

Sri Lanka: Rights groups slam domestic violence-related service providers

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Take Police and others to task over unapproachability and inefficiency

Following the recent murder of a woman in Kurunegala by her husband from whom she was separated, the Stand Up Movement in Sri Lanka and the Kurunegala Ethugalpura Women's Movement highlighted the severe unapproachability and inefficiency of police stations and others who provide services to victims of domestic violence.

"We have recognised this problem in service providers, especially police stations, including Women's Help Desks, who, instead of helping women, act in such a way that leads to bigger problems. In the recent murder of a woman from Kurunegala, a court had ordered her husband to move out of her home. However, he had taken up residency in a house close to her and had continued to harass her. She had complained to the Police twice about this. On the day she had come back from the police station after her second complaint, the man in question had entered her house and killed her in front of her daughter. This is clearly a problem with the Police," Stand Up Movement Sri Lanka Founder Ashila Dandeniya told *The Morning* yesterday (17).

The Stand Up Movement and the Kurunegala Ethugalpura Women's Movement held a media briefing earlier this week to raise awareness about the issue.

"There is no point in having a Women's Help Desk in police stations when it operates only during limited hours and is mostly handled by a male police officer. Domestic violence cases are hardly ever reported to this desk due to the harassment faced by women even at this level. And once complaints are made, it is not dealt with the importance and urgency required in order to protect women," said Dandeniya at the press conference.

Furthermore, Dandeniya told *The Morning* that this negligence towards issues of domestic violence is worsened when class and employment-related factors are taken into consideration. "Especially in places like the Free Trade Zones, women's complaints are not regarded in the slightest by the law enforcement officials. In the case of the murder in Kurunegala, the husband was a former soldier and they had been living in the Ranaviru Village in Kurunegala. Complaints from there are not often regarded with importance by the Police," claimed Dandeniya.

Pamodi Waravita

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