

The extent to which spousal abuse may occur and go unreported is not known. In response to a perception that domestic violence was rising, in 1994 a special unit was established within the police department to investigate domestic violence complaints. Female officers staff the unit. Since 1995 a hot line has been in service for abused spouses and the public to report domestic violence. During 1999 approximately 10 women and their children stayed at a women's shelter run by the Social Affairs Services unit of the Ministry of Culture. The Social Affairs

Services unit provides counseling for women and their spouses. In August 1999, a photograph of a man accused of stabbing his wife and assaulting one of his children was published in a daily newspaper, a new development in the country, where privacy generally is guarded closely. While Islamic courts usually discourage divorce in domestic violence cases, there appears to be a movement away from encouraging wives to reconcile with flagrantly abusive spouses. Islamic religious authorities recognize wife beating as grounds for divorce.

In 1999 the police recorded 91 cases of domestic abuse compared with 72 in 1998. The police also recorded 10 cases of rape and 10 molestations. The criminal penalty for a minor domestic assault is 1 to 2 weeks in jail and a fine. An assault resulting in serious injury would be punished by caning and a longer jail sentence. In September two members of the Royal Brunei Armed Forces were sentenced to 4 years' imprisonment and three strokes of the cane for the attempted molestation and sodomy of a 20-year-old deaf girl. In October 1999, a man convicted of assaulting his former wife with a knife and a piece of wood on three separate occasions, received three concurrent sentences of 2 years and 6 months in prison and three strokes of the cane. He also received a 6-month prison sentence for assaulting his 7-year-old daughter. Also in 1999, a man impersonating a religious inspector who raped and extorted money from a woman he found in a compromising situation with her boyfriend was sentenced to 12 years in prison and 6 strokes of the cane.

One area of apparent abuse involves female domestic servants. While the level of violence in society is low, beating of servants--or refusing them the right to leave the house on days off, sometimes on grounds that they "might encounter the wrong company"--is less socially unacceptable behavior. Since most female domestics are foreign workers who are highly dependent on their employers, those subject to abuse may be unwilling or unable to bring complaints, either to the authorities or to their governments' embassies. However, when such complaints are brought, the Government generally is quick to investigate allegations of abuse and impose fines and punishment as warranted.

In accordance with Koranic precepts, women are denied equal status with men in a number of important areas such as divorce, inheritance, and custody of children. Under the Brunei Nationality Act, citizenship is transmitted through males only. Female citizens who are married to foreigners or bear children by foreign fathers cannot transmit citizenship to their children, even when such children are born in the country. This has resulted in the creation of a sizable population of stateless children, estimated at more than 5,000 residents, who are entitled to live in the country and to be documented for travel by the Government, but who cannot enjoy the full privileges of citizenship, including the right to own land.

Although men are eligible for permanent positions in government service whether or not they hold university degrees, women who do not have university degrees are eligible to hold government positions only on a month-to-month basis. While recent changes eliminated some previous inequities, women in month-to-month positions continue to receive slightly less annual leave and fewer allowances than their male and female counterparts in permanent positions. There are no separate pay scales for men and women, and in recent years there has been a major influx of women into the work force. Women serve in a wide variety of capacities in the armed forces, although they are not permitted to serve in combat. The number of female university graduates is increasing, and nearly two-thirds of Brunei University's entering class is female.

Religious authorities strongly encourage Muslim women to wear the tudong, a traditional head covering, and many women do so. However, some Muslim women do not, and there is no official pressure on non-Muslim women to do so. All female students in government-operated schools are required to wear the tudong; students in nongovernmental schools are encouraged to wear it. In July 1999, a new Married Women's Law came into effect, improving significantly the rights of non-Muslim married women with respect to maintenance, property, and domestic violence. In November 1999, changes to the Islamic Family Law (in the section on women's Position in Marriage and Divorce) came into effect and are expected to improve the marital rights of Muslim women. 🇲🇵

Source: Brunei Country Situationer: Human Rights Report prepared by the US State Department
<<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2000/eap/index.cfm?docid=675>