

Domestic violence:
Need to change mindset

Thinley Zangmo

The Bhutan Multiple Indicator Survey (BMIS) 2010 revealed that 68.4 percent of women aged between 15 to 49 in Bhutan felt that their partner had the right to hit them, for at least one or more reasons. The study also revealed that one in five women believe that a husband had a good reason to hit his wife if she did not complete her household work to his satisfaction. About one in four believed a husband had a good reason to beat his wife if she disobeyed him.

The acceptance level of domestic violence is high, which poses a constant challenge for agencies such as Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women (RENEW) to change this mindset both between men and women.

The importance of changing this mindset was reiterated once more during the international day for the elimination of violence against women held on November 23 to November 25 in Thimphu.

RENEW's executive director, Tandin Wangmo, said it's a challenge to break through that acceptance among women themselves and to inform that violence, in any form, is not acceptable.

"Unless we are able to break through that mindset, I think domestic violence will be a big issue in the country. The change in the mindset has to begin from home," Tandin Wangmo said.

Around 306 cases were registered with RENEW from January to October this year. An average of three to four new cases of domestic violence gets reported at RENEW every day.

The number of cases is increasing every year. Although one cannot pinpoint the exact reasons for the increase in the number of cases because of a lack of proper study but the increase in awareness on the Domestic Violence Prevention Act could be one reason. People are now realising that violence at home is not acceptable anymore and people are also becoming aware of the agencies that is providing services to support and empower families, Tandin Wangmo said.

"When we talk about domestic violence, it's not just physical assault but also wilful negligence or denial of resources by a spouse. When that happens, the child suffers the most when resources or education have been denied. We have many cases where children have suffered because of what the parents have gone through," Tandin Wangmo said.

Today, RENEW supports more than 500 students on educational scholarship in schools around the country. Around 17 children abandoned by their family and relatives are permanently under RENEW's care. These children are aged between eight and 19 years and have no place to go and have no family that they belong to.

Apart from domestic violence victims, children who do not have a home to go to during school holidays due to domestic violence are housed at Gawailing Happy Home in Thimphu. The home is open throughout the day for those who find themselves in an emergency situation. The home provides counselling services, legal aid, emergency medical aid, crisis intervention, meditation practices, and education for the children and livelihood training for each individual.

Pg.4





Where to get help?

RENEW
Call: 332159/334751/332158
Vist: *www.renew.org.bt or www.facebook.com/bhutanrenew*

Royal Bhutan Police
Call toll free number 113

Ministry of Health
Health Helpline Center: 112

Domestic violence:
Need to change mindset

From Pg.1

There are, however, many domestic violence cases that go unreported because getting a case registered is often a last resort after everything have failed. There are still many more cases where women or men believe that they can handle it or keep it behind closed doors. We have a lot to do on that ground, Tandin Wangmo said.

"We have received the most cases that are reported based on wilful negligence or denial of resources by a spouse followed by physical assault or violence. Also increasingly, cases get registered because of misunderstanding caused by social media today. Alcohol is not the main reason but it is a triggering factor in almost 85 to 90 percent of the cases that are registered here," Tandin Wangmo said. "Domestic violence not just has social repercussion but also have financial repercussion on the government's budget, which could have been used for something more useful or productive. There is a long list of ripple effect on the society. Only from the change of mindset can change the repercussions it has on society. The change of mindset can only happen if all the stakeholders work together."

What happens after a case registered with RENEW?

Once the case is registered, the first step is case assessment done by counsellors and depending on the nature of the case it will be referred to the relevant counsellor.

There are six full time counsellors looking after each case.

A counsellor at RENEW, Karma Choden, said a counsellor will, then, re-assess the case and after speaking to both the parties will recommend a list of options including legal options by the legal officer.

"Then a couple is left to decide from the options. Based on their suggestion, counselling sessions are conducted. If we realise that the family is vulnerable and their income is not stable, then options such as livelihood skills programme are provided along educational scholarship for their children if required," Karma Choden said.

After they have availed the livelihood skills programme, then they can have access to micro financing to start a small project or form a cooperative. "We make sure to follow up these families until they are well settled and reintegrated into the society as families either as a family unit together again or as individuals," Karma Choden said. "When we look at our records so far, about 95 percent of cases registered go back together as families and there are a few cases of divorce. There are also a few cases that have been referred to relevant agencies such as the police, hospital and the court depending on the severity of a case or any criminal offence that has been conducted."

According to a study on domestic violence conducted by the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC), Bhutan is no exception when it comes to prevalence of violence against women by intimate partner.

In the past, Bhutanese did not regard violence against women as an issue serious enough to take note of. Today, there is evidence that close to three in 10 ever-partnered women aged between 15 and 49 years are likely to experience intimate partner violence of one form or the other, with the prevalence rate at 32.9 percent. This prevalence may be considered moderately high and Bhutan's small population deems the overall prevalence rate to be a cause for concern, states the study.