

Help at hand for abuse victims

Agencies help the distressed to start over again

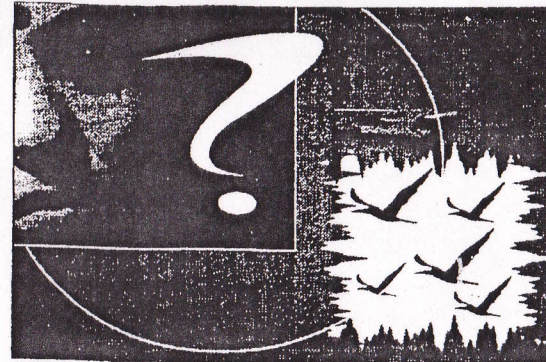
By Swati Desai

Hyderabad: Laxmi was shocked the first time her husband threw a plate full of food at her. He was angry because "she was disrespectful to his mother." He also vented his anger on the food she cooked. "It was spicy despite she knowing that it upset his stomach." Laxmi was shocked to see this ugly side in her charming husband.

However, Laxmi saw that such outbursts were always followed by attempts of apologies and coaxing her into physical intimacy. What she experienced many times over is described by domestic violence counsellors as 'cycle of violence'. In such cases, simmering tension is followed by violent outbursts and reconciliation attempts.

What triggers these incidents is usually jealousy or possessiveness. The husband also demands 'respect'.

Such people have devised many ways of controlling the victim. They allow little fi-



nancial freedom, cut communication access for minimising contact with the victim's family and friends and monitor her every move. If she were to resist such torture, there is always the threat of her immigration status being in jeopardy.

For those who suffer in silence, it has more to do with their low self-esteem and strong beliefs in marriages. Also for Indians, the idea of

reporting the matter to police is still intimidating. Victims, in most cases, return to the husband. Lack of awareness that the victim's immigration status is protected by law too is prevalent.

In some cases, what adds to the victim's trouble is her inability to drive, unfamiliarity with the language, lack of money to survive and a poor social network.

Each victim needs to un-

derstand the importance of:

Preserving evidence: Those calling the police must keep a copy of the police report, photographs of body abuses, diaries. They must also record the versions of neighbours as well as counsellors.

Precaution: Keeping copies of documents (legal, immigration, medical, bills) and some money with a trusted party. In the US, there are social service agencies in all major cities specialising in helping Indian victims of domestic violence. It is important to remember the safety tips provided by these agencies. Their help is crucial as the process re-establishing oneself could be tiresome.

(To be continued)

(The author, a psychotherapist in private practice in Los Angeles and a mental health consultant to South Asian agencies, is on a visit to ISB, Hyderabad)

HELPLINE FOR ABUSED WOMEN

Following is the list of toll free phone numbers for help in major US cities

National Domestic Violence Hotline (all ethnicities) 1-800-799-SAFE

Specific Help for Indian Community:

San Francisco: Maitri 1-888-8-MATRIB and Narika 1-800-724-2722

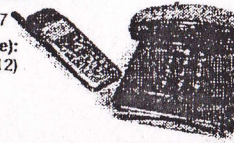
Los Angeles: SAHARA 1-888-7-SAHARA

Chicago: Apna Ghar 1-800-717-0757

New York/New Jersey (not toll free):

Manvi 1-732-435-1414, Sakhi 1-(212) 868-6741

On the web, to get phone numbers, www.sawnet.org



Any public library provides free access to the web.
Any public phone can be used to make a toll free phone call
as well as to call directory assistance by dialling 411.