

CURBING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

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ABSTRACT: *Violence against women and girls is a grave violation of human rights. Its impact ranges from immediate to long-term multiple physical, sexual and mental consequences for women and girls, including death. It negatively affects women's general well-being and prevents women from fully participating in society. Violence not only has negative consequences for women but also their families, the community and the country at large. It has tremendous costs, from greater health care and legal expenses and losses in productivity, impacting national budgets and overall development. Decades of mobilizing by civil society and women's movements have put ending gender-based violence high on national and international agendas. An unprecedented number of countries have laws against domestic violence, sexual assault and other forms of violence. Challenges remain however in implementing these laws, limiting women and girl's access to safety and justice. Not enough is done to prevent violence, and when it does occur, it often goes unpunished. This paper aims to discuss about ending violence against women and girls.*

Key Words:

Introduction

Violence against women and girls is one of the most systematic and widespread human rights violations. It is rooted in gendered social structures rather than individual and random acts; it cuts across age, socio-economic, educational and geographic boundaries; affects all societies; and is a major obstacle to ending gender inequality and discrimination globally. (UN General Assembly, 2006). The United Nations defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”

The terms ‘gender-based violence’ and ‘violence against women’ are frequently used interchangeably in literature and by advocates, however, the term gender-based violence refers to violence directed against a person because of his or her gender and expectations of his or her role in a society or culture. Gender-based violence highlights the gender dimension of these types of acts; in other words, the relationship between females’ subordinate status in society and their increased vulnerability to violence. It is important to note, however, that men and boys may also be victims of gender-based violence, especially sexual violence.

Forms of Violence against Women

Violence against women and girls has many manifestations, including forms that may be more common in specific settings, countries and regions. Violence against women manifests itself as physical, sexual, emotional and economic. The most universally common forms include domestic and intimate partner violence, sexual violence (including rape), sexual harassment, and emotional/psychological violence. Sexual violence as a tactic of warfare and in the aftermath of emergencies is also common in the respective countries and areas affected. Other widespread forms around the globe include: sexual exploitation, sexual trafficking, and harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), forced and child marriage.

Less documented forms, include:

- Crimes committed in the name of “honour”
- Femicide
- Prenatal sex selection
- Female infanticide
- Economic abuse
- Political violence
- Elder abuse
- Dowry-related violence

- Acid-throwing

Particular groups of women and girls, such as members of racial, ethnic and sexual minorities; HIV-positive women; migrants and undocumented workers; women with disabilities; women in detention and women affected by armed conflict or in emergency settings, may be more vulnerable to violence and may experience multiple forms of violence on account of compounded forms of discrimination and socio-economic exclusion.

The Life Cycle and Violence

Women and girls are at risk of different forms of violence at all ages, from prenatal sex selection before they are born through abuse of widows and elderly women. While sexual violence affects women of all ages, the changing nature of women and girl's relationships and the different in which they spend time expose women and girls to specific forms of violence during each phase of their life.

Femicide

- In India, 8,093 cases of dowry-related death were reported in 2007; an unknown number of murders of women and young girls were falsely labeled 'suicides' or 'accidents'.
- In Australia, Canada, Israel, South Africa and the United States, between 40 and 70 percent of female murder victims were killed by their intimate partners.
- In the State of Chihuahua, Mexico, 66 percent of murders of women were committed by husbands, boyfriends or other family members.

Violence and Young Women

- Worldwide, up to 50 percent of sexual assaults are committed against girls under 16.
- An estimated 150 million girls under the age of 18 suffered some form of sexual violence in 2002 alone.
- The first sexual experience of some 30 percent of women was forced. The percentage is even higher among those who were under 15 at the time of their sexual initiation, with up to 45 percent reporting that the experience was forced.

Harmful Practices

- Approximately 100 to 140 million girls and women in the world have experienced female genital mutilation/cutting, with more than 3 million girls in Africa annually at risk of the practice.
- Over 60 million girls worldwide are child brides, married before the age of 18, primarily in South Asia (31.3 million) and sub-Saharan Africa (14.1 million). Violence and abuse characterize married life for many of these girls. Women who marry early are more likely to be beaten or threatened, and more likely to believe that a husband might sometimes be justified in beating his wife.

Trafficking

- Women and girls are 80 percent of the estimated 800,000 people trafficked across national borders annually, with the majority (79 percent) trafficked for sexual exploitation. Within countries, many more women and girls are trafficked, often for purposes of sexual exploitation or domestic servitude.
- One study in Europe found that 60 percent of trafficked women had experienced physical and/or sexual violence before being trafficked, pointing to gender-based violence as a push factor in the trafficking of women.

Sexual Harassment

- Between 40 and 50 percent of women in European Union countries experience unwanted sexual advances, physical contact or other forms of sexual harassment at work.
- Across Asia, studies in Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines and South Korea show that 30 to 40 percent of women suffer workplace sexual harassment.
- In Nairobi, 20 percent of women have been sexually harassed at work or school.
- In the United States, 83 percent of girls aged 12 to 16 experienced some form of sexual harassment in public schools.

Rape in the context of Conflict

- Conservative estimates suggest that 20,000 to 50,000 women were raped during the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while approximately 250,000 to 500,000 women and girls were targeted in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

- Between 50,000 and 64,000 women in camps for internally displaced people in Sierra Leone were sexually assaulted by combatants between 1991 and 2001.
- In eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, at least 200,000 cases of sexual violence, mostly involving women and girls, have been documented since 1996: the actual numbers are believed to be far higher.

Risk Factors

A variety of factors at the individual, relationship, community and society (including the institutional/state) levels intersect to increase the risk of violence for women and girls. These factors, represented in the ecological model, include:

- Witnessing or experiencing abuse as a child (associated with future perpetration of violence for boys and experiencing violence for girls);
- Substance (including alcohol) abuse (associated with increased incidences of violence);
- Women's membership in marginalized or excluded groups;
- Low levels of education (for boys associated with perpetrating violence in the future and for girls, experiencing violence);
- limited economic opportunities (an aggravating factor for unemployed or underemployed men associated with perpetrating violence; and as a risk factor for women and girls, including of domestic abuse, child and forced marriage, and sexual exploitation and trafficking);
- The presence of economic, educational and employment disparities between men and women in an intimate relationship;
- Conflict and tension within an intimate partner relationship or marriage;
- Women's insecure access to and control over property and land rights;
- Male control over decision-making and assets;
- Attitudes and practices that reinforce female subordination and tolerate male violence (e.g. dowry, bride price, child marriage);
- Lack of safe spaces for women and girls, which can be physical or virtual meeting spaces that allow free expression and communication; a place to develop friendships and social networks, engage with mentors and seek advice from a supportive environment.
- Normalized use of violence within the family or society to address conflict;
- A limited legislative and policy framework for preventing and responding to violence;
- Lack of punishment (impunity) for perpetrators of violence; and,
- Low levels of awareness among service providers, law enforcement and judicial actors.

Additional risk factors related to intimate partner violence that have been identified in the context of the United States include: young age; poor mental health levels related to low self-esteem, anger, depression, emotional insecurity or dependence, antisocial or borderline personality traits and social isolation; history of physical discipline as a child; marital instability and separation or divorce; history of perpetrating psychological abuse; unhealthy family relationships; poverty-related issues such as overcrowding or economic stress; and low levels of community intervention or sanctions against domestic violence.

Protective Factors

On the other hand, there are protective factors that can reduce women and girls' risk of violence, including:

- completion of secondary education for girls (and boys);
- delaying age of marriage to 18;
- women's economic autonomy and access to skills training, credit and employment;
- social norms that promote gender equality;
- quality response services (judicial, security/protection, social and medical) staffed with knowledgeable, skilled and trained personnel;
- availability of safe spaces or shelters; and,
- access to support groups.

Other factors that require further research and analysis, but may be associated with risk of and protection from domestic violence include: women's prior experience as a survivor of violence (any form) at any age; men's communication levels with their female intimate partners; men's use of physical aggression against other men; as well as women and girl's restricted mobility.

It is important to remember that risk and protective factors are not direct causal links, but rather *correlated* – that is to say, for example, that a boy who witnesses abuse of his mother by his father as a child will not necessarily become a perpetrator later in life; nor is a woman of high socio-economic status and highly educated immune to domestic violence. Violence against women is a complex social, economic and cultural phenomenon.

Consequences and Costs

There are multiple consequences of violence, having immediate and short-term to inter-generational effects. The consequences and costs of violence have impacts at the individual level (for survivors, perpetrators and others affected by violence), as well as within the family, community and wider society, which translate into costs at the national level.

Individual and Community Consequences and Costs

Costs due to violence against women and girls—beyond the intangible suffering and impacts on quality of life and well-being—include costs to the survivor and her family in terms of health (mental and physical), employment and finances, and the effects it has on children. Illustrative costs include:

- immediate injuries such as fractures and hemorrhaging, and long-term physical conditions (e.g. gastrointestinal, central nervous system disorders, chronic pain);
- mental illnesses, such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, attempted suicide;
- sexual and reproductive health problems, such as sexually transmitted infections (including HIV), and other chronic conditions; sexual dysfunction; unintended/unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortion; risks to maternal and fetal health (especially in cases of abuse during pregnancy);
- substance abuse (including alcohol);
- poor social functioning skills and social isolation and marginalization;
- death for both women and their children (from neglect, injury, pregnancy-related-risks, homicide, suicide and/or HIV and AIDS-related);
- lost workdays, lower productivity and lower income;
- overall reduced or lost educational, employment, social, or political participation opportunities; and,
- Expenditures (at the level of individual, family and public sector budgets) on medical, protection, judicial and social services.

Ending Violence against Women and Girls: 'Missing Target' of the MDGs?

Violence against women undermines efforts to realize the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which 189 Heads of State and Government have committed to achieve by 2015. While ending violence against women is a strategic priority for achieving gender equality and the goals overall, it remains a 'missing target' of the MDGs.

Gender inequality and violence hamper countries' efforts to reduce poverty

Women and girls are half of the human capital available to reduce poverty and achieve development. Yet gender-based violence undermines human rights, social stability and security, public health, women's educational and employment opportunities, and the well-being and development prospects of children and communities — all fundamental to achieving the MDGs.

Violence against women reduces productivity and drains public budgets.

Violence against women has enormous direct and indirect costs for survivors, employers and the public sector in terms of health, police, legal and related expenditures as well as lost wages and productivity

The costs and consequence of violence against women last for generations

Children who witness domestic violence are at increased risk of anxiety, depression, low-self esteem and poor school performance, among other problems that harm their well-being and personal development. Children, both girls and boys, who have witnessed or suffered from gender-based violence, are more likely to become victims and abusers later in life.

Limited attention to neglected groups and issues

Insufficient attention has been paid to certain forms of violence, to certain groups of women or to particular contexts, and their costs and consequences. This is due in part to the absence of data and analyses that can help develop understanding of how violence differs for different parts of the population in different situations. These will vary by country and region, but include:

- Femicide

- Violence against marginalized or excluded groups, such as indigenous women, domestic workers, women in detention and migrant workers (UN General Assembly, 2006)
- Sexual violence and rape within marriage and as experienced by adolescent girls and young women in all contexts
- The intersections between violence against women and HIV and AIDS
- Violence and sexual harassment in public spaces such as public transport, marketplaces, cities, schools, farm fields and other common locales
- Political violence directed at women during elections, vying for public office or in high-level decision-making positions
- Violence in conflict, post-conflict and emergency settings
- Primary prevention (efforts to stop violence before it occurs by working with strategic groups such as men, adolescents or children who have witnessed abuse).

These issues and contexts are often missing, neglected or low-profile in advocacy, policy and programming. Consequently, identification and development of effective programme strategies and approaches has been hindered or slow.

Low demand for services by survivors

There are many reasons why women and girls may not seek services, some personal and some a result of the systematic discrimination that they face from the institutions and communities that surround them. Some of these factors include:

- The fear of stigma and judgment they may face from service providers, community members and their families and friends;
- The negative attitudes and poor quality of care provided by service providers (in particular, those that are the first point of contact - health and police);
- Limited knowledge of their legal rights, the resources and services available to them, and the existence of other recourse mechanisms;
- Inability to access services for lack of transportation, time or money;
- Restricted mobility;
- Restricted decision-making within the household;
- The fear of retribution by an abusive partner
- Financial dependence on the husband, partner or family together with non-existent income opportunities or alternatives;
- Intimidation and hesitation to engage with a complex legal system and processes that are not gender-sensitive and may re-victimize them; and,
- The fear of losing custody of children.

Conclusion

Violence against women is not a new or recent phenomenon women have been the victims of violence all through the age, in all societies, cultures regions or religious communities in the world. It is indeed, ironic that in India, which has given rise to apostles of peace and non-violence, women have to bear the brunt of violence-domestic as well as public, physical as well as emotional and mental.

Violence against women can be viewed in the historical perspective, for it is to a large extent, linked to her status in society. Violence against women is widespread in both developed and developing countries. Physical abuse is common in all parts of the world. No matter how hard we try to protect abused women by passing laws, it is still the single most common cause of injury to women. Many women are in abusive situations that they cannot get away from because of fear, or just because they think that they provoke the abuser to abuse them.

Most women are abused by their husbands. Battering by husbands is described as angry, moody, easily provoked, tense, and resentful. This individual is likely to be angry with himself or someone in some way. He seems very nice and polite in public, but when he arrives home he can turn into a completely different person. A battering husband may be losing his grip on his job or his prospects and may feel compelled to prove that he is at least the master of his home and beating his wife is one way for him to appear a winner.

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