



VOICES OF MOTHERS IN THE SHADOW: INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

**Real-life Stories from Women who experienced
Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) during Pregnancy in
Nuwara Eliya District, Sri Lanka**

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Sri Lanka**



Kingdom of the Netherlands

**The Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka
Monitoring and Evaluation Unit
2026**

Established in 1953, The Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka is a leading service provider and advocate of Sexual and Reproductive Health, Rights and Justice in Sri Lanka. The Association seeks to promote multiple aspects of reproductive health and improve the quality of life and well-being.

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Voices of Mother's in the Shadow: Intimate Partner Violence

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All names, people, villages, and environments depicted in this book are hypothetical. All images included have been generated using artificial intelligence (AI).

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Disclaimer:

This study was conducted adhering with the guidelines provided by the Ethical Review Committee of the Faculty of Medicine, General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University. The study report represents the opinions and views of the researches of The Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Sri Lanka and its' donor organizations, unless the context specifically defines it.

Acknowledgement

“Voices of Mothers in the Shadow” is not just a book; it is a mirror to the painful reality faced by many women in silence, and a tribute to their courage. Each story is a testimony to the enduring impact of intimate partner violence during pregnancy; a time that should be defined by safety and care, not fear and trauma. These personal accounts, collected as part of a prospective cohort study led by the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit of FPA Sri Lanka, highlight how intimate partner violence is not just a private issue but a public health crisis that undermines maternal and child well-being. They compel us to rethink how we, as service providers, policymakers, and members of society, respond to gender-based violence especially in contexts where silence is often enforced by stigma, poverty, and systemic neglect.

“Voices of Mothers in the Shadow: Intimate Partner Violence” is the result of a collaborative and deeply compassionate effort to amplify the voices of women who have lived through the harrowing experience of intimate partner violence during pregnancy. We extend our sincere appreciation to the team of external consultants whose expertise and commitment guided this project to fruition. Special thanks to Dr. Poornima Karunathilake, the primary architect of this report, whose sensitivity and professionalism brought these stories to light. We are equally grateful to Dr. Lakshman Senanayake, our lead consultant and GBV specialist, for his guidance and technical insight. The clinical perspectives provided by Dr. Chinthaka Banagala and Dr. Achintha Dissanayake, both esteemed obstetricians and gynecologists, were invaluable in contextualizing the narratives. My special gratitude to the FPA Sri Lanka team led by Mr. M. Suchira Suranga, Director of Organizational Learning and Evaluation at FPA Sri Lanka, and the project team; Mr. Janaranga Dewasurendra, Mr. Palaniyandy Sivakumar, Dr. Chinth Rupasinghe, Ms. Natasha de Rosayro, and Ms. Sachintha Welipitiya, whose contributions to proposal writing, data collection, analysis, editorial review, and field coordination were instrumental throughout.

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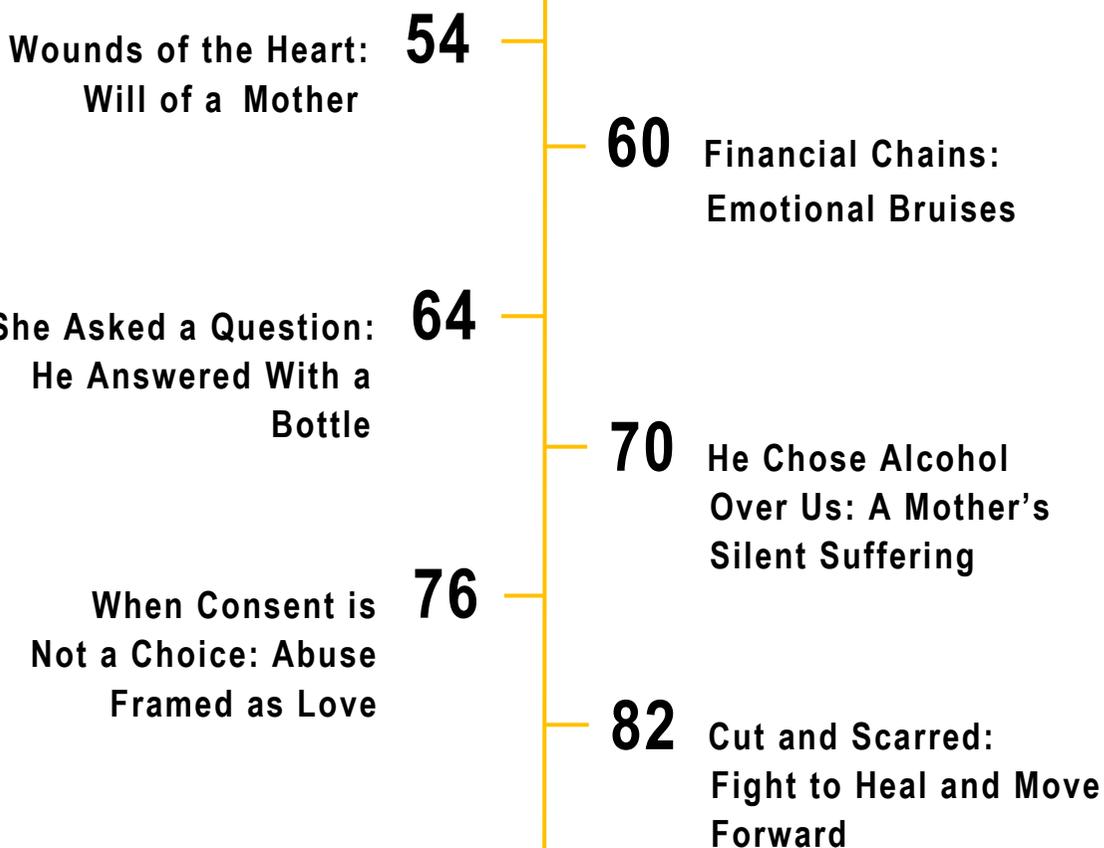
Most importantly, we are deeply grateful to the women who courageously shared their stories. This book belongs to them. It is their truth that challenges us to act and to do better.

Dr. Ruchitha Perera
Executive Director
The Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka



Content

	04	Behind Closed Doors: Surviving Abuse, His Silence, and Their Blame
A Husband's Hidden Past: A Brother's Unshakable Presence	10	
	16	Living with Fear, Speaking in Whispers: Holding On For the Sake of Her Unborn Child
Held Hostage by Love: When Leaving Means Risking Lives	22	
	28	Fighting Shadows: Seeking to Escape
Inherited Scars: Trying to Break the Cycle	34	
	38	Pregnant & Powerless: Hoping for a Change
From Business Failure to Domestic Strife: A Mother's Resilience	42	
	48	A Husband's Rage, A Brother's Betrayal: A Life Torn by Abuse



Introduction

Within our communities, there are silent stories that unfold behind closed doors, where love and marriage have turned into cruelty and abuse.

This book is a collection of real-life stories from women in our own communities who experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) during pregnancy. These stories not only reveal their suffering, but also highlight their survival strategies, coping mechanisms, and the actions they took. Each chapter represents the voice of a woman who has endured psychological, physical, sexual or economic violence at the hands of her partner or former partner.

The stories were gathered through in-depth interviews conducted as part of the research study titled *“Intimate Partner Violence and Pregnancy Outcomes: A Prospective Cohort Study in the Nuwara Eliya District”*, led by the Monitoring and Evaluation unit of The Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka. The study was partially funded by the Embassy of the Netherlands. These interviews, conducted in May and June 2025, have been transformed into narratives.

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Kotelawala Defence University (KDU) Ethical Review Committee on 23rd April, 2025 under reference number RP/2025/09 (Annexure I).

The objectives of this book are to raise awareness, create conversations within communities and support those in need, because pregnancy should be a time free from pain and fear.



Behind Closed Doors: Surviving Abuse, His Silence, and Their Blame

She once believed in love, but the relationship she trusted turned life into a nightmare. The man she lived with changed under the influence of his parents, becoming angry, abusive, and violent. His rage escalated, and he began to physically hurt her, even while she was pregnant. One brutal attack left her hospitalised, and he never visited her. Emotionally shattered, physically broken, and abandoned during pregnancy, this is the story of a woman silenced by violence and negligence.

Mallika was just 21 years old and a new mother, living with her partner and his father in a village in Nuwara Eliya.

Her situation became even more challenging when her partner relocated to Colombo for work, leaving her alone with his father. She had met her husband three years earlier, while they were both employed at the same company. Their lives had been happy at first, a new beginning for two young people. But things began to change when they decided to move back to his family home. Soon after, Mallika discovered she was pregnant. The news wasn't met with joy, but they had to accept it. When they returned to live with his parents, things only became worse.

Tension grew each day, and Mallika often reflected on the emotional strain she had endured. It had been a sacrifice for her to move in with his family instead of her own, and she received no support in return. His parents disapproved of their unregistered relationship, and rather than showing kindness, they placed all the blame on her.

"My partner and I always had to listen to his parents' comments as they would insult me, saying that I don't have parents or an identity of my own."

Although it was painful, this became a part of Mallika's everyday life. Even her partner had begun to change. Regretfully, he stopped supporting her and began prioritising his parents' wishes over her well-being. During her pregnancy, when she needed both emotional and financial support, he remained distant. He didn't accompany her to a single clinic appointment, leaving her to face everything alone.

"You're too young to understand anything." His parents would always say.

Her partner, who had been kind, suddenly seemed influenced by what his parents had said. The stress increased with each drink, and the abuse became more frequent as his fury erupted more freely. Although he was a regular drinker, his behaviour worsened, and he even began raising his hand against her. Mallika was afraid. The man she had loved now seemed like a complete stranger. He became increasingly violent, especially when she tried to defend herself. The more she resisted, the worse it got. Mallika began to experience excruciating physical and emotional pain. Raised in a loving home filled with the warmth of her parents and grandparents, yet now she found herself trapped in a nightmare.

“I remember fainting once while he was hitting me. I had to be admitted to the hospital for 8 days due to severe back pain. I couldn’t stand or carry out regular activities. My partner did not visit me once during my hospital stay, nor did he provide the money I needed for treatment. From time to time, his parents would visit me, but they never gave me the support I required.”

Her time in the hospital changed her life. The emotional scars deepened by the absence of her partner. His parents visited occasionally, but they were of little help. They said nothing comforting, only watched her suffer in silence. She endured more than just physical suffering, she faced emotional neglect and was forced to navigate it all on her own. Her scars weren't only physical, she was struggling mentally as well. Her partner's and his parents' constant verbal abuse wore her down. She stopped eating, and had trouble falling asleep. Desperation had replaced the hope that had once filled her thoughts. The emotional burden grew heavier as her pregnancy progressed, and she felt alone, as if no one truly cared. Always on edge, she never knew what her partner would do next. The violence escalated. He would yell at her and then pound the wall in rage when she attempted to defend herself.

“Who do you think is going to take care of my parents? Even though you have left your parents, I can’t leave mine”

Mallika had often fantasized about living apart from his parents, but every time she mentioned it, he would grow even angrier. She found some measure of calm whenever her partner was away in Colombo. In his absence, the violence stopped. Yes, she missed him, but for the first time in months, she could breathe, free from the constant stress. She had never thought of leaving him during her pregnancy. She had remained rooted because of her love for him. She even felt sorry for him, believing that he wasn't entirely to blame for his actions. But, the abuse had left a lasting impact, and her priorities began to change as she focused on raising her child. She longed to raise her child in peace, away from his parents' home, and hoped her partner would eventually give up alcohol.

Despite the loneliness and isolation, Mallika had one person she could trust. In her darkest moments, the Public Health Midwife (PHM) became a source of solace. She confided in the PHM and found comfort in the advice she received. She persisted despite the emotional turmoil because she was committed to give her child a better future, even if it meant confronting her husband for the first time. She told him she was going for routine clinic visits, but never mentioned the counselling sessions. Her strength came not only from her love for her child, but also from the faith that things could get better.



A Husband's Hidden Past: A Brother's Unshakable Presence

She was unaware at the time of marriage that her husband had been divorced twice and had children from previous marriages. Soon after, her life became one of violence and betrayal. Throughout her marriage, she endured abuse, both psychological and physical. Her only source of strength was her brother, who was her protector and provided emotional support. While her husband continued to cheat, she struggled to hold her life together and take care of her child. This is a story of a mother who struggled throughout her life.

Mekala only wants to spend her life with her children, free from the control of her husband. This 38-year-old mother of two lives with her mother and brother, who help her raise her kids. Before marriage, she lived with her family, and after the death of their father when she was a young girl, her brother stepped in as a father figure. Ten years ago, in an arranged marriage set up by her brother, she met her husband. Soon after, she learned that he had already been divorced twice and had two children from previous relationships. From the moment she entered into marriage, Mekala's life became a nightmare.

“When I was pregnant with my first child, he tried to kill me by squeezing my neck. He tried to hit my stomach. But as my child was inside me, I protected my stomach by defending myself and making sure he didn't hit it.”

Alcohol or not, he was merciless in his violence. He frequently resorted to physical assault, leaving her with scars on her hands, and would yell at her using foul words. He even blamed everything on her brother, often yelling and fighting with him and their mother whenever he was upset. Three months prior to her second pregnancy, she moved back home with her mother and brother, while her husband continued to visit occasionally. During this time, her brother grew increasingly concerned about her safety, as her husband continued to neglect her and failed to meet her needs. Her brother also suffered under the stress, caring for his sister, while enduring verbal abuse from her husband. She was hospitalised for high blood pressure during her second pregnancy, which led to an early delivery. It became evident that her husband was having an affair, as he made no effort to visit or support her. Throughout the pregnancy, she was totally dependent on her brother, with no help from her husband.

“You didn’t answer my phone; were you with another man?” that was what her husband always accused her of.

Her violent outbursts were triggered by her husband's persistent suspicions of unfaithfulness. She endured physical, mental, and emotional harm from this unrelenting abuse, which led her to contemplate suicide. She was plagued by thoughts of consuming poison, but her love for her mother and brother always sopped her from going too far. Though she confided in her brother and close friends about her struggles, she never sought help from medical facilities out of fear that it would escalate the situation with her husband and cause shame in the community. She often turned to her brother for support, knowing he only wanted to keep her safe. Her husband refused to provide for their children, so she began working on a tea estate to support them. Her husband frequently accused her of being unable to have children in the early days of their marriage, which made her believe that bearing children would protect her future.

“The only help I want is to be separated from my husband. Even though I have filed a police case, he has not given me a divorce and keeps running away.”

She had trouble sleeping, and as her mental state deteriorated, she finally reached a breaking point, and decided she would never live with her husband again. Throughout her marriage, her brother was her only source of support, constantly encouraging her to take legal action. Despite her husband's refusal to accept the situation, she filed for divorce with her brother's help and her own strong desire for independence. Now, her only option is to work hard to raise her children while living with her mother and brother, holding onto the hope that the divorce will ultimately set her free.

Following her narrative, the PHM from that region reported that she had become pregnant by someone else, possibly someone she was having an affair with, and had an abortion. It is unknown whether that relationship involved any violence during the pregnancy.



Living with Fear, Speaking in Whispers: Holding On For the Sake of Her Unborn Child

At just nineteen and six months pregnant, she was trapped in a cycle of violence – being beaten by her husband, cursed by his family and silenced by fear. The blows to her head were not only physical, they were attempts to take her voice and her hope. Even with the bruises and heartbreak, she held on for the life that was growing inside her. This is a story of a mother with a history of domestic abuse, desperate to fight to protect her unborn child.

Nuwara Eliya felt like an unfamiliar, chilly place to live. Even though her time there was brief, it seemed to last a lifetime. Kaviya never imagined her life would take such a turn at 19 years old and six months pregnant. Having a child so young was never her goal. She had only just begun to discover who she was when she found herself bearing the burden of an unborn child. When they arrived at his parents' house, their arguments became more intense. Her husband grew more furious whenever she tried to defend herself. The disagreements escalated into violence. He would strike her, targeting her head. In addition to the physical assault, she also had to endure verbal and mental abuse from his family, particularly his grandmother, who would curse her and try to get her to leave.

"I once had a fit when my husband was hitting me, and I had to be admitted to the hospital because it affected my baby. The doctor warned me and advised me to be careful, saying that if it happens again, it could lead to serious problems for the baby."

Despite her fear for her child, Kaviya was unable to leave. She felt trapped. It seemed as though neither she nor the baby mattered to her husband. He was indifferent to the mental and physical harm he was causing. The constant interference and influence of his family only made things worse. She would get upset and depressed after every altercation. Though she would often consider it, she was unable to bring herself to leave him. Her unborn child was the only reason she stayed. Her husband showed no concern for her well-being or her pregnancy.

The only people she could confide in were her mother and the Public Health Midwife (PHM) she saw during clinic visits. The PHM would listen to her without passing judgment and provide consoling words. Speaking with her mother made her feel less isolated. Being able to talk to someone gave her some hope, even

though she couldn't communicate freely about everything. Talking to them, brought her some solace, but it came with risk. Every time her husband found out she had spoken to her mother, he would slap her again as punishment.

It was evident that her husband was unconcerned about her pregnancy or for her at all. He was too preoccupied with what his family thought. Their relationship was being destroyed as he blindly listened to their harsh words and advice. Kaviya was certain that he would not change and that nothing would improve. But she didn't know how to leave. She was unsure about what was appropriate.

“My husband always tries to control me. He does not like me talking to anyone else, and he won't let me go out alone. The only time he allows me to go alone is when I go to the clinic, as once the PHM shouted at him for not allowing me to visit the clinic.”

Kaviya felt oppressed by her husband's constant need to control her. He didn't like her going out alone or talking to other people. The only time he allowed her to leave the house by herself was for antenatal clinic visits, and that too, only with his mother. Kaviya still needed to exercise caution whenever she spoke to anyone about the abuse she was enduring. That cycle was relentless. She would go to the clinic, talk to her mother, and feel a moment of comfort, only for the tension to resume the moment she got home. Her husband would grow angry, accusing her of speaking to others, and the violence would start again. She began to wonder if she would ever truly escape it.

Still, she made an effort to hold on, for the sake of her child. After the birth, she often found herself imagining what life would be like. Could she live somewhere else on her own? The thought of leaving was both comforting and terrifying. What would she do? Where

would she go? How will her child fare? She knew she could not leave just yet, not until the baby was born. However, she secretly knew that she couldn't stay much longer. She couldn't keep living like this. The fear, the uncertainty, and the constant suffering was all too much. Her husband was unconcerned. His family didn't care either. And the longer she stayed, the harder it would be to find a way out.

But for now, there was nothing more she could do. Kaviya would stay, at least until the birth of the child. She held on to the hope that, by then, she would find the courage to leave. She couldn't allow herself to give up, even if the future felt uncertain. Even if she couldn't yet see how things would improve, she had to have faith that they would.



Held Hostage by Love: When Leaving Means Risking Lives

Despite her attempt to leave him, she and her family were threatened. She was repeatedly assaulted and forced to stay against her will. She endured harassment, sexual and physical abuse out of fear, which eventually led to hospitalisation. With the realisation of being pregnant, she sought an abortion but was unsuccessful. Emotionally shattered and full of regret, she now lives under her family's protection. This story centres on a pregnant woman who was forced into a non-consensual relationship, and now hopes to give her child up.

Ajantha experienced severe trauma after being forced into a relationship she never wanted. She met her new partner as a divorced woman who had already experienced physical abuse in her previous marriage. She hoped for a fresh start, however, once she saw his true character, she attempted to end the relationship. Under this manipulation and intimidation, Ajantha was subjected to both physical and sexual abuse.

“He hit me once at the start of this relationship, and from that moment, I didn’t want to be with him anymore. But he kept threatening me in various ways and also tried to sexually abuse me. I had to receive treatment for my injuries and these scars on my head are a result of that violence.”

Ajantha endured physical violence in the early stages of her relationship as he would yell at her, strike her, and threaten her. The fights always ended with physical abuse, slapping and pushing her, even when she resisted. She was hospitalised as a result of the injuries and bruises he inflicted as the situation worsened. After each incident, she felt more helpless and confined. In the midst of the constant threats and harassment, Ajantha discovered she was pregnant. At 33 years old and 12 weeks pregnant, she felt afraid and overwhelmed. Wanting to terminate the pregnancy, she fled to Colombo, seeking refuge and a chance to escape her partner’s control. However, he retaliated by reporting her to the police. During her pregnancy, she moved in with her parents out of a desperate need for safety. They welcomed her, trying to shield her from the chaos she was facing. Her partner continued to visit their home, though, yelling at her and threatening to take her back. He pressured her parents to allow her to accompany him by threatening them.

“He came last week and hit me, dragging me out of my house. My mother tried to rescue me, and he threatened and hit her as well.”

Despite her parents' repeated warnings at the door, he stormed into her home and went directly into her room without hesitation. Without saying a word, he grabbed her by the arm and began pulling her out, attempting to take her with him. Her mother rushed in, pushing him and begging him to stop, but in anger, he struck her as well. Determined to take her, he kept dragging her forward, despite the commotion and shouting. Fortunately, her parents managed to stop him and after a heated argument, finally got him out of the home.

Her family was also targeted by the violence, leaving them all terrified and traumatized. Ajantha and her parents, who are doing their best to help their daughter, are horrified by the situation. They have become her lifeline, providing both physical and emotional support during this difficult period. She is afraid to go outdoors, fearing he might arrive at any moment and take her away, and her parents share this fear. Ajantha, feels like a prisoner in her own life and frequently isolates herself at home. She does not want to continue with the pregnancy, and feels powerless to change her circumstances. She struggles to find a way out and the burden weighs heavily on her.

Ajantha is mentally unstable and doesn't want to live another day. She is terrified at the thought of raising a child in such a violent and chaotic environment. Thanks to her parents' unwavering care, she is in a somewhat better place than she would be alone. They remind her that she is not fighting this battle alone and encourage her to seek help. She wants to end her pregnancy or give the child up and leave her boyfriend, but she is unsure if anything can help her right now. Although she has reported him to the police, stating that their relationship was forced, no action has been taken yet. The authorities' lack of response only deepens her sense of powerlessness. Supported by her parents, she prays through the

pain, but she is too afraid to seek assistance from any health centres, fearing it might cause further problems with her boyfriend.

Ajantha has tried to find employment despite her financial struggles, but job opportunities are scarce, and the neighbourhood community is aware of her situation, which makes them unwilling to hire her. The stigma surrounding her circumstances makes it even harder for her to secure work. Her partner wants her to carry the pregnancy to term. Ajantha hopes that by giving birth and handing the child over to him, she might finally be free from his control.

She envisions a world free from fear, one where she can make her own decisions and reclaim her freedom. She clings to the hope that the police will ultimately intervene, allowing her to live independently, without being forced to raise the child. Ajantha longs for a future when she can heal from the trauma and begin anew, without the burdens of her past.



Fighting Shadows: Seeking to Escape

She finds herself burdened by fear, loneliness and the weight of unspoken pain. Her husband's temper, worsened by alcohol, has turned their home into a prison. She dreams of refuge, her parents' house, a place to lead a better life for herself and her unborn child. Despite managing the home, caring for him tirelessly, and doing everything she can, she is met with violence instead of gratitude, even during her pregnancy. This is a story of a woman who fights every day for peace to provide a safe home for her child.

Her partner never expresses gratitude, no matter how hard she works, how well she cares for him, or how well she runs the home. Ravadhi is only 24 years old, trapped in a relationship that no longer brings joy but only suffering. When she met her husband two years ago through mutual friends, everything seemed promising. Their connection was built on laughter and shared interests. But, as his temper began to flare, that early warmth quickly disappeared. What began as occasional arguments turned into daily yelling matches, leaving her feeling more alone and afraid. Six months pregnant, Ravadhi never imagined her life would take such a painful turn. The news of her pregnancy, which should have brought happiness, only deepened her anxiety. Her husband was overjoyed, blind to the emotional turmoil and chaos around them, while she struggled with the uncertainty about becoming a mother.

Her husband uses physical violence to vent his rage, striking or slapping her without a second thought. Throughout her pregnancy, Ravadhi has experienced multiple incidences of abuse that have left her physically hurt and emotionally shaken. Although she has never been hospitalized, there was a time she had to take medication to manage the pain after he pushed her, causing her to fall. He shows no concern for her health and well-being or the life growing inside her, even when she is clearly in pain. The fear he has instilled in her is a constant presence in her life.

“I always want to run away to my parents’ house whenever he hits me. He always comes home drunk and gets angry at me for no reason. Even on the days he doesn’t drink, he still abuses me.”

Ravadhi dreams of escaping to her parents' house, where she believes she might find solace and safety. What haunts her most is not just the sadness, it is the fear of his unpredictable outbursts. She often cries and pleads for permission to go home, but his response is always the same: more abuse and angry shouts, telling her to leave if she dares. When her mother comes to take her home, he doesn't hesitate to shout at her too, further complicating her already strained family dynamics. She finds it difficult to comprehend what she's done wrong, feeling confused and hurt. Despite caring for him tirelessly and managing every part of their household, he constantly accuses her of not doing enough. She feels confined and trapped inside their home because of the restriction on her movement and the emotional strain she endures.

“If there is someone in a similar situation to me, I would advise her to marry someone only after you can properly trust him, rather than regretting it later, like I do.”

Every time she experiences abuse, she has suicidal thoughts, but she strives to ignore them because she loves her mother and her unborn child. When she is alone, she sobs and prays for courage and a way out. Talking to her mother and friend's gives her some comfort, but she is afraid to seek treatment at health clinics, knowing her husband will likely find out and become angry. It has never been easy to deal with this situation. Her marriage has brought her a great deal of trauma, and she longs to leave him. In the hopes that legal action could give her the safety she so desperately needs, she has even considered reporting him to the police. She believes that people facing similar struggles could benefit from counselling, but in her own case, fear and control keep her from attending any sessions.

Ravadhi is still uncertain about her future as she tries to navigate the challenges of her situation, both during and after her pregnancy. Every day, she is plagued by thoughts of leaving her husband, and she is becoming increasingly confused about how to cope with everything that's happening. Each day is a struggle, and she yearns for the strength to reclaim her life and discover a path to safety and healing.

Despite her hardships, she holds onto the belief that she will eventually escape the cycle of abuse and build a better life for herself and her child. She dreams of a future where she can live without fear, raise her child in a loving and safe environment, and at last experience the happiness that has eluded her for so long.



Inherited Scars: Trying to Break the Cycle

She grew up watching violence unfold between her parents and it followed her into her own marriage. Married to her cousin, she always dreamed of a peaceful home, but it all shattered during her second pregnancy, when she was violently attacked. In that moment of desperation and fear, she slapped him back, which only escalated it. Now pregnant with her third child, she lives in fear, haunted by the past, she remains silent, afraid to speak out. This is the story of a mother, burdened by regret over her marriage, and determined to protect her children from repeating the violent legacy she grew up with.

When her husband physically assaulted her during her second pregnancy, she defended herself; she slapped him, unable to bear the abuse any longer. The horror of that moment still lingers in her memory, and now, expecting her third child, she can't help but hope it won't happen again. They had known each other since childhood. He is the son of her father's sister, and they grew close over time. Having grown up in a home filled with frequent arguments, she always believed that conflict was a normal part of relationships. But, Tharshini always visualised a peaceful marriage, one that was different from what she experienced as a child, after being directly impacted by the violence between her parents.

“I'm 29 years old, and got married when I was 19. I regret marrying so early. If I had married later, I would have had a better understanding.”

Except for that one incident during her second pregnancy, their ten-year marriage had been marked by minor arguments but nothing that spiralled out of control. However, once when their first child began to cry, her husband lost his temper. Believing she wasn't caring properly for the child while she was pregnant with their second, he violently attacked her. Unable to endure it any longer, she retaliated in self-defense. The situation escalated so quickly that their first child had to intervene to break up the altercation.

Fortunately, the infant was unharmed and there were no significant injuries at the time. However, the incident also had an impact on their first child, and it left her extremely traumatized. Tharshini considered divorcing her husband at that time, but she chose to stay because of the children.

“Growing up, I often witnessed violence between my parents, therefore I always wanted my children to grow up with parents who don’t fight.”

Since then, she’s kept everything to herself. She doesn’t talk to anyone about what she’s going through because she’s afraid. Afraid that if her husband finds out, it could lead to another fight. Even now, during her third pregnancy, she still seems mentally shaken. She was hesitant to share her story, clearly scared of how her husband might react if he ever found out. While there hasn’t been any physical abuse this time, the small fights continue, and the psychological pressure is still very much present. She often finds herself crying alone, dealing with everything on her own, unable to reach out for support.

Additionally, Tharshini believes that seeking counselling may worsen the situation between her and her husband, as well as for other couples.

“All women should bear it on their own,” she stated.

She holds onto hope, even though she couldn’t fully shield her children from the violence. She wants to ensure that it doesn’t occur again in the future. She also hopes that her husband will continue to provide for their children in the right way.



Pregnant & Powerless: Hoping for a Change

Her marriage turned into a nightmare fuelled by her husband's alcohol addiction. Facing an escalation of violence throughout her marriage, including physical abuse, he even tried to strike her abdomen when she was pregnant. She is exhausted, scared and ashamed, fearing judgment from her community, so she hides her story from everyone except her mother. Despite the pain, she still hopes that he will reduce his drinking and change. But deep down, she is not sure if escape is possible.

Her husband's violence had always been triggered by alcohol. Almost every day since they married, he would come home intoxicated, and that's when the arguments would start. It began as psychological abuse during her first pregnancy, sharp words, unrelenting criticism, and incessant yelling. Over time, things only got worse. By the time she was pregnant with their second child, the abuse had turned physical.

Selvathi lives with her husband and their five-year-old child. She is 41 years old and three months pregnant. It has been nine years since they got married. They met on a bus, struck up a conversation, and one thing led to another. They eventually got married. It was a fairly typical beginning and everything seemed fine back then. But the changes came quickly.

“I also started to speak up instead of staying silent like before, but all it brought me was more pain, as he started hitting me more frequently.”

They have argued frequently over the years. But the arguments have become more intense during this second pregnancy. He becomes even more irate now whenever she tries to defend herself. When he lashes out, it often turns physical. He had hit her before, both during and outside of the pregnancies. The physical violence has escalated recently, especially when he is intoxicated. He slaps her and sometimes tries to strike her in the lower abdomen when intoxicated. Selvathi believes that at times, when their child is present, he tries to restrain himself, but by then, the damage is already done. The child's demand for more attention, the house being untidy or her lack of personal funds are the most frequent causes of their arguments.

Selvathi is emotionally exhausted from the constant arguments. She has considered leaving the marriage many times, but somehow, she always ends up forgiving him and carrying on with her daily routine.

“I do not want to talk about this with anyone except my mother. I don’t want anyone in the community to know what I am going through because I will feel ashamed of myself. That is why I do not want to speak to anyone in the clinic either.”

She is afraid of others' opinions and rumours that might spread about her. She feels embarrassed at the thought of her situation becoming known in the neighbourhood. She only confides in her mother because of this. Although her mother often advises her to leave him and live separately, she has never followed through. At times, thoughts of suicide have crossed her mind, but talking with her mother helped push those thoughts aside. Her mother's encouragement has been her greatest source of strength, yet she has never acted on it.

Selvathi believes that if both partners are willing, relationship counselling could be beneficial. She also hopes her husband might receive guidance or treatment for his drinking.

At times, Selvathi questions whether she could earn a living and provide for her family on her own. But for now, her priority is taking care of her daughter, getting through each day, and maintaining the home. Yet, every time she tries to talk to him about drinking alcohol less, it only makes things worse. Selvathi longs for the violence to end, but she doesn't believe he will change. She secretly hopes that he will change as she wants to live a peaceful life with her husband and children, free from conflict and fear.



From Business Failure to Domestic Strife: A Mother's Resilience

Her relationship shattered when her husband's business started to fail. He blames her entirely, calling her the reason for his misfortune and even labelling her as 'bad luck'. What followed was a harrowing descent into verbal, physical and sexual abuse, starvation and emotional trauma. Isolated and unsupported, she suffered through multiple pregnancies alone. Her story is a stark reminder of the hidden violence many women face and the urgent need for awareness, timely intervention and support services for victims of domestic violence.

Sivakumari, now 36 and pregnant, lives with her husband and two children. The couple married seven years ago after a nine-year relationship. For a time, all was going well, but everything changed when her husband's business began to fail. He began taking out his frustrations on Sivakumari, shifting the burden of his anxiety onto her shoulders. What was once a happy, trouble-free marriage began to unravel.

The violence began just two months after Sivakumari gave birth to her first child, when her husband started verbally assaulting and physically hitting her. It continued throughout her second pregnancy as well. Although, there was no immediate danger to the unborn child during pregnancy, the baby was born underweight. Even after the birth of the second child, the violence did not stop.

“Once, when he was hitting me, I held on to his shirt, and it accidentally ripped. He then started hitting me even more, because he got angry.”

Her husband claims that she brought him bad luck, blaming her for the failure of his business. He would provoke arguments and use them as an excuse to mistreat her, accusing her of not taking care of him and the children. During her pregnancy, he would frequently strike her on the head and even attempt to hit her abdomen.

The abuse continued even after her second pregnancy. During this time, he also sexually abused her. If she refused, he would accuse her of infidelity, claiming that her refusal to have sex was proof she was having an affair and then proceed to physically assault her. Due to the probability of the incorrect use of contraceptive pills, she is now pregnant with their third child.

“Just a few days ago, he started hitting me again and even tried to hit my stomach. I protected it because of the baby, but that made him even more aggressive. I slipped and fell down. Then he called the police and said he would kill himself if they didn’t come.”

When questioned about his actions, the husband responded that he continued to attack her because she was the reason his business had failed. As a result of the fall, Sivakumari sustained injuries to her arms and lower abdomen. Due to persistent pain, she was advised to take medication and undergo an ultrasound. Though couples counselling was suggested, her husband refused to participate. Sivakumari had no support, neither her parents nor her in-laws offered help despite these traumatic experiences. She was forced to face everything alone until she finally opened up to the PHM. She shared what she was going through, and the PHM offered her advice on how to protect herself and her unborn child.

“Sometimes when I tell him that he has too much money and that’s why he drinks so much, he gets angry and refuses to give me food, sometimes for a whole day. I have even fainted once because of this.”

He would withhold food from her whenever she complained about his drinking. As a result, she fainted and was underweight during her pregnancy. The doctor warned her that if this continued, her baby would also be born underweight. Since she is not permitted to work, she has no means to support herself. Despite experiencing severe trauma and even having suicidal thoughts, she continues to hope that he will change. She believes he wants to be with her and his behaviour stems from the stress of his business failure. However, while he wants the children to remain with him, he has

expressed a desire to divorce her, claiming that she brings him bad luck.

Sivakumari believes that raising awareness and educating couples about these domestic violence issues would help reduce its prevalence and ensure that support systems exist and are more accessible to assist women in need. She also believes that she should file a complaint against her husband, and that women in similar situations should also file complaints and seek help. She genuinely wants to live a peaceful life with her husband and raise their children kids with love, even though he no longer shares that desire. Despite this, she holds on, hopeful that things will improve, demonstrating resilience and maintaining a positive outlook on life.



A Husband's Rage, A Brother's Betrayal: A Life Torn by Abuse

Battling years of physical, emotional and sexual violence at the hands of her husband, she was forced to support her family alone amid daily torment. From forced pregnancies and violent assaults to a heartbreaking suicide attempt, her pain was compounded by the deepest betrayer - her own brother. Yet, with the love of her son, support from a distant mother and guidance from the clinic, she begins to reclaim her life. This is the story of a mother who endured unimaginable pain and betrayal but also embodies resilience, displaying a mother's fight for freedom and a better future.

Nanthini, a 29-year-old woman, had a three-year-old son. She lived in a small quiet village, bound to a life filled with hardship. Her brother and sister-in-law lived with her, while her husband would disappear for days, whenever he pleased. Although it seemed like a typical family on the outside, behind closed doors, lay a terrifying reality, marked by violence and emotional abuse.

Her marriage to her husband began sweetly. They met at a store where he worked, and after some time dating, they decided to get married. For the first few years, everything seemed fine. However, things began to change after their first pregnancy. Her husband's behaviour altered significantly as soon as she became pregnant. He grew suspicious and envious, suspecting her of infidelity without cause. This paranoia soon escalated into physical and emotional abuse.

During her first pregnancy, the violence intensified. It ended in tragedy, she suffered a miscarriage. It was one of the few times there was no physical aggression, yet it was emotionally devastating. When she became pregnant again, things were calm for a brief time. He did not respond violently at first, but as the months passed, his temper flared up again. He began striking her while hurling accusations and expressing hatred. Nanthini feared not only for her own safety, but also for the life growing inside her.

“He only wants to have sex, and if I refuse, he hits me and accuses me. He even shouts that the child isn’t his, but my brother’s.”

Nanthini had to deal with more than just physical abuse. In addition to the violence, her husband was sexually abusive, demanding sex even when she was in discomfort or exhausted from the pregnancy. If she refused, he would lash out violently, leaving her feeling even more hopeless. On one terrifying occasion, he held a knife and threatened to kill her. Thankfully, the cries of their child snapped

him out of his rage, but the fear of that moment remains deeply etched in her mind.

Despite everything she had endured, one of the most painful betrayals came from her own brother, the person she believed would be on her side. He too turned aggressive, striking her and even grabbing her by the neck. Echoing her husband's cruel accusations, he claimed that her children were not husband's but someone else's. This betrayal cut deeper than most. The very people she trusted to protect her, became the ones hurting her the most.

“If I plucked even one kilogram of tea less than usual, he would hit me, accusing me of being with someone else instead of doing my work.”

Nanthini was too scared and isolated to speak to anyone outside the family. Her husband had convinced her that if she reached out for help that people would believe she was unfaithful. This manipulation deepened her sense of helplessness and kept her trapped in silence. The more she longed to seek help, the more she felt forced to remain quiet. Her only outlet was her job on a tea plantation. Though the work was physically exhausting, it gave her a sense of independence and the ability to earn some money. Her husband constantly belittled her efforts. If she didn't meet his expectations for productivity, he would beat her, accusing her of neglecting her responsibilities or, worse, cheating on him while at work. No matter what she did, she couldn't win. Her job became another source of pressure and she could not escape his control.

The financial burden also grew. Her husband refused to work or contribute to household responsibilities. Traditionally, in Tamil culture, women move into their husband's family home after marriage—but in Nanthini's case, it was her husband who moved into hers. His refusal to take any responsibility left her in an extremely vulnerable position. Often she reflected on her early

years, memories of a simpler, happier life with her mother after losing her father at a young age. They never displayed any of the violent tendencies displayed by her husband and brother. But that sense of safety was no more. Her brother driven by the need to own the family property, had become violent and cruel. His actions deepened her trauma and became another source of fear and pain.

“My son wants us to commit suicide together. He is very smart for his age, not like other children. He doesn’t like me suffering, and he’s also going through a difficult time. He thinks we should end our lives together.”

In a moment of desperation during her second pregnancy, she attempted to end her life by overdosing on medication. Her young son, deeply affected by their suffering, even expressed a desire to die alongside her, believing that their continued existence only brought pain and burden. Though she survived, she was hospitalized due to severe abdominal pain. Overwhelmed by shame and concerned about how it could affect her unborn child, she kept the suicide attempt a secret.

Despite the ongoing mental and physical suffering, her child became a source of solace. Her older son, wise beyond his years, often offered help without being asked, his quiet support became essential to her survival. With occasional help from caring neighbours and financial support from her mother, living overseas, Nanthini persevered. She eventually sought assistance from The Family Planning Association of Sri Lanka clinic, where she was referred to a psychiatrist. Sharing her experiences helped her realize that she was not alone—and that a better life was still possible.

“My husband never really cares, he only wants sex. After getting me pregnant, he always leaves. He comes and goes whenever he wants and sexually abuses me. Sometimes, he even accuses me of carrying someone else’s child.”

Nanthini finally took action to break free after enduring months of constant violence. Even after she filed for divorce, her husband refused to comply with the court-ordered monthly payments. Her body still bore the scars of her abuse, marks of being struck and strangled, painful reminders of the violent existence she had been forced to endure. Despite the depression that shadowed her days, Nanthini persisted in standing up for herself and her children. She desired a life where they could live without fear, far from the abusive cycle that had once held her captive. Despite the extremely difficult circumstances, she began to speak up for herself. She encouraged her children to understand their worth, often talking to them about the importance of empowerment and education. She even advised another woman in a similar situation to seek support, stay resilient, and pursue education as a pathway to independence.

Each day was a struggle, but Nanthini persisted. She secretly hoped for a better future, one where her children would prosper and grow up surrounded by love, not fear. Every hardship and obstacle she faced only strengthened her determination to break free from the chains of her past. She envisioned a future free of suffering, one in which she could start over and provide her kids with a loving atmosphere.



Wounds of the Heart: Will of a Mother

Initially brought together by a warm friendship, their marriage quickly began to unravel due to alcohol abuse and family conflict. Violence escalated, especially during her pregnancy. Despite being pregnant, she is denied proper care, financial independence, and is constantly monitored and controlled by her husband. Now finding temporary solace at her mother's home, she desires for a better life for her unborn child. While she considers separation from her husband and independence, the painful memories of violence still haunt her.

A 20-year-old girl, Niranjani, lived with her mother in a rural village, surrounded by hills. Her father had passed away when she was young. Life took a sudden turn, when she fell in love with a boy from a nearby village. They first met while she was working at a pharmacy, and what began as a pleasant friendship, blossomed into a loving year-long relationship. Eventually, they made the decision to elope and get married. Everything appeared to be ideal at first. She discovered she was six months pregnant shortly after that. But as the days passed, the fairy tale quickly unravelled. Her once kind and loving husband began to change. His sisters disapproved of her and frequently spoke ill of her. With each drink, his mood darkened, and he started blaming Niranjani for everything that went wrong in his life.

“He first hit me when I was two months pregnant. During an argument, he hit and slapped me several times and also pushed me down more than once. I hit the oil lamp once, falling down. But even then, they didn’t take me to the hospital or allow me to go.”

At first, their disagreements would end in shouting, pushing and arguments. Then things worsened. One night, when Niranjani was two months pregnant, he struck her hard. Her stomach and back began to hurt, but he forbade her from going to the hospital. Instead, he sat there, lost in his own drunken world, ignoring her pain. Niranjani felt trapped. He would argue over the smallest things and constantly blame her for everything that went wrong. Niranjani struggled to cope, often fainting from stress. Even when she had to be taken to the hospital, her husband showed no concern. She then made the decision to stay with her mother. Under her mother's care, she found comfort. But her husband continued to visit, starting petty arguments and causing tension.

Every day was a struggle. Niranjani could confide only in her mother, and even then, she felt, incredibly alone. At times, her husband would suggest divorce, leaving her feeling conflicted. She didn't want her marriage to end, but his behaviour was spiralling out of control. She hoped he would change. As time passed, her stress increased. The joy of pregnancy was often overshadowed by fear—fear of what life would be like once the baby arrived. She secretly hoped for a different life, one free from his violence, where she could work, live freely and in peace. It was difficult to envision a way out. Suicidal thoughts crossed her mind. Still, she held on for the sake of her unborn child.

“ I was not allowed to go anywhere on my own, and he never gave me money. Even when I needed to go to the clinic, someone else would accompany me, and he would hand the money to them, not to me. ”

Niranjani often wondered if separating from him might bring some stability to her life. She desired to give her child a happy upbringing, free from arguments and late-night drinking. Looking back, she realised that marrying him in the hope that he would change was a mistake. Even her in-laws were too afraid to intervene, and the physical abuse only worsened during her pregnancy. She was hesitant to go to the clinic because he refused to give her the money directly, handing it only to his mother, leaving her unable to properly take care of herself.

“ I feel better living with my mother right now. ”

One thing became clear to Niranjani, she couldn't continue living this way. She made a promise to herself, once the baby was born, she would find a way to live separately and perhaps even consider divorce. She longed for a life where she and her child could be safe, content and free from pain. In the midst of her hardships, Niranjani came to a realisation, she deserved a better life, A life where she wasn't merely surviving, but truly living and ensuring she could educate her child.



Financial Chains: Emotional Bruises

A woman finds herself navigating the emotional and financial struggles of marriage while pregnant. After leaving her job due to the pregnancy, she faces growing emotional neglect and financial control from her husband. Without a stable income of her own, even accessing basic clinic care becomes a challenge, deepening her anxiety about the health of her unborn child. She dreams of returning to work, regaining her financial independence, and using that as a path to emotional healing, restoring her marriage, and building a more secure future for her children.

At 28, Ponam found herself in a difficult circumstance, balancing the joys and difficulties of family life. She lived with her husband and their daughter, bound by a relationship that began nearly a decade ago in love. As cousins, their bond made their marriage seem ideal. Over time, that connection faded, giving way to a problematic relationship, marked by mental anguish rather than physical aggression.

“This would have not started if I had just continued my job”

Now eight months pregnant with her second child, Ponam found the stress of her situation increasing. Having left her job due to the pregnancy, she became financially dependent on her husband, which led to a lot of tension in their marriage. He often withheld money for basic needs, including prenatal checkups and clinic visits, and their conversations frequently escalated into arguments. He accused her of abandoning her responsibilities by quitting her job, turning every exchange into a reminder of her growing vulnerability. Her mental health suffered.

Ponam longed for a different life, one where emotional support and financial security coexisted. Yet she hardly considered leaving her husband; the fear of raising two children alone was overwhelming. Despite fleeting thoughts of separation, she remained steadfast because of her devotion to the children.

Ponam believed that her emotional well-being was deeply tied to the health of her unborn child. Her first pregnancy had been a happy one, and she hoped this one would be no different. But this time, the constant conflict made her worry that the mounting stress might affect her baby. It was a fear that lingered in her thoughts each day. Whenever she would feel depressed, it was her daughter's innocent laughter that offered comfort and joy.

Ponam confided in her mother-in-law, with whom she shared a strong bond, in hopes of getting assistance. Her mother-in-law would often speak up for her, gently urging her son to treat her better. Their private conversations gave Ponam brief moments of solace, but the tension at home remained, with stress due to her husband's uncontrollable anger. Though the thought of seeking outside help crossed her mind, she hesitated to approach clinics or professionals, believing her struggles were private matters best kept within the family. Fearing that opening up might worsen the situation, Ponam chose silence. As a result, the emotional burden began to affect her daily activities, simple tasks like eating and caring for herself, became increasingly difficult.

“ Even if I want to leave my husband, I can’t. I can’t take care of my children alone.”

Ponam held onto the hope of returning to work as she faced these challenges, believing that regaining financial independence could help resolve many of their issues. She dreamed of earning her own income, confident it would ease their financial strain and their emotional distance after the pregnancy. She remained positive and hopeful for the future and sought ways to mend her marriage while ensuring her children's safety. In her heart, she believed that with time, effort, and a renewed focus on her mental health, she could improve her circumstances.



She Asked a Question: He Answered With a Bottle

Her story is not one of raised voices but of silence, shattered glass, and quiet strength. The worst blow came when she discovered her husband was involved with another woman, living in the same location as she was. When she confronted him, everything shattered. She was three months pregnant during the fight. He grabbed a glass bottle and smashed it across her face. Her face still bears the bruises, broken teeth, deep cuts, and pain she continues to feel. She lives in a hut without proper shelter, with no one to rely on, and often goes without food. Yet, in the midst this hardship, she speaks to her unborn child, as a source of strength. This is the quiet, painful life that too many women endure and survive.

Only 20 years old, Adharshini is carrying more than she should. Five months pregnant, she lives in a small hut that lacks even a proper washroom, its only cover, a cloth. Life is far from what she might have imagined. She had met her husband in Balangoda, where she was employed. They lived together for a year before getting married. At first, all was well. But soon cracks started to emerge.

“In the place where I live, there is another woman. My husband and that woman seem to be having a relationship. I asked him about this, and it led to a fight. He even hit me. He hit my face with a glass bottle. The marks in my mouth are from that. My teeth were broken, and I have cuts inside my mouth.”

Seven months into the marriage, Adharshini's joy of being pregnant has been overshadowed by both emotional and physical pain. While she was happy about the pregnancy, she wasn't sure if her husband felt the same. The biggest blow came when she discovered another woman living in the same apartment complex. She had seen the woman talking with her husband, and everything fell apart when she confronted him. She was three months pregnant during the fight. He struck her in the face with a glass bottle. Her mouth still bears the marks, broken teeth, and stitches from the cuts. She didn't go to the hospital, but got stitches and medicine elsewhere, and returned home as if nothing had happened.

It was not the first time. Abuse had become part of her daily routine. Slaps, punches to the arm or ear, all over trivial things like asking what he wanted to eat or if he will come home late. These were not accidents. They were routine. All of this happened while she was pregnant. She told her parents, who urged her to come home. But she did not. She still doesn't want to leave him.

The problem, she says, really started with the other woman. One afternoon, the woman approached her and simply said, 'Leave him'. She confirmed that they were in a relationship. Adharshini confronted her husband again, which led to more fights. But eventually, she stopped questioning him. Recently, the beatings have lessened. Not because he changed but because she stopped asking. She even gave her husband's phone to the PHM, hoping to break all contact with the woman, though she did not explain why. They even changed houses for a few months, hoping that would be enough. Still, she cannot tell if the affair truly ended. She catches glimpses of them together occasionally. When she brings it up, he brushes her off, saying he's only checking on her. That's all.

“He doesn’t take care of me, sometimes he doesn’t even provide food. There have been days when I haven’t eaten properly. I often survive on just one meal per day, as my husband does not give me money.”

Back at home with her own family, those things never happened. There was peace. Security. But now, she chooses silence, believing that speaking up will only bring more chaos. She holds on to that quiet, hoping it will preserve the little peace she still has. He does not provide for her; not when she is pregnant, not when she is hungry, not even when she is sick. Sometimes, she goes without food because he refuses to give her money or anything to eat, even though he has enough. She goes to the clinic alone. She no longer asks. She no longer hopes.

Nevertheless, she is managing. Not because she doesn’t feel the weight of it all, but because she has a small way to cope. When things get too much, she speaks to her unborn baby. That helps, she says. It makes her feel a little better. She has seen other women in similar situations, take their own lives. But she is determined, she will not be one of them.

“After giving birth, I plan to go to my mother’s place. The place I am staying in right now does not have a washroom. I live in a hut covered only with a cloth.”

Her future is uncertain, but she has a strategy. She hopes to move in with her mother once the baby is born. The house she lives in now is no place for a child, no privacy, no security, only walls made of cloth. But she will not go alone. But she won't go alone. She wants to take her husband with her. Why she still needs him in her life remains unsaid. Maybe it is hope. Maybe it is fear. Maybe it's a 'love' of some kind - filthy, painful and hard to name. She never says it aloud. But it's there, in the way she stays, in the things she doesn't tell her parents, in the quiet way she carries her hurt.



He Chose Alcohol Over Us: A Mother's Silent Suffering

Her life started to fall apart shortly after her marriage, when her husband turned to alcohol and became increasingly violent. What had started as love quickly became a vicious cycle of daily abuse. He spent on liquor than on food, leaving Gita and her children in constant deprivation. To manipulate and vilify her, he staged melodramatic acts, like pretending to drink poison, casting her as the aggressor. Even pregnancy offered no protection; she endured both sexual abuse and physical violence. Gita's story is one of silent suffering, resilience and the unwavering courage of a mother protecting her children.

Gita was 33, but life had been bearing down on her longer than the years could explain. She lived in a quiet estate in the hills, with her two children, her in-laws, and her husband, a man she had fallen in love with 11 years ago. He had lived in the same neighbourhood. Theirs was love marriage, and it had been sweet for a while. But everything changed after the wedding. Barely a month in, Gita saw a side to her husband she had never known existed. He began drinking. His new job on the tea plantation introduced him to alcohol and that led to violence. The fights started small, but escalated quickly. He would yell, throw things, and hit her face, her stomach, and her arms. The beatings became routine. Not even her pregnancies were enough to stop him.

There were two children now, one born nine years ago, and the other five. Gita remembered carrying them in her womb while being slapped and yelled at. The fear she felt was not only for herself, but for the babies in her womb. Yet, she never sought hospital care for the bruises or the pain. Instead, she visited private physicians, claiming she had fallen, keeping it secret, as so many women in her community did.

Once, when she was 34 weeks pregnant, her husband beat her with a broom. Her neck had been injured so badly from the beating that she couldn't turn her head for days. Still, she never reported it to the hospital. She was scared that if she complained, it would only invite more violence once she returned home. She had confided in a few people: her mother, her mother-in-law, and the village PHM. The PHM tried to intervene, even scolding her husband at times. For a few days, the hitting would stop. But he always returned to his old ways, laughing off any threats.

“Two months ago, when I was pregnant. I didn't go to work for one month, I didn't get paid, and they told me to come back only after I gave birth. Then, my sister's

husband went to speak to my husband about it. But my husband blamed me and said it was all my fault because of that conversation. And then he hit me.”

There was a time when Gita's in-laws had confronted her husband about his behaviour. He pleaded with them, promising he would change. But he didn't. Eventually, even they began scolding Gita whenever something went wrong. He accused her of cheating, of speaking to other men. Once, when her husband's brother-in-law tried to defend her, the situation exploded. He accused Gita of having an affair with him, which ended up with her being beaten so badly that she had to stay off work for a month.

“Once my husband pretended to drink poison putting on a whole act to make it look real. Everyone started shouting at me, blaming me. But when we took him to the hospital, he came back running, saying he hadn't actually drunk it. Because of that, people at home think I'm the one who's wrong.”

She was haunted by terrible thoughts of suicide, of escaping the endless nightmare of pain and fear. Her children weren't spared either. Her husband yelled at them, swore at them, and even physically assaulted them sometimes. If he didn't have enough money for alcohol, he used the little money kept aside for food. When Gita objected, he manhandled her and threatened her with daggers. She could never forget the day he pretended to drink poison, just to make her look like the villain. And her relatives sided against her, even when she had done nothing wrong.

He never took her to clinics or offered any reassurance during her check-ups. But when she had to be admitted to the hospital, he would show up smelling of liquor. He gave her no comfort, no

support, only his uncertain presence. The violence was not just physical. Gita had been sexually harassed for years, even during pregnancy. She spoke little of it only that it left her depressed, but she felt powerless to stop it.

She never spoke of escape, only of survival. Of protecting her children. Her only prayer now was for them to study well, to live the life that she never had. Gita's own education ended after her O/Ls, and she was determined that her children would have more opportunities. Sometimes she felt some sympathy for him, maybe out of habit, perhaps remnants of a love that once was. But when the bruises appeared, the blood, the clots, the tears, those were things that were unforgivable.



When Consent is Not a Choice: Abuse Framed as Love

Her life is marked by quiet endurance under brutal violence. Her husband's anger often came with a broomstick, striking her arms, legs, or even pulling her by the hair. Refusing sex would lead to beatings, an unspoken routine she silently survived. One of the worst moments came the morning she was going into labour with her youngest child, he beat her before letting her go to the hospital. Another example is when, during a journey to a funeral, she was continuously assaulted for three hours along the route to Maskeliya. Such occurrences are not infrequent; that is a path of suffering that she bears for her children's sake.

Daevi was 41, currently with her fourth child, a small baby of merely eight months. She had been handling a long chain of responsibilities since she was young. Marriage came early, arranged after a brief phone romance set up by her aunt. Before she even understood the meaning of love, she was a wife, and then a mother. She now had four children: the first born in 2008, the second in 2017, the third in 2018, and now this newest baby. There was a price to pay for each: physical, sexual and emotional. The early years of marriage were peaceful, but that changed after two years. Her husband, gentle at first, slowly changed. The violence began, not at once, but progressively, in terrible ways. Screaming turned into slapping. Slapping turned into beatings. Before long, bruises from broomsticks became her norm. Pain became part of her daily life.

“If I don’t want to have sex with him, he hits me. When he asks, I’m expected to say yes. Most of the time, it starts with a fight.”

The arguments began with his sisters. Living with his family felt like walking on shattered glass. If his siblings spoke, it would start a fight. He always chose their side over hers. Eventually, when things got worse, they moved out. The arguments quieted down a little, but the beatings never stopped. There was a pattern. He would want sex. She would refuse. And then the violence would follow. When he was drunk, it was worse. But even sober, the smallest disagreement could set him off. He had his ways. A broomstick, always within reach, became a frequent weapon. Sometimes, he used his fists. Sometimes he pulled her hair or struck her legs. The injuries were rarely serious enough to go to the hospital, but the pain, the swelling, the blood clots, they became normal. She applied balm and carried on.

“One week after I gave birth, he hit me a lot. He said the children were troubling him and accused me of taking my anger out on him through them. Even the day I went to the hospital to deliver, he beat me badly before finally letting me go.”

One of the most severe beatings Daevi could remember was when his mother died. His sister had been having an affair, and when that story reached the family, Daevi became the target of his misdirected wrath. She was battered in the vehicle from six in the evening until nine at night as they drove from Maskeliya to his mother’s funeral. But even pregnancy offered no protection. The violence may have come less frequently, but it was never gentle. She remembered the morning she was going to the hospital to deliver her youngest. He beat her that morning too. With that added pain on top of her contractions, she went into labour. He was angry, enraged, and she had no one to call. She did it all. She endured it in silence. And when she was impatient with the children, worn down by everything, he used that as another excuse to beat her again.

And yet, Daevi stayed. When asked why, she would say that sometimes he cares for her. When the anger had passed, he would speak gently to her. That was all she had to hold on to, to ride out the storms. She never regretted marrying him. Her parents had warned her, but she had made her own choice. Now she was paying the price, silently. She never told her parents. She did not want them to carry the weight of her decision. Only her best friend and the PHM in the area knew fragments of the truth. She was too afraid to tell anyone else, especially the police. She feared what her children would come to know, the scars they would carry. And still, she stayed, for them too. Her love for her children gave her the strength. They were the only reason she didn’t give in to the dark thoughts that sometimes came to her on nights of unbearable loneliness.

There were nights when she couldn't eat or sleep, especially after he hit her and just walked away like nothing had happened. Her head would reel, her heart pounding with despair and fear. But every morning, she got up, fed her children, and carried on. That was the rhythm of her survival. There was barely enough money. Asking him for anything usually led to more anger. Instead, she turned to her mother when she needed help, never making requests of him. He had recently left for abroad, hoping to earn enough to repay a 5-lakh loan. His absence brought a temporary calm to the household. But even from afar, his suspicion lingered. Just a week after she had delivered their youngest child, he beat her again—this time accusing her of being the reason the children behaved the way they did.

“I was referred from the hospital for counselling. But my husband said I’m fine. Sometimes I’ve had thoughts of leaving him and my children and committing suicide. But then I look at my children and I feel a little better.”

But Daevi still dreamed. She wanted to work again, as she once had. She wanted to tend cows and chickens, maybe even earn enough so that he would never have to go abroad again. If only someone else would mind the children for her, she could start working immediately. Independence, earning her own money, felt like the only path to safety, to respect. She had once been referred to counselling, but her husband convinced them she was fine. So she nodded, smiled, and went back to bottling it all up inside. When the sorrow was hard to bear, she looked at her children and remembered her role. Her tears came only after they had fallen asleep. During these moments, she thinks to herself that maybe tomorrow will be a brighter day.

She didn't say silent out of shame, but out of fear. If he ever found out, the violence would return with a vengeance. So she spoke her truth only to those she trusted.



Cut and Scarred: Fight to Heal and Move Forward

Her story is one of quiet endurance in the face of brutal violence. The first time her husband turned seriously violent, he slashed her leg with a knife, almost a small sword. He then cut her forehead and hit her near the nose. The cruelty didn't; he beat her with sticks, falsely accused her, and was even arrested for what he did. Sometimes, in anger, he harmed himself, poking his own body, and lied to the police to avoid punishment. Yet, through all the agony and fear, she lived for her children. They were her purpose, her determination to live, and the only light in the long, black days that filled her life.

Hema was 23 years old, living in a crowded home with her husband, his two younger sisters and his parents. The house was always packed, noisy, with constant action, but to Hema, it was sometimes the loneliest place on earth. She had been married for three years, though they had known each other for four. His aunt lived in her village, and he used to visit often. That's where it all began. They started seeing each other, made promises, and eventually got married. The first few days were good. There were no signs of what was to come. But within six months, everything began to change.

“He cut my leg with a knife, like a sword. When I say something he doesn't like, he gets angry and hits me. When he hits me, I want to go to my parents' home. But he doesn't want me to leave, so, he did that to my leg.”

Hema's husband began to grow suspicious and irritable over the smallest things. If she told him the truth or stood up to him, and he did not like what she had to say, he would lose control. The first time it got bad, he pulled out a knife, shaped almost like a small sword and slashed her leg. It wasn't the first time he had hurt her. He later cut her forehead and beat her near the nose. She was hospitalized for 14 days. That was just the beginning, there would be four or five hospitalizations in total. Even during pregnancy, the violence did not stop. She was six months pregnant with their second child when he beat her again. The wounds were fresh, not only on her skin, but deep within her.

When Hema was pregnant with her first child, she had tried to escape. After a particularly brutal beating, she returned to her parent's home and stayed there until she gave birth. But not this time. When she tried to leave again, her husband refused to let her take the baby with her. So she went back to him. It wasn't just the physical abuse though, that was bad enough. He beat her with sticks, shouted at her, and blamed her for things she hadn't even done. He listened more to others than to her, which only added fuel

to the fire. Even when others, including his own mother tried to intervene, he would turn violent on them too. At times, in a rage, he would hurt himself. Stabbing himself and then lie to the police, blaming others for his injuries.

“I have been admitted to the hospital four or five times. He’s even gone to jail because of it. The hospital staff said they would file a case, but I begged them not to. He promised me, he would change. He said he would will take care of me.”

There were a few times he ended up in jail. Once, he struck her in the face with a broomstick and she had to be hospitalized. The hospital staff reported the incident, but when the police came to take down her statement, she told them not to proceed. He had promised to change. He promised to take care of her. And in the deepest corners of her heart, she wanted to believe him. She had nowhere to go and two children depending on her. Financial hardship made everything more complicated. Her husband was jobless, and with seven mouths to feed, money was always scarce. That too became another excuse to beat her.

Hema endured it all for her children. They were the reason she kept going. His mother was one of the few who offered her some support. She would sometimes urge her son to leave Hema alone, to let her go so he might realize what he had lost. Sometimes it worked. Other times, it didn't. Hema didn't hesitate to tell the hospital staff what had happened. She wasn't ashamed. But beyond that, she stayed silent. She told no one, not her friends, not the PHM, not a single person in the village. She was afraid, so she kept quiet.

“A madam at the hospital told me if something happens again, she will protect me and find a safe place for me and my children to stay.”

One day at the hospital, a staff member spoke to her gently. She said that if anything happened again, she would help Hema find a place to stay, a shelter for her and the children. That gave Hema a small flicker of hope. She wasn't sure if she wanted to keep living with her husband. If he changed for the better, maybe she could try again. But if nothing improved, she would leave. She would take her children with her, even if it meant starting from scratch, all over again.

There were too many sleepless nights for Hema. Even days without a meal. Fear had taken up residence in her body, steady and constant, like her own pulse. And yet, inexplicably, she held on. Because she knew her children were worth more than the endless cycle of suffering and silence.

Domestic violence during pregnancy is a hidden issue, and women still suffer in silence due to fear, shame, and economic subordination.

Alcoholism in the partner and interference by toxic in-laws are common factors that sustain the cycle of violence and emotional control.

Some women described cycles of violence during pregnancy, where they were specifically targeted on the abdomen resulting in hospitalization and lasting psychological trauma.

A small act of kindness from a trusted individual, such as a health worker, friend, or relative, often provided the emotional support required to cope.

Women avoid clinics, police, or legal aid due to fear of social stigma, victim-blaming, and further abuse by their perpetrators.



Children are often direct witnesses or are indirectly exposed to the abuse, putting them at high risk of trauma or learning how to inflict harm to themselves.

Many women endure abusive relationships simply to preserve a sense of peace for their children.

The majority of women fear the collapse of their relationships and cope either on their own or with the support of trusted friends. Few seek professional or legal help.

Fears of revenge, trauma, and inadequate systemic support often discourage women from accessing legal redress.

Economic dependence on the abuser severely limits a woman's autonomy in making decisions or ending the cycle of abuse.

Women often recognize their need for mental health support but avoid seeking it for fear of being discovered by their partners and subjected to further violence.



Message of Hope

These mothers are living through unimaginable pain, yet they show remarkable courage and strength as they experience and cope with violence. They are mothers who still dream of peace and independence, who hold on to hope for change. They are survivors who continue to protect their own lives and those of their children, even at great personal risk.



Chair

Prof. Priyamali Jayasekera

Secretary

Dr. Thamarasi Senaratne

Committee Members

Prof. GDI Rodrigo

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Mr. Kamalnath Jinadasa

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Dr. Aruna Fernando

Dr. Dilshan Perera

Dr. Vasanthika S Thuduvage

Dr. YSHTD Silva

Dr. LS Kaththiriarachchi

Ms. MDC Fernando

Date: 25th April 2025

ERC Meeting Date: 23rd April 2025

Dr. Lakshman Senanayake,
Consultant Obstetrician & Gynecologist,
Independent Consultant,
546/2, Nawala Road,
Rajagiriya

Dear Dr. Senanayake,

Application no : **RP/2025/09**

Title : **Intimate Partner Violence and Pregnancy Outcomes: A Prospective Cohort Study in Nuwara Eliya District, Sri Lanka**

Principal Investigator: **Dr. Lakshman Senanayake,**

Co-Investigators/Supervisors: **Mr. M. Suchira Suranga, Dr. Chinthaka Banagala, Dr Achintha Dissanayake, Mr. Janaranga Dewasurendra**

Thank you for submitting the above study to the ERC/FOM, KDU. We are pleased to inform you that the ERC/FOM, KDU has granted ethical approval for your project effective from 23rd April 2025, as per details given below;

The following documents were reviewed and approved.

Document	Version No	Date of Submission
Project Proposal	II	17.03.2025
Study Instrument – English	II	17.03.2025
Study Instrument – Sinhala	II	17.03.2025
Study Instrument – Tamil	II	17.03.2025
Participant Information Sheet – English	II	17.03.2025
Participant Information Sheet – Sinhala	II	17.03.2025
Participant Information Sheet – Tamil	II	17.03.2025
Participant Consent Form – English	II	17.03.2025
Participant Consent Form – Sinhala	II	17.03.2025
Participant Consent Form – Tamil	II	17.03.2025

We affirm that none of the proposed study team members were present during the decision-making process of the ERC.

The approval is valid until two years from the date of sanction. You are requested to make a written request for renewal / extension of the validity, along with the submission of annual status report, one-month prior to the date of expiry of approval.

Please note that ethical approval would be revoked if any alteration is made to the project without obtaining prior written consent from the ethical review committee.

As the principal investigator you are expected to ensure that procedures performed under the project will be conducted in accordance with all relevant national and international policies and regulations that govern research involving human participants.

Please note that this approval is subjected to the following condition.

- Progress reports to be submitted at 6 monthly intervals. Progress reports should be submitted only in the format given in the annexure 13 of SOPs.
- In the event of any complaints from the participants, these should be reported to the Secretary, ERC/FOM, KDU.
- In the events of any protocol amendments, ERC must be informed and the amendments should be highlighted in clear terms as follows:
 - a. The exact alteration/amendment should be specified and indicated where the amendment occurred in the original project.
 - b. If the amendments require a change in the consent form, the copy of the revised information and Consent forms and the translations should be submitted to Ethics Committee for approval.

Thank you.

Yours Sincerely



Prof. Priyamali Jayasekera
(Chair, Ethics Review Committee)



Dr. Thamarasi Senaratne
(Secretary, Ethics Review Committee)



Kingdom of the Netherlands

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