



Violence Against Women

The Situation

Violence against women takes many forms – physical, sexual, psychological and economic. These forms of violence are interrelated and affect women from before birth to old age. Some types of violence, such as trafficking, cross national boundaries.

Women who experience violence suffer a range of health problems and their ability to participate in public life is diminished. Violence against women harms families and communities across generations and reinforces other violence prevalent in society.

Violence against women also impoverishes women, their families, communities and nations.

Violence against women is not confined to a specific culture, region or country, or to particular groups of women within a society. The roots of violence against women lie in persistent discrimination against women.

According to country data, up to 70 per cent of women experience violence in their lifetime.

Violence by an intimate partner

The most common form of violence experienced by women globally is physical violence inflicted by an intimate partner, with women beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused.

Several global surveys suggest that half of all women who die from homicide are killed by their current or former husbands or partners.

- In Australia, Canada, and Israel 40 to 70 per cent of female murder victims were killed by their partners, according to the World Health Organization.
- In the United States, one-third of women murdered each year are killed by intimate partners.
- In South Africa, a woman is killed every six hours by an intimate partner.
- In India, 22 women were killed each day in dowry-related murders in 2007.
- In Guatemala, two women are murdered, on average, each day.

Psychological or emotional violence by intimate partners is also widespread.

Sexual violence

Rates of sexual violence are difficult to establish because in many societies it remains an issue of deep shame for women and often their families. Statistics on rape from police records, for example, are notoriously unreliable because of significant underreporting.

- According to the World Health Organization, the proportion

of women suffering sexual violence by non-partners after the age of 15 varies from less than 1 per cent in Ethiopia and Bangladesh to between 10 and 12 per cent in Peru, Samoa and the United Republic of Tanzania.

- In Switzerland, 22.3 per cent of women experience sexual violence by non-partners in their lifetime.
- In Canada a study of adolescents aged 15 to 19 found that 54 per cent of girls had experienced “sexual coercion” in a dating relationship.

Forced and unregistered marriages can increase the vulnerability of women to violence, including sexual violence. The practice of early marriage – a form of sexual violence – is common worldwide, with more than 60 million girls worldwide married before the age of 18, primarily in South Asia (31.1 million) and Sub-Saharan Africa (14.1 million).

Young girls forced into marriage and into sexual relations may suffer health risks, including exposure to HIV/AIDS, and limited school attendance. One effect of sexual abuse is traumatic gynaecologic fistula: an injury resulting from severe tearing of the vaginal tissues, rendering the woman incontinent and socially undesirable.

Sexual violence in conflict

Sexual violence in conflict is a serious, present-day atrocity affecting millions of people, primarily women and girls. It is frequently a conscious strategy employed on a large scale by armed groups to humiliate opponents, terrify individuals and destroy societies. Women and girls may also be subjected to sexual exploitation by those mandated to protect them.

Women as old as grandmothers and as young as toddlers have routinely suffered violent sexual abuse at the hands of military and rebel forces.

Rape has long been used as a tactic of war, with violence against women during or after armed conflicts reported in every international or non-international war-zone.

- In the Democratic Republic of Congo approximately 1,100 rapes are being reported each month, with an average of 36 women and girls raped every day. It is believed that over 200,000 women have suffered from sexual violence in that country since armed conflict began.
- The rape and sexual violation of women and girls is pervasive in the conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan.
- Between 250,000 and 500,000 women were raped during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.
- Sexual violence was a characterizing feature of the 14-year long civil war in Liberia.

Women aged 15-44 are more at risk from rape and domestic violence than from cancer, car accidents, war and malaria, according to World Bank data.

Violence against women in police custody is common and includes sexual violence, inappropriate surveillance, strip searches conducted by men and demands for sexual acts in exchange for privileges or basic necessities.

- During the conflict in Bosnia in the early 1990s, between 20,000 and 50,000 women were raped.

Violence and HIV/AIDS

Women's inability to negotiate safe sex and refuse unwanted sex is closely linked to the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Unwanted sex results in a higher risk of abrasion and bleeding and easier transmission of the virus.

Women who are beaten by their partners are 48 per cent more likely to be infected with HIV/AIDS.

Young women are particularly vulnerable to coerced sex and are increasingly being infected with HIV/AIDS. Over half of new HIV infections worldwide are occurring among young people between the ages of 15 and 24, and more than 60 per cent of HIV-positive youth in this age bracket are female. The vulnerability of women and girls to HIV remains particularly high in sub-Saharan Africa; 80 % of all women in the world living with HIV live in this region.

Female Genital Mutilation/Genital Cutting

Female Genital Mutilation/Genital Cutting (FGM/C) refers to several types of traditional cutting operations performed on women and girls.

- It is estimated that between 130 and 140 million women and girls alive today have undergone FGM/C, mainly in Africa and some Middle Eastern countries.
- 3 million girls a year are thought to be at risk of genital mutilation.

Dowry murder

Dowry murder is a brutal practice where a woman is killed by her husband or in-laws because her family cannot meet their demands for dowry — a payment made to a woman's in-laws upon her marriage as a gift to her new family.

While dowries or similar payments are prevalent worldwide, dowry murder occurs predominantly in South Asia.

"Honour killing"

In many societies, rape victims, women suspected of engaging in premarital sex, and women accused of adultery have been murdered by their relatives because the violation of a woman's chastity is viewed as an affront to the family's honour.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that the annual worldwide number of so-called "honour killing" victims may be as high as 5,000 women.

Trafficking in persons

Although the global scale of human trafficking is difficult to quantify, it is estimated that as many as 2.5 million people are trafficked annually into situations including prostitution, forced labour, slavery or servitude. Women and girls account for about 80 per cent of the detected victims.

Violence during pregnancy

Violence before and during pregnancy has serious health consequences for both mother and child. It leads to high-risk pregnancies and pregnancy-related problems, including miscarriage, pre-term labour and low birth weight.

Female infanticide, prenatal sex selection and systematic neglect of girls are widespread in South and East Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East.

Discrimination and violence

Many women face multiple forms of discrimination and increased risk of violence. Factors such as women's ethnicity, caste, class, migrant or refugee status, age, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, disability or HIV status can influence what forms of violence they suffer and how they experience it.

- Indigenous women in Canada are five times more likely than other women of the same age to die as the result of violence.
- In India, Dalit women experience high rates of sexual violence committed by men of higher caste.
- In Europe, North America and Australia, over half of women with disabilities have experienced physical abuse, compared to one-third of non-disabled women.

Sexual harassment

- Between 40 and 50 percent of women in European Union countries experience unwanted sexual advancements, physical contact or other forms of sexual harassment at their workplace.
- In the United States, 83 percent of girls aged 12 to 16 experience some form of sexual harassment in public schools.
- Small surveys in Asia-Pacific countries indicate that 30 to 40 per cent of women workers report some form of harassment – verbal, physical or sexual.

Cost and Consequences

The costs of violence against women are extremely high. They include the direct costs of services to treat and support abused women and their children and to bring perpetrators to justice. The indirect costs include lost employment and productivity, and the costs in human pain and suffering.

- The cost of intimate partner violence in the United States alone exceeds \$5.8 billion per year: \$4.1 billion is for direct medical and health care services, while productivity losses account for nearly \$1.8 billion.
- A 2004 study in the United Kingdom estimated the total direct and indirect costs of domestic violence, including pain and suffering, to be £23 billion per year or £440 per person.
- In Canada, the annual costs of direct expenditures related to violence against women have been estimated at 684 million Canadian dollars for the criminal justice system, 187 million for police and 294 million for the cost of counselling and training, totalling more than 1 billion a year.
- In Uganda the cost of domestic violence was estimated at US\$2.5 million in 2007.

All sources available at endviolence.un.org