

There are various pressing concerns in International Human Rights Law but one that I feel very strongly about is domestic violence against women globally. This topic holds vital importance to me, as this sickening conduct is essentially a norm in my home country, Pakistan.

In the 1990s, the UN adopted several treaties and resolutions to help combat this issue. However, despite international laws being in place, the local and judicial authorities are not implementing them as required. It was only this year that Pakistan's justice system decided to set up special courts to tackle domestic violence. However, such violence goes unreported even today, especially in rural areas of Pakistan where poverty and societal stigma prevents women from speaking out against the abuse. In a recent survey carried out by the Thompson Reuters Foundation, Pakistan ranked at number 6 for most dangerous country for women globally.

Home is the one place where we should feel the safest at. A lot of work needs to be done in terms of introduction and implementation of laws that firstly, define what amounts to domestic violence as this violence is not just physical but also mental and emotional and there should be laws in place protecting women from such kinds of violence at home. Secondly, I feel the justice system should keep cultural and religious norms aside when giving verdicts on domestic violence cases. Recently in China, a judge gave a verdict in a domestic violence case stating that the beating the women had suffered was not chronic enough to constitute as domestic violence and the women's plea for a divorce was denied on the basis of 'marriage being a traditional value' and hence, prompting the couple to give it another chance at making amends. If such values were to not interfere in the decision making process, women would have a greater chance in getting out of an abusive marriage easily. It is vital to pass and implement local legislation to protect not just women rights but also their lives in this case, as only then would these victims would feel safe at the place they call home.

One would assume that with a high literacy rate, the number of domestic violence cases would decrease as education enhances awareness, which should technically act as a barrier against abuse towards the 'weaker gender'. However, in a country like India, where the literacy rate is over 70%, domestic violence is still very much practiced. In the same survey by the Thomas Reuters Foundation, India was ranked as the most dangerous country for women in the world. So depending on education to help decrease rates of domestic violence in a country is rather naïve as it will take several decades to change the mind sets of people and their traditions and practices. Hence, I feel it is crucial for governmental authorities to provide women with all the legal and financial aid required to bring these cases to court. Many women do not report these cases as in countries such as Pakistan and India – here generally men are the sole breadwinners in the family and these women are heavily dependent on their husbands. Getting a divorce could also mean not being able to put food on their plates and that is a risk not many women there are willing to take. Hence, they give in to the abuse and learn to accept it as a way of life and try avoiding things that trigger their husband's anger – the issue is not halted rather suppressed.

We may call it oppression or mere helplessness but putting a label on it is not the answer. Awareness and more importantly, proper implementation and execution of legislation is a far more effective and favourable means to an end.