

Sexual violence: a global awakening, from India



Corbis

The rape and murder of a 23-year-old female physiotherapy student from Delhi—six men have been arrested for the attack, which took place on Dec 16—has rightly caused outrage and anguish across India. Immediately after her death, following treatment in a hospital in Singapore, Delhi was locked down by police to prevent outbreaks of public protest. Despite these measures, thousands of Indian citizens took part in peaceful vigils to express their anger at the violence inflicted against this young student, as well as the harassment experienced daily by thousands of Indian women.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has called for “a constructive course of action”. But there is agreement that India has failed to address a pervasive culture of sexual violence and gender injustice. This political neglect has created a permissive environment where men can rape, beat, and kill a woman with impunity. India is a respected democracy that has delivered phenomenal economic success for its growing middle class. But the country’s inattention to fundamental

protections and liberties for its citizens reveals a nation facing a moral turning point. We endorse the campaign by the *The Times of India* and others to address “the lack of respect for women in our patriarchal society”.

Yet it would be a grievous error to conclude that sexual violence is a predicament confined to India. It is not. Rape and other forms of violence against women and girls are a feature of all societies. In South Africa, for example, as many as a third of men have taken part in acts of rape.

As a first step, sexual violence must be acknowledged as a reality by all of us, and its causes discussed. We must support the creation of safe systems for preventing, reporting, and remedying acts of sexual violence. As advocates for women’s health, health professionals have a special role in defeating rape. It’s time we exercised our voice more strongly. The greatest respect we can give to the memory of the Indian student who died on Dec 29 is by protecting and strengthening the political and social rights of women worldwide. ■ *The Lancet*

For *The Times of India*’s campaign on respect for women see <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Honour-Nirbhaya-by-making-this-pledge/campaigntoi.cms>

Opening up about mental health



Corbis

For too long, people with severe mental illnesses in the UK have received poor care, according to Care and Support Minister, Norman Lamb. To improve services, the government has pledged £1.2 million to a pilot scheme in which six National Health Service sites will implement the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence’s recommendations for psychological treatments for people with psychosis, personality disorders, or bipolar disorder. The scheme, running throughout 2013–14, is designed to give patients more choice in the care they receive. The sites involved—already leaders in mental health care—will share good practice with other services and provide data to show if and how improvements in services lead to clinical and economic benefits.

Access to services is an important issue, and the UK Government deserves praise for its efforts. However, in an Article in this issue of *The Lancet*, Antonio Lasalvia and colleagues provide a stark reminder of how much work remains to be done to support people with mental illnesses. They report findings from a survey

of discrimination experienced or expected by people with major depressive disorder. 1082 people from 35 countries took part in the study; 79% had experienced some form of discrimination, with about a third stating that they had been shunned or avoided because of their illness. Roughly 70% of participants kept their diagnosis secret. Furthermore, as highlighted in a linked Comment, 20–37% of respondents stopped themselves from having a close personal relationship or applying for work or training because they expected to experience discrimination.

That people with mental health problems are limited not only by their illness, but also by the reactions they fear from other people, is a poor reflection of society. The government needs to continue to support mental health care to ensure that people get the treatment they need. All of us—who, whether we know it or not, are probably the family, friend, or colleague of someone with a mental illness—should strive to provide a supportive environment in which everyone can fulfil their potential without fear of stigma. ■ *The Lancet*

See *Articles* page 55