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India tackles domestic violence

A landmark new law seeking to protect women from domestic violence has come into effect in India.



Women protest in Delhi against a rise in domestic violence

The law also bans harassment by way of dowry demands and gives sweeping powers to a magistrate to issue protection orders where needed.

Punishment could range from a jail term of up to one year and/or a fine of up to 20,000 rupees (\$450).

Every six hours, a young married woman is burned, beaten to death or driven to commit suicide, officials say.

Overall, a crime against women is committed every three minutes in India, according to India's National Crime Records Bureau.

Despite the scale of the problem, there had been no specific legislation to deal with actual abuse or the threat of abuse at home.

Domestic violence, under the new law, includes "actual abuse or the threat of abuse whether physical, sexual, emotional or economic," a statement from the federal ministry of women and child development said.

Wall of silence

The law provides protection to the wife or live-in partner from violence at the hands of the husband or live-in partner or his relatives.

Besides physical violence, the law also covers forcing a wife or partner to look at pornography.

"We have been trying for long to protect women from domestic violence. In India alone, around 70% of women are victim of these violent acts in one or the other form," junior minister for women and child

INDIA: CRIME AGAINST WOMEN

- One crime against women every three minutes
- One rape every 29 minutes
- One dowry death case every 77 minutes
- One case of cruelty by husband and relatives every nine minutes

Source: National Crime Records Bureau

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development Renuka Chowdhury told the Press Trust of India news agency.

She said the news law would help provide relief to the women suffering from domestic violence.

Women's activists have welcomed the law, although many say it is not perfect.

They say a bill alone will not help in preventing domestic abuse; what is needed is a change in mind sets.

A survey by the International Institute for Population Studies showed 56% of Indian women believed wife beating to be justified in certain circumstances.

The reasons varied from going out without the husband's permission to cooking a bad meal.

Domestic abuse is often denied by the victims themselves.

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