

NO ONE DESERVES TO BE BATTERED, 10 JAN 2013

Within the past two weeks, a woman in Alor Setar, Kedah was murdered and a woman in Kangar, Perlis was severely battered, reportedly by their jealous husbands. This is unacceptable.

On 7 January 2013, Kosmo! reported that a 27-year-old woman in Kangar was hospitalised after her husband attacked her using a chair, a stone mortar, a picture frame, and a knife, because he suspected infidelity. On 29 December 2012, The Star reported that a 17-year-old girl in AlorSetar was battered to death with a blunt object, apparently by her husband who also suspected infidelity.

Domestic violence survivors often face multiple acts of abuse over a period of time. Surely more preventive measures could have been taken before the situations escalated to hospitalisation and murder. The 27-year-old woman in Kangar said she was beaten weekly before she was finally hospitalised, creating multiple opportunities for intervention be it by the family, community, police, doctors, or religious figures.

Three to four thousand cases of domestic violence are reported each year. This is undoubtedly a small fraction of the actual number of incidents. A Women's Aid Organisation study estimated that 36% of women in Malaysia experienced domestic violence. Though this study was published in 1995, this estimate is consistent with contemporary studies of domestic violence prevalence in other countries. None of these women deserve to be battered, more so die.

We all have a role to play in combating domestic violence. The government must improve the enforcement of the Domestic Violence Act (DVA), particularly in the following areas:

- Effective and uniform enforcement of the positive amendments made to the DVA in late 2011, which recognise psychological violence as a form of domestic violence, and make domestic violence a seizable offence.
- Interim protection orders must be more descriptive to clarify what a perpetrator cannot do, instead of simply stating that the perpetrator must desist "from using domestic violence" ("dihalangdaripadamenggunakankeganasanrumahtangga").

The language employed by the media in their reporting of these situations is also something we find deeply troubling. Phrases such as "Wanita disyaki curang dibelasah" (Woman suspected of cheating beaten up) and "Rahsia kecurangan isterinya terbongkar" (The secret's out: the wife's a cheater) insinuate a lack of sympathy with the victim and instead supports the unacceptable notion that the violence was deserved and justified.

Domestic violence is a crime, not a private matter. As neighbours, friends, and members of a community, we too have a responsibility to speak up. If we suspect abuse, the police must be called immediately. No matter what the reason, no one deserves to be battered.

Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG), which comprises:

Women's Aid Organisation (WAO)

Sisters in Islam (SIS)

All Women's Action Society (AWAM)

Perak Women for Women Society (PWW)

Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER)

Persatuan Sahabat Wanita Selangor

Sabah Women Action Resource Group (SAWO)

Women's Centre for Change (WCC)