

# Marital rape remains taboo topic in patriarchal society

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Lusi, 25, arrived at the Women's Legal Aid (LBH Apik) sometime last year with a pair of black eyes. She also had a genital infection after her husband often forced her to have sex even while she was on her period.

"He'd hit me when I refused," Lusi told *The Jakarta Post* on Wednesday.

Her 30-year-old husband has allegedly raped her since they got married three years ago.

"I told my mom, but she advised me that whatever it takes, I have to serve my husband. My refusing to do so is considered a sin," said the mother-of-one. "I reported to the LBH Apik because I couldn't take it anymore. I don't feel safe at home."

In Indonesia's patriarchal society, marital rape remains a taboo topic as society often refuses to acknowledge "rape" within a legitimate marriage.

Lusi was among 195 victims of marital rape reported to the National Commission on Violence

Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) in 2018. There were 172 cases in 2017.

Komnas Perempuan chairwoman Azriana Manalu told the *Post* that the real number must be far higher, given that few victims of marital rape report their husbands because they believe that, despite the suffering they inflict, such husbands are not committing a crime.

According to the commission, the forms of marital rape vary, from husbands forcing menstruating wives to have sex, to husbands forcing harmful, unhygienic things into their wives' bodies.

Article 5 of the 2004 Domestic Violence Law stipulates that domestic violence is a crime and includes physical and mental assault and sexual violence. Article 8 of the law specifies that sexual violence also includes forcing sexual intercourse on individuals within the family, including spouses.

"In marital rape cases, law enforcers need the victims to submit a report for them to be able to follow up the case. But [the perpetrators] are rarely charged because it's still regarded as a pri-

vate matter," Azriana said.

The number of reported cases of violence against women in 2018 increased to 406,178 from 348,446 in 2017, according to the commission.

As in previous years, domestic violence remains the biggest problem, accounting for 71 percent of the total figure. About 53 percent of domestic violence cases were committed by husbands against their wives, 21 percent by boyfriends against girlfriends in so-called "date violence", while the remainder included sexual violence against daughters and maids.

"The data shows that husbands, from whom wives seek protection, can be the main perpetrator of violence," Komnas Perempuan commissioner Mariana Amiruddin said.

Ali Khasan of the domestic violence division with the Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Ministry said that most of the cases of violence against women remained unresolved because many law enforcers, especially at the regional level, lacked gender perspectives.

"They don't even understand what 'gender' is. Thus we have to improve on this first of all. They have to learn about the evolving forms of violence against women," Ali said.

Ali said the ministry was focusing its energy on the rape bill, currently being deliberated at the House of Representatives.

The bill specifically cites nine forms of sexual violence, their punishment and compensation and rehabilitation for victims.

Deliberation has stalled as conservative lawmakers in the House have attempted to drop the bill, because they believe it promotes adultery and will lead to wives disobeying their husbands. Many conservative groups also claim that the bill undermines family values.

Azriana said the government should involve religious figures in teaching about gender equality and what is not permissible within marriage.

"We won't be able to minimize violence against women if our society still thinks that women are inferior to men. It's about changing the social construct," she said.