

Press Kit

Violence against women is now recognised as a human rights violation and its definition includes physical, sexual or psychological harm:

“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 of Violence Against Women, 1993 FACT SHEET FIVE

Violence Against Women 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 every six deaths of female infants in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan are caused by 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 without control over their behaviour, appearance, expression and movement. Women become targets of extreme forms of violence like incest, rape, forced marriage, ‘honour’ killing and dowry deaths.

Statistics on Violence against Women in South Asia: At a Glance

- One in every two women in South Asia faces violence in their daily life
- The incidence of domestic violence in South Asia is the highest in the world and a major cause of deaths among young women who marry early, says the World Development Report 2007
- Sixty per cent women in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, 35 per cent in India and 80 per cent women in Pakistan and Afghanistan live with daily abuse by their intimate partners within their own homes
- Eighty eight million children in South Asia witness domestic violence within their homes (UNICEF study 2006)
- There would be 13 million fewer malnourished children in South Asia if women had an equal say in the family, says UNICEF’s The State of World’s Children (2007)
- Violence against women does not just affect women. It adversely affects each one in society

Bangladesh

- The International Center for Diarrhoeal Disease Research – Bangladesh says 60 per cent of women face violence in the country (2006)
- It is estimated 57.5 per cent of the women in the provinces of Bangladesh have suffered from either or both sexual and physical violence (WHO Multi-country Study, 2005)

- The One Stop Crisis Centre's study shows that 70 per cent of the abuse happens at home
- More than half of the women in the country marry before age 15. This is the highest rate of early marriage in Asia and among the highest worldwide
- There are many incidents of acid attacks due to dowry disputes, leading often to blindness, disfigurement, and death. In 2002, 315 women and girls in Bangladesh were victims of acid attacks; in 2005 that number was 267 (UNIFEM)
- A study by NGO Odhikar shows that from 1 January 2001 to 28 February 2007 a total of 5,816 cases of rape were reported against women and children. Among these numbers, 636 women were killed after being raped, and 69 committed suicide after the incident, see http://www.iccnw.org/documents/Odhikar_IWD_PR_08mar07.pdf
- During this time a total 1,024 women were subjected to acid violence and a total of 1,884 women fell victim to dowry related violence.

Sri Lanka

- About 60 per cent women in Sri Lanka experience violence, says figures put out by the country's Gender Based Violence Forum
- Recent police statistics show between 8,000 and 10,000 cases of violence against women per month
- A survey at the outpatient department of the North Colombo Teaching Hospital in Ragama, a semi-urban area in the suburbs of Colombo found that 40.7 per cent of women had been abused by their partners
- Most women reacted in a submissive manner: 79 per cent of those abused have stayed in their marriages for more than 10 years (2005), see <http://bjp.rcpsych.org/cgi/content/full/187/6/587-a>
- According to the same survey, children of 31 per cent of the victims had witnessed the abuse. It has been demonstrated by many studies that emotional abuse in childhood has a major impact on adult mental health
- Fifty six per cent of women who had suffered abuse were in poor mental health

India

- The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) -3 (2005-06) findings underscore the extent and severity of violence against women in India, especially married women
- It says that one-third of women in the age group 15-49 have experienced physical violence and about one in 10 have experienced sexual violence
- In total, 35 per cent women experience physical or sexual violence
- Nearly two in five (37 per cent) married women have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence by their husband
- The prevalence of physical or sexual violence ranges from six per cent in Himachal Pradesh and 13 per cent in Jammu and Kashmir and Meghalaya to 46 per cent in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and 59 per cent in Bihar.
- Sixteen per cent of never married women have experienced physical violence since they were 15 years of age, generally by a parent, a sibling, or a teacher
- Only one in four abused women have ever sought help to try to end the violence they have experienced

- Two out of three women have not only never sought help, but have also never told anyone about the violence
- More than half of women (54 per cent) and men (51 per cent) agree that it is justifiable for a husband to beat his wife under some circumstances
- In India, one incident of violence translates into the women losing seven working days

Nepal

- According to UNIFEM, the most widely quoted source on the magnitude of the trafficking problem in Nepal, it is estimated that 5,000 to 7,000 girls are trafficked from Nepal to India and other neighbouring countries every year, primarily for prostitution, and 200,000 Nepali girls and women are currently working in the sex industry in India
- Thirty nine per cent of all rape victims are young women and under the age of 19 and another 39 per cent are between 20 and 29 years ; all are at high risk of sexually transmitted infections, particularly HIV/AIDS, and other sexual and reproductive disorders
- In 2006, 936 instances of domestic violence were reported, according to the Central Women's Cell of Nepal Police
- Despite a decade long struggle to pass a law on domestic violence, such a law has not come to be

Pakistan

- Statistics compiled by leading women's rights organisations show that as many as 7,733 cases of violence against women were reported in the print media in 2008
- The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) records that in 2007 a total of 4,276 cases of women's rights abuses were reported.
- HRCP recorded 1,202 killings, out of which honour killing crimes were 636, cases of sexual harassment were 755, of which 377 victims were raped (166 minors) and 354 victims were gang-raped (92 minors). Kidnappings were 736, whereas other forms of attacks were 143
- Cases of honour killing are on the rise in Pakistan as 90 such cases were reported all over the country in the first quarter (January to March) of 2008, (Report compiled by a non-governmental organisation (NGO) Aurat Foundation (AF), see [http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd\[157\]=x-157-562573](http://www.wluml.org/english/newsfulltxt.shtml?cmd[157]=x-157-562573))
- Dr Zulfikar Siyal, Additional Police Surgeon, Karachi, claimed in 2008 that at least 100 women are raped daily in Karachi, see <http://pakistaniat.com/2008/09/16/rape-sex-karach/comment-page-3/>,
- A draft Protection against Domestic Violence of women and Child Act was drawn up by the Federal Law Ministry in 2007 but it is as yet to be passed

Afghanistan

- Since March 2007 till now there has been a 40 per cent rise in violence against women in Afghanistan, says the UN
- Womankind Worldwide, a British charity, says 80 per cent of Afghan women suffer domestic violence
- UNIFEM says 70 to 80 per cent women face forced marriages (2008)

- Fifty seven per cent girls are married before the legal age of 16 and the maternal mortality rate in Afghanistan is among the highest in the world
- Every year 24,000 Afghan women die due to diseases; 70 per cent women have no access to medical care, according to UNFPA

About We Can End All Violence against Women Campaign ('We Can')

The South Asia Campaign to End All Forms of Violence Against Women or 'We Can' was launched in 2004 in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India. In Pakistan it was launched in 2005 and in Afghanistan in 2007. 'We Can' aims to change deeply entrenched gender-biased societal attitudes and practices that endorse gender discrimination and violence.

The We Can campaign's model of change involves mobilising large numbers of people (Change Makers) and organisations to take a public stand and oppose violence against women through large-scale public awareness programmes and empathy for the issue. The emphasis is on people and personal change.

Hence, it strongly promotes the positive message that violence is neither acceptable nor inevitable, and that ordinary women and men have the capacity to end it.

Change Makers actively aid this process. They do not offer readymade solutions. Instead they raise awareness on the issue through personal interaction and the communication tools they are provided with, extend information about support services and networks and offer the campaign identity as a catalyst for change.

The focus is on encouraging critical thinking and engagement of people including the perpetrators instead of putting them on the defensive by 'naming and shaming'.

The campaign, hence, only provides the stimulus and encouragement to people to change and make their world a more just and equal place.

While each of the campaign allies responds in their own manner to the unique social, cultural, political and economic environments and have different focus areas, they are all bound by their commitment to the long-term and sustained process of the campaign to change social attitudes on violence against women. In all the six countries, the overall goal of the campaign is to reduce social acceptance to Domestic Violence.

Campaign Phases

'We Can' will progress through four distinct phases:

- 1) Raising awareness or the phase where the focus would be to increase awareness and promote reflection on violence against women
- 2) Building networks or supporting and mobilising change Makers towards building a momentum for social change

- 3) Integrating action and consolidating efforts or bringing together diverse local, national, regional and international efforts and groups to improve synergy and impact and strengthening community and organizational capacity
- 4) Consolidating efforts or strategising, securing, sustaining community and organisational capacity to prevent violence against women. It is important to develop and institutionalise mechanisms to advocate women's needs and rights within the community.

Campaign Coverage

Country	Districts covered (until April 2008)
Bangladesh	48
India	220
Nepal	40
Pakistan	24
Sri Lanka	19
Afghanistan	8

Change Makers: At the Heart of the Campaign

The campaign is being implemented in six countries by an alliance of more than 2,400 organisations. The strategic direction of the campaign is determined at the Regional Secretariat based at Oxfam GB's Regional Centre for South Asia in New Delhi.

Change Makers form the core of the campaign. Currently there are 2.7million Change Makers in the region. The campaign, which was rolled out in 2004, will continue until 2011. It is envisaged that during this period five million Change Makers will be mobilised across the region each of whom will reach out to at least ten people. The idea is to involve 50 million people in the six countries to oppose violence against women and to symbolically link up with the 50 million 'missing women' in the region (*This figure refers to women and girls who have either died due to gender discrimination and violence, including unequal access to resources, girl foetuses aborted through sex selection. See Klasen and Wink, 2003, 'Missing Women': Revisiting the Debate, Feminist Economics 9(2-3), 263-99.*)

Who Is A Change Maker?

A change maker is any person (or group of persons) who:

- Believes that a change in the current gender perceptions and attitudes is needed and that this change is possible
- Initiates change in their own lives
- Treats men and women the same way
- Speaks up for equal opportunity among men and women
- Realises that violence against women is a serious social problem and unacceptable

- Actively tries to influence others to change their attitudes towards women and raises awareness about the seriousness of the problem

Why Are Change Makers an Integral Part of 'We Can'?

- 'We Can' uses Change Makers to raise the issue of violence against women in the public domain, change gender-biased beliefs and attitudes of the community, and reduce social acceptance of domestic violence linking it with the grave issue of missing women.
- Change Makers also help involve entire communities and institutions in the process of change
- Through such people (men, women and collectives), 'We Can' aims to bring change that will happen slowly but surely, like ripples in the water

What Can A Change Maker Do To Influence Others?

A Change Maker can:

- Commit to never use violence in their personal relationships
- Challenge existing gender-biased attitudes, stereotypes and practices in their communities
- Talk about violence against women being unacceptable to friends, family, neighbours and colleagues
- Persuade people who abuse their partners to stop
- Support women who suffer violence

What Does A Change Maker Look Like?

- A Change Maker may not look like a hero/heroine or lead an extra-ordinary life
- A Change Maker may be no different from others but is a person who is open-minded and willing to challenge prevailing gender-biased beliefs and practices
- A Change Maker may be an ordinary man or woman but speaks up and acts to stop violence against women
- A Change Maker is a person who is motivated to speak up, reach out and act

How does 'We Can' support Change Makers?

'We Can Campaign' supports Change Makers through:

- Interactive orientation tools
- Campaign communication material
- Information on locally available support services for women
- Support for campaign events

Campaign Activities Aimed at Public Awareness to Facilitate Change at the Community Level

- On 26 May 2007, a private TV channel in Bangladesh 'Bangla Vision' organised a live talk show on violence against women that was anchored by the renowned TV personality Ali Imam. Jinat Ara Haque, member of the Bangladesh We Can Alliance, Shanaj Perveen from Polli Sree, Santa Maria, a Change Maker and a journalist by profession, and Sikandar Azam Anam, President, Gaibandha Lawyer Association were present. At least 15 callers sought help for domestic violence during the show. A number of upper and middle class women

from Dhaka shared their experiences of domestic violence but under the condition of anonymity

- A 15 minute weekly radio programme is being run by We Can Alliance members and Change Makers through Radio Nepal. The programme has a listener following amongst young people in 19 remote districts of western Nepal. Currently there are 338 such listeners' clubs with a membership of 5,000 boys and girls. The radio programme encourages the listeners' club members to generate dialogue on the various facets of violence against women within their families and among the peers. The Change Makers send in their experiences, poems, songs and stories of other people in areas to the club
- 'We Can' in Pakistan celebrated the 16 days of activism (25 November -10 December) 2007 by organising various activities A countrywide signature campaign was launched with the aim to collect 100,000 signatures on banners to raise public awareness on violence against women. The campaign allies raised awareness through FM radio programmes, rickshaw rallies in Sindh and NWFP, press conferences; meetings with parliamentarians and political party representatives; corner meetings and dialogue sessions with communities; and interactive dialogue with college/university students and parents with quiz programmes and debates competitions thrown in
- In India six episodes on violence against women called "*Khamosh nahi rahna hai*" have gone on air on FM Radio and All India Radio from two cities in October 2008. The programmes have an outreach of 12 districts with a target audience of more than 1,50,000 Change Makers

Personal Change in the Lives of Change Makers

- "I am a survivor! I am a Change Maker!" says Selvi, from **Namakkal district, Tamil Nadu, (India)**. But life for Selvi has not been easy. She was married young and had no education." My husband was a lorry driver. He drank a lot and often 'abused' me. Soon my in-laws joined in and I faced a lot of harassment within the family. When I became pregnant, I had to undergo a blood test and was found to be HIV+. I was devastated. Then, the counsellor asked my husband to also take the tests and he was declared to be carrying the HIV virus. He died soon after. Once word spread, I had to face a lot stigma from the society and relatives. It was very difficult. I cried a lot and wanted to die. That is when I met one of the alliance members of **We Can, Tamil Nadu - MGENM**. They encouraged me in different ways. I claimed my legal rights over the property share for my child. I started involving myself in the campaign activities and became a 'Change Maker'. Mobilising Change Makers has increased my self-confidence. People have started accepting me and seeing me as a 'normal' person like them. As a Change Maker, I feel proud that I am a role model for other HIV+ women and also for the women who are the victims of domestic violence.
- Jannat Bibi from **Jaccababad District in Sindh, Pakistan**, is a role model as a Change Maker. She is an illiterate woman, a widow and mother of three young sons. She keeps herself busy from sun rise to sun set solving the problems of people and representing their cases in the District Assembly. In her Union Council, she is trying her best to motivate women to raise their voice against violence. She says, "You don't need physical power to change people but just the power of inner belief and conviction that you are right and can bring change and can save lives of many people." She has saved the life of a girl who was shot by her brother in the name of honour. She went alone to

the house of the survivor of honour killing and with only the help of her young son, took the injured girl to the hospital. Later with the help of the local police, she persuaded the family that whatever they did was wrong and also illegal and that it should never happen again. The survivor of honour killing, who was given another chance to live because of Jannat Biwi , has gone on to marry the person of her choice.

- “It was only after seven years of my marriage that I realised I was violent towards my wife. I came to this understanding at a ‘We Can’ meeting in the village and when I became a Change Maker, I used to think I am a man and can beat my wife as she is inferior to me. I had seen my father beat my mother. But now I know better and have seen the folly of my ways,” says Eliash Mrida, a Change Maker and a radio and TV mechanic from Noa Para, **Bagerhaat district, Bangladesh**.
- “I am learning to live, not to tolerate violence and cope with life”, Meeramma. Meeramma of Magullavancha village, **Khammam district in Andhra Pradesh, India** says, “I was only fifteen 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 the 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 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 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 helped her regain 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.

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 (Change Makers section)

Future Direction of the Campaign

Now in its Phase II the focus of the campaign is on building networks and widening the alliance to make it more diverse and the campaign far more visible. The key objective of this phase is to reiterate that violence against women is not acceptable under any circumstances. Individuals and communities will be encouraged to realise the benefits of violence free relationships and made to understand that it is necessary to bring the issue of domestic violence in the open, oppose it and empower people who suffer abuse. This phase would be marked by '1000 events'

'1000 Events'

1000 events per district implies 1000 instances/interactions or actions, which Change Makers individually or a group shall voluntarily take/initiate in a district within his /her sphere of influence. Each event will consist of a group of at least ten people with whom the Change Makers have a good rapport. There will be a discussion of an hour on the issue of violence against women and gender based discrimination. Change Makers will voluntarily conduct these events with support from the 'We Can' Regional/National Secretariat in the form of audio-visual communication material. For example, Om Prakash Maru from the State of Rajasthan in West India decided to discuss at his wedding the issue of Violence against Women and the 'We Can' Campaign. As a result of this all his guests (approximately 500) undertook the pledge to become Change Makers.

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