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More women killed in gender violence than armed conflicts in parts of Asia – expert

In India over 8,000 women are killed every year over dowry disputes.

By Ben Lih Yi

Thomas Reuters Foundation (13.10.2017) - <http://tmsnrt.rs/2hOJjq7> - Gender-based violence is emerging as one of the deadliest forms of violence in Asia and it has killed more women than armed conflicts in some parts of the region, an expert on conflict said on Friday, calling for more attention to the issue.

Researcher Patrick Barron of the U.S.-based non-profit The Asia Foundation said a two-year study on conflicts and violence revealed violence against women in Asia has greater - and more deadly - impacts than previously thought.

In India for example, the study showed over 8,000 women were killed every year over dowry disputes - a figure far higher than the 278 who died in a Maoist rebellion in eastern India last year.

"The evidence is not absolute but it certainly suggested that gender-based violence is one of the largest killers in Asia - if not the largest," Barron told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone from Washington.

"We see a rise in violence as women assert their rights," the group's conflict and development regional director added.

He said the trend was also seen in Nepal, where gender-based violence has become the deadliest form of violence this year.

"Honour" killings, dowry-related deaths and the lynching of women branded as witches have persisted in some parts of South Asia, including India and Pakistan, despite years of campaign to halt these practices.

An archaic practice of banishing menstruating girls and women to sheds during their period also persists in remote parts of Nepal, resulting in some dying from attacks by wild animals or from snake bites.

Barron said the study released on Thursday also showed gender-based violence is becoming the deadliest threat to women in Southeast Asian nations such as Indonesia and East Timor but a lack of data hampers a definitive conclusion.

"The problem is a lot of gender-based violence happens within households and because of cultural norms against reporting it, a lot of it goes unreported," he said.

Barron said he hoped the findings will spur lawmakers into action to tackle the problem.

Dowries - often in the form of jewellery, cars or money - are given by the bride's family to the groom and his parents, traditionally to ensure the bride will be looked after in her new home.

The custom has been outlawed in India but still widely practised. Disputes erupt when the groom's family demanding more money after marriage, often driving the woman to suicide and in the worst cases, she is murdered by her husband and family.
