



United Nations Secretary-General's Campaign

Violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women's lives, on their families and on society as a whole. Most societies prohibit such violence – yet the reality is that too often, it is covered up or tacitly condoned.

– United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

Fact Sheet

HOW WIDESPREAD IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN?

- The most common form of violence experienced by women globally is physical violence inflicted by an intimate partner. On average, at least one in three women is beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused by an intimate partner in the course of her lifetime.
- Women aged 15-44 are more at risk from rape and domestic violence than from cancer, motor accidents, war and malaria, according to World Bank data.
- 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, Israel, South Africa and the United States, 40%-70% of female murder victims were killed by their partners, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). In Colombia, one woman is reportedly killed by her partner or former partner every six days. Hundreds of women were abducted, raped and murdered in and around Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, over a 10-year period.
- It is estimated that, worldwide, one in five women will become a victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime.
- Violence against women during or after armed conflicts has been reported in every international or non-international war-zone. Between 250,000 and 500,000 women were raped during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda; between 20,000 and 50,000 women were raped during the conflict in Bosnia in the early 1990s.
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) refers to several types of deeply-rooted traditional cutting operations performed on women and girls. It is estimated that more than 130 million girls and women alive today have undergone FGM, mainly in Africa and some Middle Eastern countries, and 2 million girls a year are at risk of mutilation. As of April 2006, 15 of the 28 African States where FGM is prevalent had made it an offence under criminal law.
- 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.
- Many women face multiple forms of discrimination and increased risk of violence. Indigenous women in Canada are five times more likely than other women of the same age to die as the result of violence. In Europe, North America and Australia, over half of women with disabilities have experienced physical abuse, compared to one-third of non-disabled women.
- Women experience sexual harassment throughout their lives. Between 40% and 50% of women in the European Union reported some form of sexual harassment in the workplace. In Malawi, 50% of schoolgirls surveyed reported sexual harassment at school.

WHY AND HOW DOES VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN OCCUR?

- 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 historically unequal power relations between men and women, and persistent discrimination against women.
- Rape has long been used as a weapon of war. Women as old as grandmothers and as young as toddlers have routinely suffered violent sexual abuse at the hands of military and rebel forces.
- 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.
- The practice of early marriage is common worldwide, especially in Africa and South Asia. This is a form of sexual violence, for young girls are often forced into the marriage and into sexual relations, causing health risks, including exposure to HIV/AIDS, and limiting their attendance in school.
- Between 500,000 to 2 million people, the majority of them women and children, are trafficked annually into situations including prostitution, forced labour, slavery or servitude, according to estimates.
- 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% of HIV-positive youth in this age bracket are female.
- 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.
- Female infanticide, prenatal sex selection and systematic neglect of girls are widespread in South and East Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East.

COSTS 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 US\$5.8 billion per year: US\$4.1 billion is for direct medical and health care services, while productivity losses account for nearly US\$1.8 billion.

- In Canada, a 1995 study estimated the annual direct costs of violence against women to be Can\$684 million for the criminal justice system, Can\$187 million for police and Can\$294 million for the cost of counseling and training, totaling more than Can\$1 billion a year. 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.
- One effect of sexual abuse is traumatic gynecologic fistula: an injury resulting from severe tearing of the vaginal tissues, rendering the woman incontinent and socially undesirable. It is believed that tens of thousands of women have suffered from sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since armed conflict began.
- The prevalence of violence and of HIV/AIDS are interlinked. 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% more likely to be infected with HIV/AIDS.
- Courtroom procedures that protect the privacy of victims during trial, such as allowing evidence to be given by video link or restricting access to courtrooms during rape trials, are being used more often, including in Finland, Ireland, Japan and Nepal.

Providing Services

- In Timor Leste, Fokupers, an NGO, provides legal aid services for women victims and raises public awareness of women's legal rights. It distributes information to service providers, religious institutions, government agencies and lawmakers.
- It has proven effective to bring together health services for victims of violence in one interagency unit, often called a "One-Stop Centre". First developed in Malaysia, this model is currently being replicated in much of Asia as well as in other countries, including South Africa.

Preventing Violence

- There are promising strategies to engage men in the prevention of violence against women. The White Ribbon Campaign, established in Canada in 1991, has spread to 47 countries.
- States have become increasingly involved in trying to change attitudes. In Denmark, a comprehensive nation-wide government campaign was launched in Danish, English, Arabic, Turkish and Somali.
- In Upper Egypt, NGOs used community mobilization to inform local and religious leaders of the adverse effects of female genital mutilation/cutting and to call for an end to the practice.

HOW ARE COUNTRIES DOING ON LEGISLATION?

- According to the 2006 Secretary-General's In-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence against Women, 89 States worldwide had some form of legislative prohibition on domestic violence, and a growing number of countries had instituted national plans of action to end violence against women. Marital rape may be prosecuted in at least 104 States, and 90 States have some form of legislative provision against sexual harassment
- There are 102 States that have no specific legal provisions against domestic violence. Marital rape is not a prosecutable offence in at least 53 States. Only 93 States (of 191 reviewed) have some legislative provision prohibiting trafficking in human beings.
- In many places, laws contain loopholes that allow perpetrators to act with impunity. In a number of countries, a rapist can go free under the penal code if he marries the victim.
- UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, adopted in the year 2000, calls for women's equal participation in peace and security issues. Yet, eight years later, it is evident that much more effort is needed to strengthen mechanisms to prevent, prosecute and remedy violence against women in times of war, and to ensure that their voices are heard in peacebuilding.
- Although the 1981 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) does not explicitly mention violence against women, the CEDAW Committee clarified in its General Recommendation No. 19 (1992) that countries party to the Convention are under an obligation to eliminate violence against women.

WHAT IS BEING DONE: SOME EXAMPLES

Improving Criminal Justice Systems

- The Mongolian Domestic Violence Law, enacted in May 2004, was the result of collaboration between two prominent Mongolian women's NGOs and the parliamentary domestic violence legislative taskforce.
- In the United Kingdom, there are guidelines for police, social workers and educators on addressing forced marriages.

THE WAY FORWARD

- There has been significant progress in establishing international standards and norms. International and regional legal and policy instruments have clarified the obligations of countries to eradicate and punish violence against women. However, States are failing to meet the requirements of the international legal and policy framework.
- Violence against women must be prioritized at all levels — it has not yet received the priority required to enable significant change. Leadership and political will is critical.
- There is need for investment of resources and for consistent assistance, especially to the least developed countries and countries emerging from conflict. A more cohesive and strategic approach is needed from all actors, including governments, the international community and civil society.
- There is compelling evidence that violence against women is severe and pervasive throughout the world: in 71 countries at least one survey has been conducted. However, there is an urgent need to strengthen data collection in order to inform policy.
- The problem of under-reporting complicates data collection. A 2005 WHO study based on data from 24,000 women in ten countries noted that 55% to 95% of women who had been physically abused by their partners had never contacted the police, NGOs or shelters for help. Stigma and fear prevent women from seeking assistance and redress.