

UNBRIDLED LEARNING PROJECT

The Nari Project

Ashley Wali

WE ARE BROTHERS AND
SISTERS OF THIS WORLD

Project Proposal: The Nari Project

Rape, abuse, acid attacking, trafficking, dowry, murder- all painful issues that few want to deal with. While the modern woman is afforded ample rights in contrast to those only decades ago, the bitter truth is that we have a more pressing issue at hand- violence against women. It is sobering to realize that we live in a world where an eleven year old is raped, a fourteen year old dies from an acid attack, a woman dies from domestic abuse, and a fifteen year old is gang-raped for a week and murdered from acid. However disturbing these occurrences may be, it is the stark reality.

While violence is a widespread issue, the amount of abuse women face in Bangladesh is staggering. According to a 2003 UN study, Bangladesh ranks fourth in the world with respect to violence against women. The study found that 66 percent of males believe it is justifiable to beat their wives. Although the government enacted laws to protect women in 1983, the abuse has not diminished due to a lack of knowledge and support. Only yesterday, the Daily Star reported on a housewife that “was hospitalized . . . after she was brutally beaten up by her in-laws for failing to meet their dowry demand”. She was allegedly beaten by her husband, his brother, and her mother-in-law and her father found her “bleeding in an unconscious state”. Nari Forum (nari means women in Bengali) is a grass roots organization in Bangladesh that supports battered and abused women through critical situations. While they have a shoestring budget, there are a number of local doctors and lawyers that support the organization.

While I knew my years at SMU would have a great impact on my life, I had no idea that an opportunity like the Unbridled Learning project would arise so soon. The American Heroine class, taught by Professor Nina Schwartz, was a catalyst for my interest in women’s rights. The course focuses on women’s issues and helped me understand the challenges women face in today’s world. I feel a profound obligation to help battered and abused women in developing countries. There is a desperate need for someone to articulate their plight to the world.

I contacted Nari Forum with a proposal to create a hundred “crisis kits” that would provide the battered women with their very basic needs as they transition from dismal situations to a more secure environment. Nari Forum was very receptive to my ideas, as their funds have limited the amount of help they can extend to the women. These ‘crisis kits’ will be the first of its kind in Bangladesh

and will consist of clothing, toiletries (soap, toothpaste, toothbrush, comb, and a small towel), first aid, and a copy of the universal declaration of human rights (which Dr. Halperin will help provide). While we think of these as bare necessities, the kits will offer the women something of their own at a time when they have nothing. Each kit would cost approximately twenty dollars each, totaling 2,000 dollars to make a hundred kits.

In addition to the kits, I will work with local women's shelters to learn about their procedures and develop a more structured process to apply to the organization. There is a plethora of experience and knowledge in the Dallas community that I plan to leverage and use in Bangladesh. I want to take basic guidelines not only for the affected women, but also for the supporting organization. This will ensure that the efforts and funding are used in the best possible way.

I plan to travel home to Bangladesh in May and work with Nari Forum in an attempt to counter this severe hardship. As I speak Bengali fluently, there should not be difficulties in communication. I will work with the abused women, the organization, and the local community to ensure that every dollar is spent appropriately. I wish to bring my experience back to SMU and be a global voice for these women. If I am afforded the opportunity to share their story with others, it will have a profound effect. This will be a new chapter in the story of SMU's global impact. Although the magnitude of problem facing us is immense, the Nari Project is a small, yet positive, step in the right direction.