



PHOTO: UN Women

ENGLISH

PROTECTION AND SUPPORT SERVICES HELP VIOLENCE SURVIVORS HEAL AND MOVE ON

• STORIES OF CHANGE SERIES

One of the added tragedies of violence against women is that those who experience it often feel they have nowhere to turn for help. Instead they continue suffering in silence and some of them do not survive. In Afghanistan, Women's Protection Centres are providing a safe haven, training and support for women survivors of violence, and their children. For Lalbib^{*} and Najiba^{*}, being able to access this support likely saved their lives.

From the time 19-year-old Najiba's^{*} father ordered her to marry a man of his choice, she lived in fear. When she rejected that marriage, things got even worse and she became a prisoner in her own home.

Concerned for Najiba's safety, her mother helped her escape the house and, along with Najiba's brother, went with her to make sure she arrived safely. The Department of Women's Affairs referred them to one of

the Women's Protection Centres funded by UN Women where they were able to access a safe place to stay and support services.

The Centre also reached out to Najiba's father via the local elders. After counselling and mediation, he changed his mind, conceding that she could choose who to marry and that he would leave the Taliban and participate in the government's peace process.

Najiba and her family returned home and she has joined the Police Academy.

"One of the worst incidents of my life was also the one that helped me realise that if I had not run away, my life would have been miserable," Najiba says.

Years of war and insecurity have deepened the culture of violence in Afghanistan, exposing women to continued

UN WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN

Location: Office in Kabul, active country-wide

Programme sectors: Normative support; violence prevention and protection; national planning; economic empowerment; leadership and participation.

Key donors: The Governments of Australia, Belgium, Iceland, Italy, Korea, Norway, Netherlands and Sweden.

Women's Protection Centres: UN Women supports 11 centres in nine provinces, providing more than 2,860 women and children affected by violence with a safe

haven, legal support and vocational training.

Survivors Empowerment Journey: This programme takes a holistic approach to empowering women survivors of violence through survivor-centric protection services and economic empowerment, while also fostering an enabling environment for community-level prevention and legal reform.

violence in public and private spaces, and undermining the rule of law. Around 87% of women in Afghanistan experience some kind of violence during their lifetime, mostly at the hands of the family members and people who claim to love them the most.

As the bearer of their families' honour, women are both valuable and vulnerable in the family, paving the way for brutal punishments of suspected transgressions against social and moral taboos through traditional justice systems operating outside the law.

The violence includes: early and forced marriages (including baad, the exchange of girls for dispute resolution); so-called honour crimes; rape and murder; sexual harassment in the workplace and in public spaces; and self-immolation and self-harm linked to experiences of violence. Around 62% of women report experiencing multiple forms of violence. A sense of isolation and fear of retribution means that many women do not seek help or pursue their cases through the formal justice system.



PHOTO: UNAMA/Fraidoon Poya

“One of the worst incidents of my life was also the one that helped me realise that if I had not run away, my life would have been miserable.”

Najiba*, Kunduz

Eliminating violence against women requires a complex web of services and activities that work to protect women, prevent violence occurring in the first place and put in place processes that ensure women can get access to justice. UN Women supports 11 Women's Protection Centres in nine provinces, not only helping women escape their abuse and recover, but also working to change the attitudes of their families and communities.

When Lalbibi was abducted and gang-raped repeatedly for five days by the local policemen in Kunduz, no one in her community offered support and her family. In fact, they were threatened by the perpetrators to stop them from making a complaint. Instead, Lalbibi and her family turned to a UN Women-funded Women's Protection Centre. They received psychosocial support and Lalbibi was provided with a lawyer to help formally pursue her case through the justice system.

As a result, all eight of her attackers were arrested and sentenced to serve time in prison. With the support of the Women's Protection Centre's programme, several elders from Lalbibi's community also came forward with promises to stand up for her and protect her from being stigmatised within her community so that she could return to her home, heal and move forward. Lalbibi is now back home in Kunduz with her parents, able to smile again.

*Names have been changed to protect identity

74%

of women in Afghanistan reported experiencing psychological violence during their lifetime, mostly from their husbands.

39%

of women in Afghanistan say their husband has hit them in the past year. Around 52% of women experience physical violence in their lifetime.

91%

of women in Afghanistan's Khost Province report being in a forced marriage.

ALL STATISTICS SOURCED FROM Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, *Violence against women and girls in Afghanistan, 2013*

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