

WOMEN'S RIGHTS VIOLATION IN SRI LANKA: HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH

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Key Words: *Gender Study, Violation, Domestic Violence, Women's Rights*

Introduction

Violence against women is a common tragedy for every society. It is one of the obstacles for enjoying the human rights respecting to equality and liberty. These violations are preponderantly inflicted by men on women and girls. As result of these violations, the health, dignity, security and autonomy of women are harmed.

Worldwide, an estimated one in five women will be a victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime. One in three will have been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused, usually by a family member or an acquaintance. More often than not, the perpetrators go unpunished. UNFPA reports in 2005 states the consequences of gender based violence which forms of violence against women and its influences on women. There are risk of acquiring HIV, emotional distress, mental health problems and poor reproductive health. More over UNFPA report indicated that "the impact of violence may also extend to future generations as children who have witnessed abuse, or were victims themselves, often suffer lasting psychological damage".

As a state, who opposes to violence against women (VAW), Sri Lanka set up the legal framework and implements the numbers of policies, strategies and action plans against the VAW. In 2005, the domestic violence act was passed. Sri Lanka is signatory to Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and has also signed the Vienna Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in 1993 and reaffirmed its commitment at the international level to address the issue of gender-based violence. Furthermore, the country has ratified four major international instruments, which have relevance to rape and other forms of Violence against women. There are International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1966, and the optional protocol; Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW-1979), The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC-1989) and the Convention on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984). Additional to them, with the contribution and collaboration of government and nongovernment sectors in Sri Lanka, the policies and strategies and action plans are mapped. As a product of them, the Ministry of Women's affairs was established in 1983. The Women's Charter, the main policy statement of the government was also adopted by the state in 1993. The charter establishes standards to be observed in seven broad areas including the right to protection for women against physical or mental. The Charter also set up the National Committee on Women (NCW) in 1993. The National Plan of Action (NPA) for Women was adopted by Sri Lanka following the World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) in May 1996, and has been developed based on the Global Platform for Action on Women.

The research problem is even there are strong mechanisms and rules and regulations against the abuses of women's rights and protection for women's rights, why do women in public sector as employees face the gender based violence.

Objective is to explore avenues and opportunities for empowering and mobilising the women in public sector to stand on safeguarding their rights.

Methodology

The Primary and secondary data is collected by methods of case studies and focus group discussions and literature reviewed respectively. The sample is comprised with 50 case studies and focus group discussions from various administrative officers in General hospital –Peradeniya. Mainly, the research has focused on qualitative data as opinions, perspectives, ideas, stories, recollections and case histories. The qualitative data is interpreted by 'phenomenology'.

The theoretical framework is based on the concept of Human Rights. The articles from Universal declaration on Human Rights, Two covenants as the civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights are used for analysis the research in conceptual way.

Discussion and Conclusions

The findings are able to categorize under three dimensions as psychological, social and economic. Psychologically, the women workers do not make any act against the women's Rights violations in their working environment because of fear for losing the jobs and promotions, increasing the harassments, taking the revenges and being of isolations. The respondents form the sample, the women works as attendants face the sexual and verbal harassments from their supervisors, male nurses and some of the doctors. The female nurses and doctors are more educated although, they are lack of confidence in case of protection their rights in working environment. Some respondents say, they do not want have sexual relationships with the authoritative or high ranking people in health sector, but they do it for the sake of avoiding the transfers and obtaining the promotions. There are respondents, who do not reveal their own experiences, but pretend and share those experiences as others'.

The voice against the women's rights violation is weak. The trade unions of attendants, nurses, and doctors pay less attention on the issue. The absent of a professional role to handle or inquire the violence against women in health sector cause to climbing up it more than other sectors. Rooted cultural habits and patterns also make women power less in the circumstances of their rights violations. The respondents mention, they do not complain against any violence because they are shy on it. They ask, "If we tell, that there are sexual harassments for us, the other colleagues misunderstand it and do not accompany with us."

Lack of support from the family also effect to increase the violence against women. One responded said that:

"My husband is three-wheel driver. He consumes liquor everyday evening. If I tell him that, I have physically abused by somebody, he never let me to do this job. I am a nurse. So I have to work in nights. If he knew these things, he never let me to come home after did my night duty. If I lost my job, it will be problem for my children".
(Female Respondent)

"My husband works in a particular department. Once I told him that there is a influences on me from an authoritative person in our word. He scold me that, it as a

fault. He said, it happened because I wore causally and my way of behaviour gave the wrong impressions. After all, I got a transfer for another ward". (Female Respondent)

Another story told by a female attendant that "after my husband knew that there are some influence for me from the authoritative people in the ward, he all the time make the problems/fights/ with me and hit me to stop going to work" (Female Respondent)

These stories mention that, family, male householders or their victims' husbands do not support them to protect their rights. 20 respondents point out; the only stable income for their families is their job. 14 respondents are female headed house holders and they have to feed their children and the adults. Thereby, none of them prefer to lose their job whether there are number of violence.

Sri Lanka is one of the states with better environment for protecting women's rights. Decision makers and implementers in the top level bring up the policies and programs for fulfilling the women needs and preserve their rights. But, absent of a bridge between the victims and the policy makers and the problems of punishing the victimisers and political, economical interferences are related to mount up the GBVs. Initiative responds from the intuitions for protecting women's rights are effective less. For instance, the ministry of Women's affairs website implies the wrong contact numbers. Sri Lankan informal education system does not provide information on self -defence. Absent of choice for stable employments keep women silently in the mode of GBVs. The system for recruitments and promotions should be re-arranged. Equality and liberty for employing should be guaranteed.

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