

Many women in Morocco face abuse at home, some are now speaking out

Euronews.com (10.06.2019) – <https://bit.ly/31skVRr> – Bearing pictures of scars and bruises she said she had suffered at home, Fatna Ben Ghala sought help at a women's counselling centre in a poor neighbourhood near Morocco's capital Rabat after she and her mother endured domestic violence by a relative.

The case of Ben Ghala, 40, and her mother was not unusual. Some 54.4% percent of women, amounting to millions in a country with a population of about 35 million, have been subjected to violence, according to a survey released last month by the Solidarity, Family and Social Development Ministry.

The survey, which showed the 25-29 age group is most vulnerable, also pointed up the amount of work to be done to remedy the abuse. Only 28.2% of abused women have spoken to a person or an institution about their suffering and only 6.6% have brought their case before justice, the survey said.

Ben Ghala said she was referred to the Araafa listening and counselling centre after she went to the hospital to seek treatment for her injuries.

“We live under oppression and we live in pain. The blow I

received in my head deteriorated my vision," she said. Ben Ghala did not identify the relative who she said had abused her.

The Araafa centre can help only a small proportion of the women who say they have been abused. Last year, it offered advice to 146 women subjected to all kinds of violence and abuse. Morocco has dozens of such centres across the country.

"I had a miscarriage because of the beating and the mental pressures I was enduring," said Raja, an unemployed 19-year old, who said her husband had been violent and who now lives with her parents.

"I can't understand why that violence happened. Was it a habit or a mental illness or something else?," she said.

Charifa, 26, told Reuters she had been beaten by her husband, who expelled her from the house and prevented her from seeing her son and daughter, aged 7 and 6.

"I live now with my father and have no way of being next to my children who are not even registered in the family registry and hence unable to attend school like other children," she said, adding that her husband does not provide for the family.

Neither Raja nor Charifa identified their husbands.

'Much needs to be done'

Ben Ghala, Raja and Charifa would need to provide more evidence and bring witnesses to court to see the alleged perpetrators brought to justice.

However, it is very difficult to bring witnesses in domestic violence cases, which happens behind closed doors, as courts often dismiss the testimony of those who might hear but not see screaming, said Naima Saber, Araafa's director.

Morocco adopted a law in September last year criminalising domestic violence and various kinds of verbal and online harassment, "but much needs to be done in order to reduce evidence requirements," she said.

Women are also discouraged from bringing cases to court as they are often asked by other relatives and sometimes local officials to compromise for the sake of keeping the family together, said lawyer Houria Elhamss, who has handled such cases.

"This often prevents women from having access to justice," she said.

Solidarity, Family and Social Development Minister Bassima Hakkaoui told 2M TV channel on Sunday that the law criminalising violence against women has encouraged women to report and sue their aggressors.

“Several people were indicted by virtue of this law,” she said. But the rate of violence against women is “scary”, she said, adding it calls into question the role of education and the law.

“We ask woman to cooperate with us and to report violence