



Canada

WE ARE WITH HER
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FOR A VIOLENCE FREE SRI LANKA





IN SRI LANKA,

1 IN 5

EVER PARTNERED WOMEN

HAVE EXPERIENCED PHYSICAL
AND/OR SEXUAL **VIOLENCE BY AN**
INTIMATE PARTNER IN THEIR LIFETIME

Violence can impact women physically, psychologically and economically, and has serious implications on their health, their families, and communities. Responding to this violence requires a range of interlinked actions.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) together with the Government of Canada in partnership with the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Pre-schools and Primary Education, School Infrastructure and Education Service is working towards improving services and support for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

Every individual featured in this publication passionately contributed to improving services for SGBV survivors in Sri Lanka, both at National and Sub-National levels in the Mannar and Hambantota districts through the project titled 'We Are With Her'. This is a two and a half year project aimed at positioning public sector officials as advocates working to address violence against women and girls.

A portrait of Ritsu Nacken, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a blue and red patterned scarf and a black top. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

**EVEN ONE WOMAN
OR GIRL SUFFERING
FROM VIOLENCE
IS ONE TOO MANY,
AND TOGETHER WITH
OUR PARTNERS,
UNFPA CONTINUES TO
WORK TOWARDS
A VIOLENCE-FREE
SRI LANKA.**

Ritsu Nacken
UNFPA Representative, Sri Lanka

“It’s high time we talk about rape,” says Ritsu Nacken, UNFPA Representative, Sri Lanka, and Country Director, Maldives.

“Whether it is intimate partner rape, or assaults on minority groups, including sexual minorities, at the heart of it all is the issue of individual agency and bodily autonomy.

THIS IS ABOUT RESPECTING A
PERSON’S AGENCY, AND THEIR

RIGHT TO
SAY NO,
WHATEVER THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

It takes courage to come forward, and those in authority need to know how to respond and coordinate with each other to ensure SGBV survivors don’t fall between the gaps or are re-victimised. For the state, a critical step will be to allocate more funds in the national budget to provide vital services including the enhancement of shelters for victims/survivors of violence.

Each instance of SGBV is an instance of someone’s rights and dignity being violated. Each case is preventing someone from realising their full potential,” says Ritsu.



**WHAT WORKS IN
CANADA, MAY NOT
WORK IN SRI LANKA.
YOU CAN'T JUST
TRANSFER SOLUTIONS
FROM ONE PLACE
TO ANOTHER,
UNLESS YOU'VE
ADJUSTED THEM
TO THE LOCAL
CONTEXT.**

H.E David McKinnon

High Commissioner of Canada to Sri Lanka and
the Maldives

“Gender has been at the heart of Canada’s development work for decades with renewed focus in recent years under our Feminist International Assistance Policy,” says H.E. David McKinnon, High Commissioner of Canada to Sri Lanka and the Maldives. While emphasizing the important role of women and girls as agents of change, he notes the critical importance of engaging men and boys in addressing SGBV.

MEN AND BOYS ARE PART OF THE PROBLEM, BUT ALSO PART OF THE SOLUTION.

To help Sri Lanka respond more effectively to SGBV, the Government of Canada is supporting UNFPA and the Department of Census and Statistics to gather evidence on cases of violence. “It’s very important to give policymakers such tools to make the right decisions so that they can identify local solutions to address local challenges.”

**PRECISE DECISIONS,
ESTABLISHED LAWS
& ORDERS, AND
WELL-FORMULATED
MECHANISMS WILL
HELP WOMEN MOVE
FORWARD IN A
BETTER AND SAFER
SRI LANKA DEVOID
OF GENDER-BASED
VIOLENCE.**

K. M. S. D. Jayasekara

State Secretary of State Ministry of Women and
Child Development, Pre-schools and Primary Education,
School Infrastructure and Education Service



In this pandemic situation, I strongly believe in the need for raising awareness on the importance of

**FAMILY, SURVIVOR-CENTERED
COORDINATED APPROACHES
THROUGH MULTI-STAKEHOLDER
SERVICE PROVIDERS, AND SAFE
SHELTERS**

**FOR VICTIMS
OF VIOLENCE.**

Continuous follow up mechanisms on victimized and non-victimized women in society will help ensure the protection of women and girls from all forms of violence.



“

WE SHOULD GO BEYOND THE USUAL AND TRADITIONAL WAYS OF RAISING-AWARENESS, AND USE MORE EFFECTIVE TECHNIQUES SUCH AS SOCIAL MEDIA, AND THE INTERNET. WE SHOULD GO TO THE COMMUNITIES WITH MORE VISUAL METHODS SUCH AS TELEDRAMAS, FILMS, AND STREET DRAMAS, RATHER THAN JUST TALKING.

”

M.V. H. Dayarathna

Grama Niladhari, Lunugamwehera Divisional Secretariat



“PEOPLE OFTEN THINK THAT
RAPE IS THE VICTIM’S FAULT:

**WHAT WAS THE
WOMAN DOING?
WHAT WAS SHE
WEARING? WAS SHE
WALKING ALONE?**

They don’t think of the woman’s rights due to this stereotypical mind-set,” says M.V. H. Dayarathna, a Grama Niladhari in the Lunugamwehera Divisional Secretariat.

Dayarathna thinks the solution is a strong victim-centric approach to providing justice in a timely and sensitive way. To achieve this, authorities across several sectors including health, law and order, and social services must coordinate their efforts. Dayarathna also notes that underreporting, including instances of marital rape, should be addressed. He hopes a different approach could change attitudes on the ground.

“

**COMMUNITY
POWER CAN BE
USED AS THE MOST
POWERFUL TOOL
TO SUPPRESS THE
TENDENCY TOWARDS
COMMITTING
VIOLENCE.**

”

Dr. Rahal Rajapaksa
Ministry of Health

Dr. Rahal Rajapaksa worries about the adverse impact sexual violence can have on children. Rahal, who works with the Ministry of Health, explains that SGBV can take many different forms, including physical, verbal, sexual, and psychological. “Any such violence can have an impact on the future well-being, personality development, and mental development of a child,” he says.

Children who are affected by SGBV can carry around a profound fear, and experience physical and mental collapse. They might rebel against the society that failed to protect them. “Whatever the way they are harassed, their experience has an impact on their future family life,” says Rahal.

MANY TYPES OF RESEARCH HAVE POINTED OUT THAT **THE FAMILY BACKGROUND HAS**

**AN IMMENSE IMPACT
ON THE BEHAVIOUR
PATTERNS OF A CHILD.**

For him, the solution must include transforming societal attitudes by bringing communities together. From parents to counsellors to healthcare professionals and legal aid, everyone has a role to play.



“ IN THE PAST, THERE HAVE BEEN INSTANCES WHERE RAPE VICTIMS HAVE BEEN RAPED MULTIPLE TIMES BEFORE THEY REACHED COURT. WOMEN HAVE BEEN REPEATEDLY RE-VICTIMIZED BY AN UNCARING SYSTEM. TODAY, CHILDREN AND WOMEN ARE AWARE THAT THERE IS A DEDICATED POLICE UNIT AND THAT THEY CAN REPORT TO WOMEN POLICE OFFICERS. ”

ASP Lanka Rajani Amarasena
Child and Women Bureau, Sri Lanka Police



Superintendent of Police, Lanka Rajani Amarasena is proud of what the Children's and Women's Bureau of Police has accomplished. Developed into a separate police division in 1998, the Department is designed to support women and children at their most vulnerable. "Today, we provide a very progressive service," says Rajani. However, she also highlights the need for improved infrastructure in police stations to be more women and child-friendly.

Rajani and her team are also finding new threats emerging. "The Internet is a space with limitless freedom," she says.

"SOMETIMES, THE **PERPETRATORS** ARE
**FAR AHEAD OF US
IN TECHNOLOGICAL
KNOW-HOW."**

In response, Rajani's Department is raising awareness around cyber and computer-related SGBV and cybersecurity and is planning to launch an internet-based crime surveillance unit.

Rajani is hopeful that as more women join the police force and receive training, they will be able to provide greater support to SGBV survivors.

**“DURING THE WAR,
LONG-STANDING SOCIAL
NETWORKS DISINTEGRATED
AS PEOPLE FLED THEIR HOMES,
AND WHEN THE FIGHTING
WAS OVER, WOMEN FOUND
THEMSELVES SIMPLY STRUGGLING
TO EARN A LIVING. MANY TODAY
LIVE WITH HIGH LEVELS OF DEBT.”**

Kurushanthan Mahaluxmy

District Coordinator, Women's Development Federation, Mannar





Kurushanthan Mahaluxmy believes that all women and girls deserve to be safe and free.

“MY SERVICE AS A **WOMAN** GOES
**BEYOND RELIGION,
ETHNICITY, AND
CULTURE.”**

“People who have been displaced by the war have lost their lives, property, education, and culture,” she says.

Having once been displaced herself, she knows what challenges other displaced women face including women headed households.

For Mahaluxmy, such structural inequalities feed into SGBV. Determined to help survivors, Mahaluxmy today works as a District Coordinator at the Women’s Development Federation in Mannar, and also serves as an active board member of the Women’s Action Network and a patron of the Muslim Women’s Trust Organization. In her work, she helps survivors gain access to legal services, connects both survivors and perpetrators with mental health services, and says they remain committed to active monitoring and data collection.



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**RAISING AWARENESS
AMONG NEWLY MARRIED
COUPLES IS ALSO AN
EFFECTIVE STRATEGY
BECAUSE EVEN WITHIN
MARRIED LIFE,
RAPE (MARITAL RAPE)
AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT
CAN TAKE PLACE.**

”

Thushari Mangalika

Women's Development Officer, Hambantota





**“I HAVE COME TO REALIZE THAT THERE IS
NO ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, OR GEOGRAPHICAL
DISPARITY IN TERMS OF**

**WOMEN BEING
SUBJECTED TO
VIOLENCE. I HAVE MET
SURVIVORS FROM ALL
BACKGROUNDS.”**

says Thushari Mangalika, as she reflects on the lessons she has learned through her 14 years of experience at the Divisional and District Secretariat level as a Women’s Development Officer. Another lesson Thushari has embraced is that prevention is always better. In this context, she sees the social services sector as a vital player in preventing rape and sexual violence.

Thushari shares her belief that it is important that we start talking about SGBV early on. “We must also recognize that it can impact men and boys in the form of mental and emotional violence,” she says.



“

**WE PRACTICE
A KEY POLICY
THAT EVERYBODY
HAS A RIGHT
TO ENJOY
A DIGNIFIED
LIFE.**

”

Nadeeka Gamage

Representative, Legal Aid Commission, Lunugamwehera



After eight years of working as the Legal Aid Commission's Representative in Lunugamwehera, Nadeeka Gamage understands why people are very reluctant to report a rape. "There are many reasons for this," she says, "there can be a lack of trust in the law, they may experience shame or be cautious of long term legal processes, they may be worried about their standing in society or fear re-victimization, or fear facing other issues in their personal life. Many also lack confidence in the police and other services."

THE LEGAL AID COMMISSION PROVIDES
FREE LEGAL ASSISTANCE AND
SERVICES TO VICTIM-SURVIVORS OF

SEXUAL AND GENDER- BASED VIOLENCE IN LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

while also raising awareness in the community around the legal aspects of the issue. She says that "such issues should be everyone's concern. For a crime affects not only the victim, but disturbs the entire society."



“

SOME MALE SURVIVORS OF SGBV HAVE LEFT SCHOOL JEOPARDIZING THEIR EDUCATION. ENTIRE FAMILIES HAVE ALSO BEEN IMPACTED DUE TO LOSS OF LIVELIHOOD STEMMING FROM THE SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION OF A HUSBAND, FATHER, OR SON.

”

S. Gunapalan

Former Additional District Secretary, Mannar



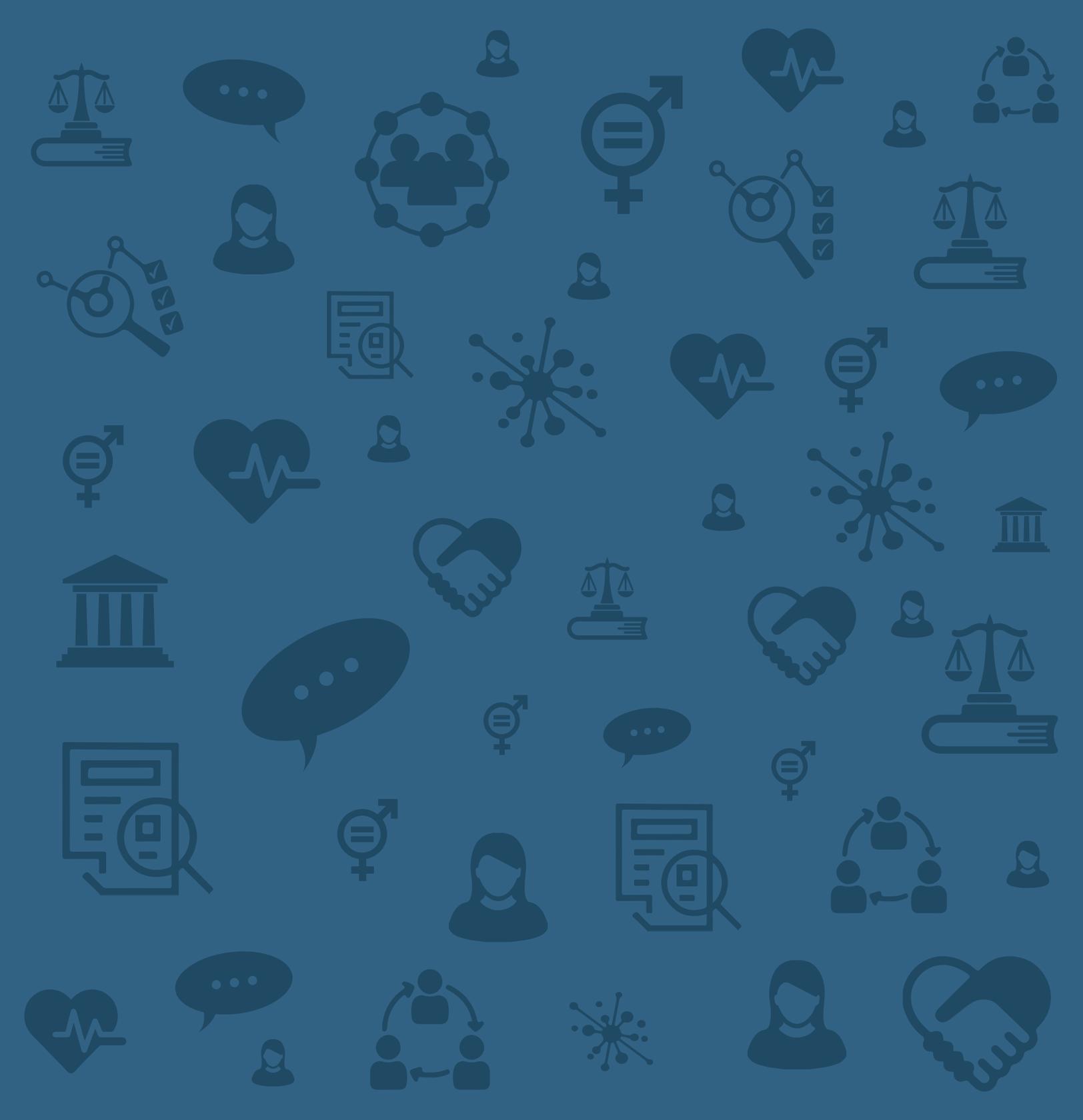


In 2018, 54 cases of SGBV were reported in the Mannar District. In 2019, that number almost tripled, says S. Gunapalan, the Additional District Secretary of the Mannar District. He knows this increase in reporting is also an indicator of progress, as survivors increasingly reach out to authorities for support. However, he highlights the challenges:

“WE HAVE VERY FEW FEMALE CONSTABLES WORKING IN MANNAR AND VERY FEW TAMIL-SPEAKING POLICE IN AN AREA WHERE THE MAJORITY ARE TAMIL-SPEAKING.

THIS IS A BIG CHALLENGE FOR US.”

The risk of ignoring SGBV is crushing. Gunapalan and his team have seen the consequences of physical assault resulting in severe, and in some cases, lifelong injuries. Gunapalan also seeks to broaden public understanding of SGBV to include male survivors of violence. “Economically, survivors face numerous impediments to employment due to poor mental health, community marginalization, or compromised physical health,” he says.



“

**I'M VERY HAPPY TO
WORK AS A WOMEN'S
DEVELOPMENT OFFICER
BECAUSE I KNOW
THAT MY SMALL
CONTRIBUTION CAN
HELP CHANGE
A PERSON'S LIFE.**

L. Thayananthi
Former Women's Development Officer, Mannar

”





**“IN OUR SOCIETY, WE THINK THAT
WOMEN ARE TO BE**

**BLAMED FOR THEIR
ACTIONS WHEN
THEY EXPERIENCE
VIOLENCE.”**

says L. Thayanthy, a Women’s Development Officer in the Mannar District. “There are even officials who feel uncomfortable talking about sexual violence.”

Over the years, Thayanthy has come to see SGBV as an extreme form of discrimination and a serious human rights violation, which can threaten the right to life, liberty, and security of a person, as well as their right to freedom.

In this context, Divisional level women’s federations, such as the one that Thayanthy belongs to, can play a key role in raising awareness around the social, economic, and political empowerment of women, and in directing women to the services they most need.

This publication released in 2021, contains excerpts from a campaign conducted during the period of 16 days of Activism in 2019, reflecting the project '**Addressing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence through Public Institutions**'. As such designations and placements of certain officers have changed.