

Morocco: Women battle against domestic abuse

Source:

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Countless Moroccan women, continue to face abuse and sexual violence at the hands of their husbands. About 6 million women in Morocco are victims of violence, or around one in three. Morocco's Social Development Minister Bassima Hakkaoui, the only female minister in the country, said last week that she would try to push forward a law protecting women that has been stuck in Parliament for 8 years.

The bruises on her wrists so the signs of struggle. Her still blue tinted eyes show the marks of a fist. For Khadija, and countless other Moroccan women, she continues to face abuse and sexual violence at the hands of her husband.

"If I don't do what he says or refuse sex, he beats me and attacks me," she told Bikyanews.com at a local women's shelter in Casablanca. "He then will force himself on me, but there is nothing I can do because it is isn't illegal for him to force sex on me."

She is getting treatment for the first time after she ran away from home. At 24-years-old she is thankful that she has no children. And she is determined not to go back.

"I can't go back to my husband. I don't want to be treated like that and thankfully Morocco has these places to be safe," she said.

Her story is one of many in Morocco, and here at this makeshift home run by a Moroccan couple who told Bikyanews.com that "we just wanted to offer a place for women who are beaten to be safe."

The "safe house" is secretive and word-of-mouth has seen it fill up in recent months with women needing shelter.

The husband and wife team that own the flat believe that by giving an outlet to younger women who face domestic violence, they can bring attention to a problem that continues to afflict women in the country.

"It is our goal to be there for people in need," said the husband, Ibrahim, who added that he and his wife had met too many women beaten and abused by their spouses to remain silent.

"It was the right thing to do," he added.

And the government is finally taking notice. Morocco's Social Development Minister Bassima Hakkaoui, the only female minister in the country, said last week that she would try to push forward a law protecting women that has been stuck in Parliament for 8 years.

"Despite all efforts, violence against women is still widespread," she said at the opening of a regional conference on the subject. "Violence against wives represents 50 percent of all attacks against women."

According to statistics from her ministry, 6 million women in Morocco are victims of violence, or around one in three.

In March, the suicide of a 16-year-old girl who was forced to marry the man she said had raped her made international headlines and once again put the spotlight on Morocco's penal system.

Amina al-Filali poisoned herself after several months of what her parents described as an abusive marriage to a man they said had raped her in the woods as she was returning from school.

Hakkaoui, a member of a moderate Islamist party that dominated the country's election in November, has been criticized for not doing enough to protect women, including changing the law allowing rapists to be exonerated if they marry their victim.

While the official marriage age is 18, judges can approve much younger unions, which are common in rural areas that are poor and deeply traditional.

Morocco updated its family code in 2004 to improve the situation of women, but activists say more still needs to be done.

Women in Morocco are finally taking action and the efforts of places like this safe house, one of many in the city, aims to create a better society and care for women battered by their spouses.

"I thank God that this place exists. I don't know what would happen if it didn't. Maybe I would just kill myself to end the misery," added Khadija as her cuts and bruises were being mended.