

Interview 8: SRI LANKA: M. Pradeepa

Sister M. Pradeepa, 34, is from Trincomalee and works at the Ampitiya Convent in Kandy where she is involved with various projects involving children and the elderly. As a support staff member at a local human rights group, she also helps to shelter and assist young rape victims who take their cases through the courts.

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

The system should be different. We were just speaking about a young girl who was raped, but when she went to the police, they didn't file a report, instead, they sent her back home. They didn't take the case seriously. They knew what they should do; they have been through police training, and they knew what their job is. There was even a female officer there and she didn't do anything. The victim was just a schoolgirl, only 15 years old.

I think the police need more training on how they should handle people when they come to report an incident or crime. They must know that they have a responsibility to protect and safeguard people. It's not just a job; they have a duty to protect people. They need training that is not only physical, they need something more organized, something that will make them change their attitudes.

I don't have much experience in police stations but I have heard people say that when they have gone to the police station, the officers were not kind or helpful. I have heard that if you knew someone at the station, they will take your case and work on it right away and you will receive better treatment. But if you don't know someone, then you have to go again and again to get your work done.

What do you think about the use of torture?

Torture is very bad. As human beings, nobody has the right to torture anybody else. The police must find other ways of gaining information if a suspect doesn't seem to be telling the truth. I don't know how the police do things in other countries, but we should find out what people do in other places and use it to make our system better. The police should not torture people, no matter what people have done. As police officers, they must do their duty, but this does not mean using torture or violence of any kind. If a police officer tortures someone, then they are doing the same thing as the criminal; there is no difference. The police do not have the right to punish a person. The person should be taken to court, and after a judge should decide what will happen.

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

They should be respectful and kind to people. They shouldn't treat them like animals. I don't think that all police officers are like that, but in general, this is what I've heard. In any relationship, we have to show that person kindness and respect. People generally are afraid, or maybe indifferent. Nobody likes to go to the police station. Even if you go, you don't know if your case will be heard or not. If it is heard, you do not know that you will get fair treatment.

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

I would not be able to go by myself, I would ask a friend or family member to come with me. Since it's a big office, there would be lots of police and I'd need some company, so that I would have support. As a Sister, because of this garb, if I went they would treat me with some respect. They would see me and ask: "what is the matter Sister?" If I was a normal person, it wouldn't be the same story.

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

Domestic violence is forbidden. I have heard that it happens, but I don't know much about it. I have heard a great deal about parents treating their children unfairly and physical punishment is one kind of domestic violence. Sometimes husbands drink and then go home and beat their wives, especially men who don't go to work.

In our society, people don't like to take their problems outside of the home. Rape cases are often hushed up by the parents to keep the family's honor. They ignore such cases because they think they can protect the family name that way. If a woman is courageous and wants to stand up for herself, she would take her complaint to the police station. She might have problems with her husband, or her in-laws who might tell her not to go.

Women who are treated badly should not keep quiet or just accept it for the peace of the family. It is not correct to accept the pain and keep quiet.