

Interview 7: SRI LANKA: Thamara

Mrs. Thamara is a mother who had to go to a police station to report a case of domestic violence.

What do you think of the policing system in your country?

In any police station, there are good officers and there are bad officers. Due to the bad behavior of many officers, they are all thought of as being bad. This is the impression that everyone has: that all police officers are bad. I think the policing system should be changed. A woman finds it difficult to go to a police station alone. When she does, the officers make inappropriate jokes and generally behave badly. We go to the police stations when we are in difficult situations, and often the reactions of the officers don't make us feel any better. So I think there should be changes in this system. Police officers who do wrong things should not be allowed to work as police officers. Right now, they may have to endure small punishments for wrong behavior, but there is no lasting change in how they act, and they continue to serve as police officers. The job of the police is to catch wrongdoers and punish them, but they themselves do wrong things and they are not punished. This doesn't make sense. Those officers who do wrong things should not be allowed to continue working as police officers.

What do you think about the use of torture?

The issue of torture is something that should be talked about more. A lot of innocent people go to police stations, are taken in and assaulted by the officers. What they should do is ask questions and find out what has happened so that they can take appropriate action, but instead they immediately resort to assaulting the suspect. I don't think this is correct; I really don't like what is happening. What they should do is look into things and then take the proper action. People have died at the police stations because of this. I don't approve of this kind of behavior.

What are your views on the public relations of the police?

Sometimes people react favorably to the police for good work that they do. But the police also take bribes and give assistance to known criminals. If I were to give them a bribe to have a person arrested and harassed, they would do that. That is not a good thing. Sometimes there are good relationships, but more often than not, they are doing bad things.

If you had a problem would you go to a police station to get help?

I can talk from my own experience here, as I have gone to the police station for a personal problem. When I went to the station, the officer who was dealing with this particular matter was not there. There was a good police officer on duty and he said: "You shouldn't come to the police station alone. That is very bad. You'd better go now and return with somebody later." As for my complaint, the police made some inquiries but they didn't do a good job on the case, and as a result there was no real justice. This was a case of domestic violence.

Is there a law against domestic violence in your country and what is your opinion of it?

I went through a domestic violence dispute, so I can tell you about my experience of this law. When I went to the station to complain, another woman was there talking about an incident in which her husband got drunk and beat her. The police went to arrest the man but returned, saying that they could not find him. Later, the woman returned to the police station to complain that the man was threatening to hurt her. The police officer said to her, "But you haven't actually been beaten up yet, you are only afraid that you will be beaten up? Come back to us after he beats you up." This is obviously not the right attitude. If the woman gets beaten up, or perhaps even killed, then what is the use of the police taking action then? A woman does not go to a police station just for fun. She goes because things are very bad and she is desperate. So in my opinion, the attitude of the police in this case was not correct at all.