



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.

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.

A World Health Organization (WHO) study in 11 countries found that the percentage of women who had been subjected to sexual violence by an intimate partner ranged from 6 per cent in Japan to 59 per cent in Ethiopia.

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 to 70 per cent of female murder victims were killed by their partners, according to the World Health Organization.

- In Colombia, one woman is reportedly killed by her partner or former partner every six days.

Psychological or emotional violence by intimate partners is also widespread.

Sexual violence

It is estimated that, worldwide, one in five women will become a victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime.

The practice of early marriage – a form of sexual violence – is common worldwide, especially in Africa and South Asia. 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.

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.

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.

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.

- 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.
- 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.

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 more than 130 million girls and women alive today have undergone FGM/C, mainly in Africa and some Middle Eastern countries.
- 2 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

Between 500,000 to 2 million people are trafficked annually into situations including prostitution, forced labour, slavery or servitude, according to estimates. 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.

- 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.

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.