

Violence against women needs priority in India's health policy

LANCET ■ 'Efforts to prevent violence against women not enough'

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CURRENT efforts to prevent violence against women and girls are inadequate, according to a new series that will be published online in *The Lancet* on Friday. Estimates suggest that globally, 1 in 3 women has experienced either physical or sexual violence from their partner.

According to this series, violence against women needs to receive higher priority in health policies. In India, however, the national health policy, 2002, has yet to highlight this critical issue and it is only now that the process of developing a policy document for a health care re-

SERIES HIGHLIGHTS BELL BAJAO CAMPAIGN

THE LANCET series has highlighted the Bell Bajao campaign, launched by human rights organisation Breakthrough, that calls on men to challenge violence against women. The idea of the campaign is to break the cycle of violence against women in India with one simple action: by ringing the bell on some pretext in order to interrupt the violence. Breakthrough seeks to move men to become agents of change by showing men as leaders in providing solutions to end violence against women rather than being part of the problem. The multimedia component of the campaign has reached more than 130 million people in India alone. **ENS**

sponse on violence against women is under way.

Padma Deosthali, coordinator of Centre for Enquiry into Health and Allied Themes (CEHAT), who is among the key persons involved in preparing this policy document, has also been featured in *The Lancet* series. "Our biggest challenge is that there is no recognition on the

issue of violence against women in the health policy. It is looked at as more of a law and order issue," she said.

While the Ministry of Health had issued guidelines on the health care sectors response for survivors of sexual violence, till date very few states have adopted the same. Only Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have passed govern-

ment resolutions based on the guidelines, while in Maharashtra, the matter is in court. The CEHAT has appealed against the state's protocol on guidelines for the health care sector response to survivors of sexual violence.

The Lancet series is an eye opener, say activists, who urge that violence against women should receive higher priority in the health policy.

"Globally, one in three women will experience sexual violence in their lifetime, which shows that more investment needs to be made in prevention," said series co-lead, Professor Charlotte Watts, the founding director of the Gender Violence and Health Centre in London.