

EDITORIAL

Married women as abuse victims

A recent Cabinet Office survey has found that 32.9 percent of married women have experienced domestic abuse. This percentage has remained unchanged from the two previous surveys in 2005 and 2008, indicating that little help has been provided for the ongoing tragedy in one-third of Japanese households.

One-fourth of victims said they were punched, kicked or shoved by their husbands and 6 percent were assaulted repeatedly. Fourteen percent said they were forced to engage in sexual relations with their husband. Seventeen percent suffered psychological harassment such as verbal abuse, restrictions on going places or being constantly watched.

An astonishing 41.4 percent told no one about the situation and suffered alone. The reasons for accepting the abuse and not filing for divorce were for the sake of the children, 57 percent said, and because of economic worries, according to 18 percent.

The issue of domestic abuse is not confined to any particular socioeconomic level, as shown by last week's news report about the Japanese vice consul in San Francisco, Mr. Yoshiaki Nagaya, who last Monday pleaded not guilty to 13 counts of domestic violence and three charges of assault with a deadly weapon against his wife of 18 months. His wife presented investigators with photographs of her injuries, evidence that led to his arrest in March.

The effects of domestic abuse can be serious and lasting. Victims often suffer depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, sleeping and eating disorders and other physical and psychological problems.

The effects are not limited to the women but also affect children. One of the mistaken beliefs of some victims is that they can shield their children from the effects of abuse. Children growing up in families with abuse often continue to suffer emotional and behavioral disturbances throughout their lives.

Abuse has many causes, but abusive behavior can respond to treatment in many cases, though change is difficult. Most urgently, though, victims need to have therapy and counseling, and know that there is hope for the situation.

Call centers should be given sufficient government support, so that more women can take action to start the process of stopping abuse. Local police need to be trained in the best ways to handle cases of domestic violence.

A more detailed study of the issue should be undertaken. This Cabinet survey included only 5,000 men and women, with two-thirds responding. The figures are likely to be underreported.

The government should make stopping domestic abuse a greater priority as current policies have done little to reduce the problem. Working to reduce abuse will help not only women, but also the children, families and society that depend on them.

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