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## **Behind closed doors - Violence against women**

*Its statistics are alarming, the spread global, the human cost staggering, but the problem of gender-based violence often lacks the consistent media spotlight it warrants.*

### **The Story**

Violence against women and girls is a universal problem of epidemic proportions, but its human cost often remains invisible. At least one out of every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime. The abuser is usually someone known to the victim.

In 2002, the Council of Europe declared violence against women a public health emergency and a major cause of death and disability for women 16 to 44 years of age. A World Bank report estimated that violence against women was as serious a cause of death and incapacity among women of reproductive age as cancer, and a greater cause of ill-health, than traffic accidents and malaria combined. A 2003 report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that the costs of intimate partner violence in the United States alone exceed \$5.8 billion per year: \$4.1 billion in direct medical and health care services and almost \$1.8 billion in productivity losses.

For the most part, the human cost of gender-based violence is invisible. Fear and shame continue to prevent many women from speaking out, and data collected is often insufficient and inconsistent. Even in countries that enjoy relative peace and prosperity, many women are living in a constant state of insecurity.

- **The Context**

Violence against women occurs in all regions and countries and much of it is invisible. Police in countries around the world say that many rape victims do not report the crime.

- Often, countries reporting the incidence of violence are the ones doing the most to counter it.
- In the Dominican Republic, reports indicate that in cases of violence against women, the aggressors are partners or former partners of the victims in 40-68 per cent of the cases. In Georgia, it has been reported that 50% of families experience some form of domestic violence. In India, statistics indicate that 14 wives are murdered by their husbands' family every day.
- According to a 2002 report by the World Health Organization, studies in Australia, Canada, Israel, South Africa and the US have shown that 40-70 per cent of women who have been murdered were killed by their intimate partners, usually in the context of an abusive relationship. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that in the United Kingdom 40 per cent of female homicide victims are killed by their husbands or boyfriends.
- A study in Sweden found that 70 per cent of women had experienced some form of violence or sexual harassment. Statistics from the Netherlands show that about 200,000 women are subjected to violence each year by their intimate partners.
- It has been reported that 6 in 10 women in Botswana are victims of domestic violence, while in Moldova, 31 % of girls and young women (ages 16-19) are reported to have experienced sexual violence.

(more)

***For further information***

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***Useful web links***

**UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences:**

<http://www.ohchr.org/english/issues/women/rapporteur/>

**2003 report of the Special Rapporteur: Review of international, regional, and national developments in the area of violence against women:**

<http://www.unhchr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/TestFrame/a9c6321593428acfc1256cef0038513e?Opendocument>

**United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM):**

<http://www.unifem.org/campaigns/november25/issue.php>

**World Health Organisation (WHO):**

World Report on Violence and Health:

[http://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/violence/world\\_report/en/](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/)

Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women:

<http://www.who.int/gender/violence/multicountry/en/>

Sexual Violence Research Initiative: <http://www.who.int/svri/en/>

The economic dimensions of interpersonal violence:

<http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2004/9241591609.pdf>

**UN Division on the Advancement of Women:**

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/>