public places. This does not mean that I have become a monk. But I now respect women and believe that they are no less than men. "

***"I am learning to live, not tolerate violence and cope with life."*** Meraamma

Meraamma of Magullavancha village, Kammam district in Andhra Pradesh, says, "I was only 15 when I got married. My husband used to beat me regularly. Worse still, he would not contribute to household expenses. I have three girls and my in-laws would threaten to get my husband a second wife so that she could bear them grandsons. I bore all this humiliation silently and supported the family selling kerosene and petrol on the roadside. One night while I slept, my husband set me on fire and ran out. He pretended to be part of rescue team later and threatened to harm my children if I told the truth. I was so scared that I did not tell the police anything. I later sought help from a campaign ally. They paid for my surgeries and helped me set up a small shop. They also helped me admit my daughters to a school with hostel facilities; file a police complaint against my husband and forward several petitions to the Collector. As yet the police express their inability to find him. Nothing has come of the petitions either. But I have not lost hope. I am learning to live, to not tolerate violence and cope with life."

***"My dream is to enable other women who suffer violence find their feet."*** Geetha and Gnanamalar

Geetha of Periyakulam, Ampara, Sri Lanka, has dedicated her life to working with women affected by domestic violence in her area. She has been able to take on this difficult task because she herself has survived violence inflicted upon her by her husband and her in-laws. Geetha enlisted the help of a campaign ally to set up a poultry rearing enterprise and become self-reliant. Her dream is to enable other women who suffer violence to find their feet.

Gnanamalar from Vankalai, Mannar, Sri Lanka, decided to work with a campaign ally to support her four children as her husband was a drunkard and would beat her regularly. The organisation has helped her gain back her self respect and

extended counselling to her husband who has since stopped his abusive behaviour. Today, Gnanamalar is a field worker and has formed several village groups - of men and youth - to speak out against violence against women

***“I am also now willing to talk of my plight. I see the change in myself. I have faith that one day women can live lives that are free of fear and violence.”*** Tauhin Nahar Seema

Twenty eight-year-old Tauhin Nahar Seema of Dinajpur, Bangladesh, says, “I was married at the age of 15. I have a nine-year-old daughter. I am 28 now. My husband began abusing me since the early years of our marriage. I did not talk of the abuse to anyone as I felt I would be disloyal to the family if I did. I felt it was my shame to bear. And, bear alone. One day I met a social worker who counselled me and also gave me the communication material of ‘We Can’. She made me understand that I was not alone in my misery. And, that my shame was society’s shame as well. I was somehow relieved and encouraged by the fact that they were others like me. I began to feel it was in my power to change myself. I have not done anything drastic as yet. Nor do I plan to. But I have begun talking to my husband at length about the issue and showing him the campaign booklets. He has actually mellowed down. His beatings have reduced and he also does not beat me in front of my relatives and friends. It is a change, albeit a small one. But I hope that one day the violence will stop. I am also now willing to talk of my plight. I see the change in myself. I have faith that one day women can live lives that are free of fear and violence.”

***“Though women have begun speaking about violence within their homes it is still not discussed openly.”*** Monowara Haque

Monowara Haque of East Goran in Dhaka joined ‘We Can’ after an orientation. She began distributing booklets and leaflets and holding one-to-one discussions with six neighbourhood families to dialogue on domestic violence. She found that women in almost all the families in her neighbourhood were victims of abuse. But none of them protested as they were conditioned to accept it as a part of their lives. Most women shouldered huge responsibilities at home and had to also take care of their children. Though women have begun speaking about violence within their homes after Monowara’s intervention, it is still not discussed openly. “This is why men need to be part of this campaign,” asserts Monowara.

***“I am no longer impatient with my wife. I do not demand everything at home as a right.”*** Mohammad Naushir Alam

Mohammad Naushir Alam, a 42-year-old social entrepreneur in Gaibandha, Bangladesh, admits to having been impatient and arrogant at home in his previous *avtaar*. “My attitude has changed dramatically ever since I have become associated with ‘We Can’. I am no longer impatient with my wife. I do not demand everything at home as a right. Instead, I help myself to water and food if my wife is not at home; I have never ever done this before and all I did was scold her for not serving me on time or in a way that I wanted it to be. Now I also drop my children to school and try to help out with little things at home so that it eases of my wife’s burden.”

## 'We Can': Focus on 'Honour' Killing in Pakistan

### There is no honour in killing women, says 'We Can'.

Official figures say about 1,000 women are murdered in the name of 'honour' in Pakistan every year but the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and women's organisations say the numbers are far, far greater.

Called by different names – *karo kari*, *siah kari*, *kala kali swara* – 'honour' killings are common in both rural and urban areas as feudal, tribal and patriarchal value systems pervade the society. In the historical and cultural context, the practice of 'honour' killing was bound to women's sexual conduct.

The modes of behaviour regarded as 'undesirable' for a woman in Pakistan cover a broad range, including marrying a man of her choice, seeking employment outside the home, disobeying the family patriarch, going outside the home without the permission of a male family member, being accused of having illicit relations or just seeking a divorce. These activities could trigger 'honour' killings. When a wife, sister or daughter is accused, it is her male relatives who are seen to be victims of 'dishonour'. The slightest accusation is enough to bring 'shame' on the family, and thereby justify the slaying.

Today these killings take place also for economic, political and social reasons as well and the problem is intensifying.

Under the *Qisas and Diyat Ordinance*, heirs of a victim of murder are entitled to pardon the murderer; the result: only 20 percent of 'honour' killing crimes are brought to justice.

It is, thus, important to locate 'crimes of honour' within the purview of murder and also within the framework of violence against women. It is also important to raise a debate on what constitutes 'honour' and raise public awareness about there being no 'honour' in taking away the life, rights and dignity of women.

'We Can' is working in 30 geographical locations in 25 districts of the country where maximum number of 'honour' killings are reported to spread awareness that 'honour' killings are murders that violate the lives and dignity of women and mobilise public support to end the practice. Its main message is –there is no honour in killing women.

The mass media – particularly radio and videos on the television – is being used extensively to highlight the enormity of the crisis. Imagine the fear of a mother who lives in perpetual anxiety for her daughter's safety where even the slightest allegation about her behaviour could lead to her killing by close relatives. This is the story of *Apna Faisla*, a video song dedicated to the thousand women who are murdered every year in the name of 'honour'. It is being beamed repeatedly on prime time television to reinforce the message that 'honour' cannot be used as a cover to legitimise crime and rob women of their basic right to life and dignity. Radio programmes are also raising a debate on the issue.

### CEDAW and other International Conventions

**CEDAW, adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, is the most comprehensive international agreement imposing legally binding duties to eliminate violence against women.**

Often described as the international bill of rights for women, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly. It is the most comprehensive international agreement imposing legally binding duties to eliminate violence against women. CEDAW expressly requires states to “take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organisation or enterprise” (Article 2 (e)).”

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) defines violence against women as: *“Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, 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.”*

It says, violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

- Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;
- Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;
- Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.

Ratification of CEDAW is as follows: Bangladesh (1984); Sri Lanka (1981); India (1993); Pakistan (1996); Nepal (2003) and Afghanistan (2003).

***Various international agreements have enabled signatory States to put in place legal measures and services to combat violence against women and support women affected by it. They include:***

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989)
- Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993)
- The World Conference on Human Rights (1993)

- Plan of Action in the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) (1994)
- The Fourth World Conference on Women (1994)
- The Forty Ninth World Health Assembly (1996)
- The Eighth World Congress Against Sexual Exploitation of Children (1996)
- The Women 2000: Gender, Equality, Development and Peace for Twenty First Century (Beijing +5) (2000)
- The Convention on Transnational Organised Crime (2000)
- South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Cooperation (SARC) Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking of Women and Children for Prostitution (2002)
- Islamabad Declaration Review and Future Action Celebrating Beijing Plus Ten (2005)

***In the 1990s violence against women emerged as a focus of international attention.***

- At both the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, women's organisations from around the world advocated that ending violence should be a high priority
- In March 1994, the Commission on Human Rights appointed the first Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women
- In 1998, UNIFEM launched regional campaigns in Africa, Asia/Pacific and Latin America to draw attention to the issue
- In 1999, the United Nations Population Fund declared violence against women as a 'public health priority'
- In 1999, the Optional Protocol to CEDAW was signed, allowing the Committee to address petitions from groups and individuals on alleged violations of the convention.



## Role of Change Makers in 'We Can'

**Change Makers believe violence against women is everyone's problem and this is the time to add our voices to the struggle for a world free of violence against women.**

'We Can' believes that people help other people change their perceptions and practices. People often inspire one another, learn from one another and many a time begin the process of collective action. Such processes have the power to alter personal behaviour and inter-personal relationships.

The campaign, hence, works through millions of Change Makers -- people who actively encourage more positive attitudes and behaviour towards women within the communities they live and work by providing alternative norms -- to facilitate attitudinal change on violence against women.

Both men and women are involved in the 'awareness-to-action' process -- both as individuals and as a group -- and their participation and role while advocating for gender equity is seen to be of equal significance.

### Who is a Change Maker?

- any individual who works to change his/her attitude and practices relating to violence against women and influence ten others to do the same
- a group of persons who act together to change community attitudes and practices
- individuals who work to bring change through their work in schools, offices, government institutions, factories and medical centres by reaching out to their colleagues/clients and influencing them

### To Be Change Makers, Men and Women Must Believe:

- change in current gender perceptions and attitudes is essential and possible
- violence against women is not acceptable
- violence against women is everyone's problem
- each individual has the potential to change their life
- this is the time to add our voices to the struggle for a world free of violence against women

### How do Change Makers Work?

As an integral part of the community, Change Makers are attempting to be part of the solution by attempting to break the cycle of violence. They

- talk to friends, neighbours and colleagues to influence their opinion on violence against women
- increase their own awareness on the issue and make changes in their own lives

- disseminate information on the campaign
- challenge existing gender biased attitudes, stereotypes and practices
- take a public stand on violence against women
- support women who experience violence

### **Support for Change Makers:**

#### **'We Can' provides for**

- interactive training material
- campaign communication material
- information on locally available support services for women
- support for campaign events

### **How Do Change Makers Communicate?**

#### **To change personal and societal attitudes, Change Makers:**

- talk to people around them about gender discrimination and violence in everyday situations regularly and convince them that they can challenge entrenched relations of power within the family and the community and cultivate new cultural practices and identities
- reinforce messages that are simple, understood, affirmative, context and constituency-specific and resonant over a sustained period of time to gather public understanding, strengthen resistance and mobilise support to end abuse against women
- use Change Maker kits to challenge existing ideas and practices, communicate fresh ideas and understand/address resistance to mind change
- use dance, drama, song, puppets, leaflets, posters and a host of methods (described in the section below titled '*Communicating for Change*') to ensure people's participation

### **How Many Change Makers Will 'We Can' Mobilise?**

In the next four years five million Change Makers will be mobilised.

#### **Why?**

Each of these five million people will reach at least ten others. The idea is to involve 50 million people in the five countries to oppose violence against women and to symbolically link up to 50 million 'missing women' in the region.

## Profiles of Some Change Makers

**Change Makers are very ordinary people trying to make a difference in their own circle of friends by simply breaking the silence on the issue of violence against women and encouraging others to act to end this violence.**

Change Makers in the five countries are taking small and large steps to accept new ideas and enable women, men and children to live safer, violence-free lives. They are breaking the silence and acting to stop violence against women – in their own way and in their own community.

The actions of such men and women from different walks of life and different professions may seem small and ordinary – the truth is that the majority of Change Makers are very ordinary people trying to make a difference in their own circle of friends by simply breaking the silence on the issue of violence against women and encouraging others to act to end this violence.

The first step is often the most difficult – taking responsibility and making the change. It is difficult to speak up whether at home or outside and make the first move to change oneself. But Change Makers know that each voice counts in making the difference.

Many Change Makers are making personal journeys to oppose violence while in other cases men and women are together unlearning socialised ways of expressing power and beginning to develop alternatives that are more equal, respectful and mindful of individual dignity.

**Being a Change Maker is both exciting and fulfilling. Here are a few instances of how.**

- Sending a postcard may not seem like much. But Ashok a student from Gujarat in India wrote to his friend saying he now recognised that their attitudes and behaviour with girls in their college was harassment and urged his friend to join him in stopping such harassment. In a small way, he is helping spread the message.
- Girls in Ajmer's Sophia College (India) have crafted *rakhis* to tie on their brother's wrists with messages that ask for equal rights and treatment.
- P T Jamal, a 49-year-old Chief trustee of the Grand Mosque of Islamafath village in Kalmunai, in Sri Lanka, has chosen to be an active part of 'We Can'. "I try and speak out against girls dropping out of schools, their restricted mobility, early marriages, domestic violence and laws that discriminate against women."
- Tarek Zaman, a businessman from Gaibandha market in Bangladesh has printed campaign messages on shopping bags and visiting cards that he hands out to his clients and fellow traders. "People take back commodities as well as ideas."
- Sharmin Sattar, a nursing instructor at the Dinajpur Nursing Institute, Bangladesh, says, "The health care system perpetuates violence against women. Medical care is biased in favour of men. When patients come seeking medicines, it is the men who get them. This is unfortunate as women fall ill more often than

men and need more wards and medical attention. Also, women almost never take decisions on the number of children they will have. The irony is that they have no choice in the matter of their own bodies. I am lobbying to set such practices right.”

- A shade different is Ram Kison. A singer in a ‘We Can’ youth cultural troupe in Ranchi, Jharkhand, East India, his group travels from village to village, raising awareness about domestic violence. This region is the site of armed conflict for many decades. Reflecting on the aim and methods of the two change processes, he says, “The gunmen like us want a change in society. The gunman has his guns, and we have our music. People are scared of guns, but they enjoy our performances. Our messages stay back in the hearts of people.”
- Sixteen-year-old Nischal Pakhrin of Sri Nepal Madhyamik High School in Bara district, Nepal, says, “I have been witness to many, many unsavoury incidents of abuse in my home and have wanted to speak out. ‘We Can’ gave me a chance. My family members were initially aghast. Now they support me. I have encouraged other girls to join me and together we approached families to allow their girls to attend school as keeping them uneducated is a form of violence. This may seem to be a very small step. But it isn’t. Our efforts have resulted in six young girls enrolling in local schools. This has fuelled our enthusiasm and we have started adult education classes with 30 women.”
- In Nepal, a band of boys committed to the campaign managed to help girls being harassed during *Krishnajayanti* (the birthday of Lord Krishna) celebrations in Amlekhganj, Bara district. “Wearing the ‘We Can’ t-shirt made us conscious of our behaviour and responsibility. The fact that the other boys took us seriously gave us the confidence to convince others to desist from unruly behaviour.”
- Narendra Swarup, advocate, Kammam District Court, Kammam district, Andhra Pradesh, says, “Women rarely approach courts in our area. I have got together a group of likeminded lawyers and we are trying to make it less intimidating for women to file cases.”
- Muhammad Jan Odhano is a young Change Maker from district Jacobabad in Sindh province (Pakistan). A local *jirga* ruled that five minor girls between ages four and 12 years be given away as compensation to settle a murder dispute between two tribes in Kashmore. Within three days of the *jirga*’s decision, he along with other Change Makers and campaign allies initiated a series of public demonstrations challenging the verdict of the *jirga*. As a consequence, the issue got extensive media attention and the Supreme Court of Pakistan took *suomoto* action against the case, and besides banning the *jirga*, initiated cases against the people who were involved in the *jirga*.

***For more profiles of Change Makers – stories of ordinary men and women who have made a difference in their own circle of friends by breaking the silence on violence against women and encouraging others to act to end gender abuse – see [www.wecanendvaw.org](http://www.wecanendvaw.org) (Change Makers section)***

## Communicating for Change in Behaviour

**'We Can' communication strategy relies on the 'The Stage of Change Theory' based on the understanding on how people change. Its messages -- simple and succinct -- are reinforced to reach people through a variety of ways.**

'We Can' communication strategy relies on the 'The Stage of Change Theory' based on the understanding on how people change. An understanding of the sequential and staged nature of change is critical to communicating for change; especially if the intent is to modify traditional behaviour.

All communication interventions are routed to follow the campaign's four phases with each phase carrying messages relevant for the period. The four phases are: raising awareness (increasing awareness to promote reflection on violence against women); building networks (supporting and mobilising Change Makers); integrating action (bringing together groups to improve synergy and impact) and consolidating efforts (strengthening community and organisational capacity).

The multi-pronged communications attempt to follow an easy but effective route: they begin with the creation of self-directed learning (to deepen understanding of the issues; proceed to raising awareness and dialogue within the community; and then support for the campaign. These efforts are meant to culminate in influencing community behaviours.

The campaign primarily uses Change Makers to reach campaign messages to the people, raise awareness and foster dialogue and debate with the aim of bringing attitudinal change.

To carry the overall identity of the campaign, campaign allies have created a name, logo and strap line. They are being used together and consistently within all channels of visual communication to create recognition and understanding of the campaign and its issues.

We Can messages -- simple and succinct -- are reinforced to reach people through a variety of ways:

- highly visible and coordinated community mobilisation events (mass rallies, marches (on foot, cycles, rickshaws, boats, horse carts, camels); protests, formation of human chains, door-to-door campaigns, silent vigils and functions/events
- public education events (seminars, discussions, open meetings and workshops)
- cultural and youth festivals (theatre, songs, story telling sessions)
- games (ludo and snakes, ladders and football tournaments -- adapted to take the campaign ideas ahead and painting competitions)
- student programmes (debates, annual functions, poster and photo exhibitions)
- religious gatherings and annual fairs
- outreach programmes of civil society groups and universities

- mass media (articles, features, editorials, talk shows, advertisements, syndicated columns, televised soap operas and feature films)
- specially designed Change Maker kits (an illustrated kit that highlights the different kinds of violence that Change Makers can use to take forward the campaign messages)
- campaign documents (briefing, position and strategy papers)
- campaign website – [www.wecanendvaw.org](http://www.wecanendvaw.org)
- campaign products: booklets, leaflets, pamphlets, brochures, posters, banners, stickers, billboards, t-shirts and aprons with campaign messages, postcards, bookmarks, caps, bags, calendars, plaques and sashes
- messages on private television channels, slides in cinema halls, radio shows and public service advertisements in the mass media
- informal communication (street theatre, puppet shows, mimes, mural paintings; wall paintings and posters behind rickshaws and comic cards) and
- unique sign-up and public personalities and celebrity endorsements (Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and well-known actor Rahul Bose in India, Her Excellency President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga in Sri Lanka, and Bharat Mohan Adhikari, Deputy Prime Minister of Nepal to name a few)

## Out-of- the ordinary Communications

We illustrate some creative and effective ways used by 'We Can' allies to shape a message, reach people and engage in dialogue.

### Badge

A badge has been developed in Bangladesh to be worn by a person for ten days. During this time, the wearer tells at least five other people about the campaign and inspires them to wear the badge and continue the process.

### Three-wheeled Wonders Carry 'We Can' Messages

Campaign allies are making use of the navigability of rickshaws and fixing panels behind passenger seats to reach campaign messages far and wide.

### Change Makers' Kit

A uniquely designed and illustrated kit meant for Change Makers to highlight the obvious and not-so-obvious forms of violence against women.

### 100-yard Banners/Signature Campaigns

Long banners 100 metres long and miles-long signature strips are a spectacle to behold and a tool that campaign allies use often.

### Postcards/Invitations/Pickle Bottles/Shopping Bags/ Prescriptions/Newspaper Inserts

Specially designed 'We Can' postcards are used by people to convince others about the merits of the campaign. Of late, invitations to personal functions, pickle bottle labels, doctors' prescriptions, shopping bags and inserts in newspapers have campaign messages embossed.

### Air waves

Imagine the fear of a mother who lives in perpetual anxiety for her daughter's safety where even the slightest allegation about her behaviour could lead to her killing by close relatives. This is the story of *Apna Faisla*, a video song dedicated to the thousand women who are murdered every year in the name of 'honour', beamed regularly on Pakistani television channels. Noted Indian poet and lyricist Javed Akhtar has composed a lyric especially for the campaign and in Sri Lanka, a regular radio programme *Saha-Astitwa* is aired to deal with violence against women. In Bangladesh, a 26-episode television serial on domestic violence will be aired shortly.

## **Tanks Tell a Tale**

In Sri Lanka, water tanks in tsunami-related camps are providing an unexpected platform for the campaign messages. The tanks make perfect canvases; the messages are visible to all and they generate discussion and debate.

## **Comic Cards**

Comics humanise change through humour and visuals. In India and Sri Lanka, first time illustrators are trying their hand at spreading campaign messages through comic strips with enormous success.

## **Mammoth Hoardings at Bus Stops**

Thousands of people have been taking notice of huge campaign hoardings around bus stops that speak of domestic violence in Andhra Pradesh (India). Campaign allies have been flooded with calls seeking help and advice.

## **Using Traditional and Festive Occasions**

In India, the annual and traditional Jaganthpur *rath yatra mela* in Ranchi was used to tell millions of visitors about the campaign. Students of Ajmer's Sophia College in north India crafted messages of anti-violence on *rakhis* that they tied to their brothers. In Bangladesh, allies celebrated the National Girl Child Day (September 30) as *Konna Divas* to highlight discriminatory practices against girls and in Nepal, *Teej and Krishna Jayanthi*, two major festivals, have been used as occasions to highlight campaign messages.

## **Games and Tournaments**

Games like ludo and snakes and ladders have been adapted to campaign concepts in all the countries and in Bangladesh a football tournament was organised to highlight the campaign.

## **Traditional Theatre, 'We Can' Themes**

Bhavai (a 750-year-old traditional folk dance drama from Gujarat) has been revived by campaign allies in India in the form of Rangla Rangli. The flamboyantly dressed characters Rangla and Rangali are used to discuss the issue of violence against women.

## **Share a Meal**

A campaign ally in Bangladesh's Dinajpur has been challenging the traditional practice of women eating alone and after the rest of the family through the concept of 'Share a family meal a day,' popularised at public fairs through word-of-mouth and through written communication.

## Mass Media and 'We Can'

**Mass media professionals can become one more support group to end all forms of violence against women.**

As the mass media penetrates every segment of the society and effectively informs how people view the world, we have highlighted the above information to provide a framework for sensitive and informed reportage, raise public awareness, frame public debate and accentuate political accountability. We hope that mass media professionals become one more support group to end all violence against women. Change can come about only through collective efforts and a combination of factors.

### **Your support is needed to:**

- highlight abuse and break the silence surrounding violence against women
- challenge existing norms, gender stereotypes that promote violence against women and diversify images of women to counter traditional stereotype images
- report negative fall-outs of violence against women in various spheres of life
- safeguard women's rights
- initiate debates on non violent ways to resolve conflicts and provide new concepts of masculinity
- research the missing link of power: are women empowered or excluded from asserting their rights in public and private arena?
- highlight statistics and fact files on incidence of violence against women to tell a powerful story
- keep track of a country's reporting on CEDAW and compliance to its principles
- track legal measures and loopholes relating to violence against women
- produce national and regionally comparative information on violence against women that is lacking
- look into the economic costs of violence against women
- survey trends to capture emerging threats to women
- bring to light efforts being made to curb violence against women
- incorporate information on hotlines, shelters, laws, legal centres and other relevant resources to allow women to protect themselves

### Further Reading on 'We Can'

- Oxfam Briefing Paper 66 August 2004, Towards Ending Violence Against Women in South Asia, Oxfam International, London
- Campaign Brochure 2004
- Campaign Strategy Paper 2004
- Violence Free Lives for Women, Quarterly Update of 'We Can' (2004-2006)
- See [www.wecanendvaw.org](http://www.wecanendvaw.org) (for all the above papers/documents)

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