



VIOLENCE
against
Women and Girls:
Your Questions,
Our Answers

**GENDER &
DEVELOPMENT
NETWORK**

The Problem

I. What is violence against women and girls?

Violence against women and girls affects one in three women world-wide and is one of the most widespread abuses of human rights globally. It is violence that is directed at a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately.

According to the United Nations, violence against women and girls is:

"...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."

(Article 1, UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993)

Full references for all statistics referred to in this resource are available at
<http://www.gadnetwork.org.uk/the-violence-against-women/>

2. What are the causes of violence against women and girls?

Violence against women and girls is both a cause and consequence of inequality between men and women. The cause of violence is the subordination of women by men throughout history. Through violence, power and control over women is maintained. During times of social breakdown or crisis, gender inequalities and discrimination are often exacerbated and more easily exploited by those in power.



Village of Char Harikesh, Kurigram District, Bangladesh. Photo: Tom Pietrasik / ActionAid

3. Violence against women and girls and poverty – what are the links?

As well as being a violation of human rights, violence against women and girls is a fundamental barrier to eradicating poverty. It impoverishes individual women and girls, as well as their families, communities and countries.

Violence against women and girls negatively impacts economic growth and blocks progress towards each of the millennium development goals. Violence against girls in schools directly leads to poor performance, lower enrolment, absenteeism and high drop-out rates. Women and girls are often forced into pregnancy or targeted for violence once they become pregnant. Violence is also often used to silence and intimidate women who are active in politics or public life.

Poverty increases women's vulnerability to violence. However, eradicating poverty does not mean the elimination of violence against women and girls.

Even when women have access to economic opportunities, healthcare, justice and education, gender discrimination remains present and unchallenged.

In Mexico and Central America, the rate of brutal sexual violence, kidnap and killings of women (known as femicide) is highest in export processing zones, where female labour exploitation interlinks with poverty, social exclusion and impunity. (CEFEMINA, 2010)

Every year, 60 million girls are sexually assaulted at or on their way to school. (USAID, 2008)

In 2008 in Nepal, 26% of women political candidates faced violence. (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2008)

Women are up to three times more likely to be living with HIV if they have experienced violence (UNAIDS, 2005)

4. What are the costs of violence against women and girls?

Violence against women and girls results in lasting physical and psychological damage affecting women world-wide including broken limbs, disability, miscarriages and even death.

In addition, violence against women and girls has huge social and financial costs. While it is difficult to measure the extent of these costs, even the most conservative estimates put national costs of violence against women and girls in the billions of dollars. These can be direct costs for policing, courts and health care or indirect costs from lost opportunities through girls missing education and women having to take time off work or even losing their jobs.

Crucially, violence against women and girls undermines their potential and ability to effect change in the world – it stops them securing a decent education, entering the workforce and participating in public life.

The direct cost to the economy of domestic violence alone in England & Wales in one year is £6billion (Cross Government Action Plan on Sexual Violence and Abuse, 2007)

In Uganda violence costs an average household over £3 per incident while the average income is £223 (ICRW & UNFPA, 2009)



Young women and girls, part of a Gender & HIV awareness programme (Burkina Faso). Photo: Amanda Marshall / Tearfund

5. Does violence against women and girls happen only in conflict?

The simple answer is 'no'. Violence against women and girls is a universal phenomenon and it doesn't matter where you are in the world – there is an imbalance of power between men and women.

However, armed conflict greatly exacerbates violence against women and girls, and is now one of the defining characteristics of contemporary armed conflict. This includes rape, forced impregnation, forced abortion, torture, trafficking, sexual slavery, and the spread of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV and AIDS. Rape has now been recognised as a weapon of war, and violence against women and girls in conflicts has been defined as both a war crime and a crime against humanity.

Every day, on average 40 women are raped in the South Kivu Province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. (UNFPA, 2010)

In England and Wales, two women a week, on average, are killed by a violent partner or ex-partner. (Home Office, 2005)

In other 'peaceful' countries such as Ghana, 1 in 3 women experience violence specifically because of their gender. (www.gendercentreghana.org, 2009)

A Global Problem

United Kingdom: An NSPCC Study found that 33% of girls between the ages of 13-17 in the UK have reported experiencing sexual violence from a partner (2009)

Canada: Every minute of every day, a Canadian woman or child is being sexually assaulted (1998)

France: 1 in 10 women in France are victims of domestic violence (2005)

Turkey: 39% of all women have experienced physical violence by their partner over their lifetime (2010)

Egypt: 96% of women have undergone FGM (2005)

Sierra Leone: Up to 64,000 women were sexually assaulted by combatants during the war (2010)

United States of America: Every nine seconds, a woman is beaten in the US (2001)

Guatemala: 2 women are killed per day because of their gender, known as femicide (2010)

Peru: 1/3 of women aged 15-24 has experienced physical violence (2010)

Argentina: The Rape Victims' Association reported more than 9,000 rape cases in Buenos Aires City and Buenos Aires Province during 2009 -- that is 25 women reporting rape every day (2009)

Nigeria: 10 out of 36 states have laws that allow husbands to use physical force against their wives

DRC: 500 women were raped by armed men in eastern Congo in July and August 2010 (2010)

South Africa: A woman is raped every 26 seconds (2009)

Brazil: Women living with HIV and AIDS in shanty towns were attacked and forced to leave their communities (2008)

Ukraine: 11% of women trafficked from the Ukraine were trafficked with the active cooperation of their husbands (2010)

Iran: No specific law exists criminalizing spousal violence and a man may escape punishment for killing a wife caught in the act of adultery if he is certain she was a consenting partner

Tajikistan: 58 percent of wives report physical and/or sexual violence from their husbands (2009)

Kyrgyz Republic: Physical violence against women takes place in 80% of homes (2008)

Russia: 14,000 women die from domestic violence in Russia while only some 20 shelters exist across Russia for women fleeing domestic violence in 2009 (2010)

China: 32,352 cases of rape were reported to police in 2006. That's 88 every day (2007)

Bangladesh: In 2005, 267 women were victims of acid attacks (2006)

Philippines: In 2009 the number of VAW cases reported to the police rose by 37.4 percent from 2008 (2010)

Malaysia: There were an estimated 14,000 rapes in Malaysia in 2002 (2003)

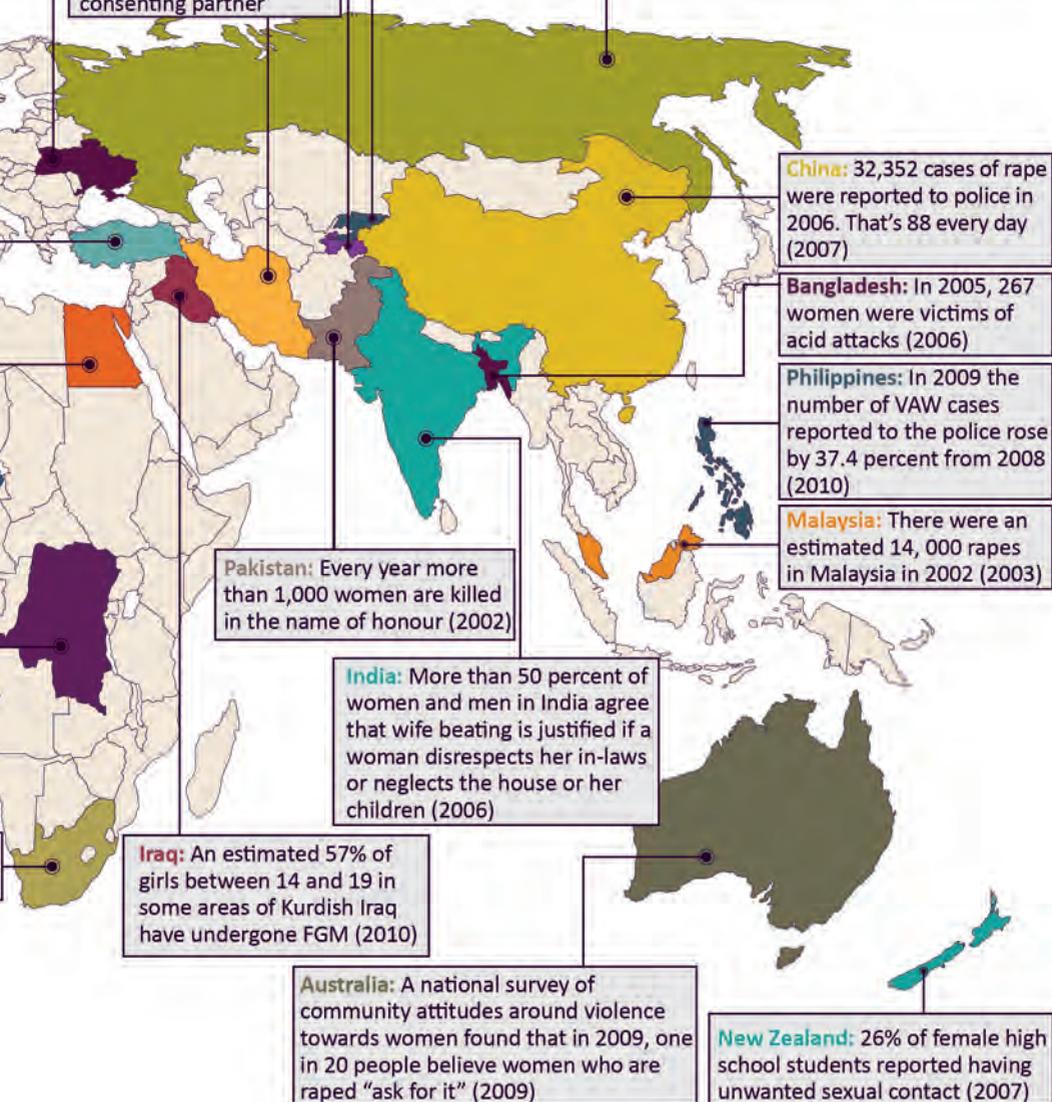
Pakistan: Every year more than 1,000 women are killed in the name of honour (2002)

India: More than 50 percent of women and men in India agree that wife beating is justified if a woman disrespects her in-laws or neglects the house or her children (2006)

Iraq: An estimated 57% of girls between 14 and 19 in some areas of Kurdish Iraq have undergone FGM (2010)

Australia: A national survey of community attitudes around violence towards women found that in 2009, one in 20 people believe women who are raped "ask for it" (2009)

New Zealand: 26% of female high school students reported having unwanted sexual contact (2007)



6. What about men and boys?

All violence is a fundamental human rights violation, whether perpetrated against women, girls, men or boys. More commonly cited forms of violence against men and boys include sexual violence in contexts of conflict, violence against men in prisons, or homophobic violence. Men may also become victims of violence as a result of participating in armed conflicts, insurgency, civil unrest or gang crime. It is clearly important not to ignore men's experiences of victimisation.

Yet evidence shows that violence against men and boys is nothing like on the same scale, severity, type or nature as the many forms of violence experienced by women and girls. Nor is it as persistent and deliberate. Men's violence against women and girls is endemic. While most of the violence experienced by women and girls is at the hands of their male partners, the vast majority of the violence experienced by men and boys is at the hands of other men, generally strangers. So while men are more likely to experience physical assault than women, they are less likely to experience rape, domestic violence or partner abuse, forced marriage or so-called 'honour' crimes.

Men can be powerful advocates for ending violence against women and girls. Most men and boys are not violent and there are men in all parts of the world who speak out and take action against the violence women and girls face.

Across all countries three to four times more girls than boys reported forced sexual initiation (WHO, 2002)

Women are 7 to 10 times more likely to be injured by a partner in a relationship than men
(University of Rhode Island Family Violence Research Program, 1995)

In the UK, every minute the police receive a call from the public for assistance for domestic violence, of which 89% are calls by women being assaulted by men (Women's Aid, 2009)

To find out more on how men and boys can get involved in eliminating violence against women and girls, please visit www.engagingmen.net

7. Isn't violence against women and girls a cultural issue?

No. 'Culture' is often used to justify and legitimise violence against women and girls. While some cultural norms and practices empower women and promote women's human rights - customs, traditions and religious values are also often used to justify violence against women and girls by states, by social groups and by political and traditional leaders. All over the world, women are organising to challenge these practices.

Collaboration and coordination between Governments, NGOs and women's organisations continues to be vital in the development of effective practices to eliminate violence against women and girls. The challenge is to respect our diverse and rich cultures while exposing practices which violate universal human rights standards. Compromising women's rights is not an option. All Governments have a responsibility to reject 'cultural' excuses and to treat all forms of violence against women and girls as criminal offences, punishable by law.

8. What is the role of faith organisations?

Many women and men have a faith. To ignore this significant aspect of their life is to ignore a major influencing factor. We need to work with and alongside faith organisations and faith leaders, who are often gatekeepers to the local community, to enable them to deal with the issues of violence in their own communities and to bring about cultural change. The local faith congregation can be effective in preventing violence against women and girls, promoting healthy relationships and be a sustained part of positive cultural change. Interpretations of religious texts are sometimes used to support violence against women and girls, however, men and women of faith also challenge this from within their own faith context. They can be ostracised for doing so and need support to continue to bring about change from within. There is no excuse for violence against women or girls in the name of any religion, culture or tradition.

9. What about the international community?

At the international level, resolutions, laws and legal frameworks exist – and have mostly come into existence because of the activism of women’s movements. CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Violence Against Women – the most important Convention for women and girls) mandates governments to take action on gender equality and promote women’s empowerment. UN Resolutions 1325 and 1820 mandate the international community to protect women from sexual violence during war, and to ensure women are at the heart of peace building. The European Union also has guidelines on tackling violence against women and girls.

Civil Society can use these tools to pressure Governments to abide by their legal obligations to tackle violence against women and girls. Women’s organisations which provide essential services and support for women and girls who have experienced violence must be provided with support. Perpetrators must be brought to justice, sending a message that violence against women and girls is both unacceptable and preventable. Women must be listened to and be able to demand their rights safely in the public arena.

10. Are we doing enough?

Across the world, in every country, women activists organise at local, national and international levels to call for an end to violence against women and girls. Women who strive to promote and defend human rights are vital to social change, although all too often are subject to violence, repression and stigmatisation for taking a stand. Perpetrators of such violence, which can include governments, armed groups, private companies and individuals, think that by silencing women they can protect themselves from prosecution and prevent wider social change.

In the UK, international organisations, including those working within the Gender and Development Network, are actively working to end violence against women and girls. You can learn more about our work by visiting <http://www.gadnetwork.org.uk/the-violence-against-women/>

While it is important to recognise that women’s rights activism has brought about many changes at local, national and global level, there is still a long



Every 25th November women's organisations take part in the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women march (Tegucigalpa, Honduras).
Photo: Katherine Ronderos / Central America Women's Network (CAWN)

way to go. Violence against women and girls is entrenched in gender inequality, and whilst unequal power relations exist between women and men, women will always be susceptible to violence.

Dismantling long held gender inequalities requires fundamental societal change, and that takes time. However, by building the links between women in local communities, their national level counterparts and the international community, as well as securing leadership from governments, we can start to make a difference.

In Uganda in 2009, women's rights organisations rallied through the streets of Kampala, calling on the government to pass a new law on domestic violence. The law was passed.

In Nepal, women are organising across the country right now to ensure that the new constitution of the country has gender equality and freedom from violence at its heart.

In the UK, the Million Women Rise march brings together thousands of women every year on 8th March (International Women's Day), who march through the streets of London, and demand an end to violence against women.

GENDER & DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

The Gender & Development Network (GADN) brings together expert NGOs, consultants, academics and individuals committed to working on gender, development and women's rights issues. Our vision is of a world where social justice and gender equality prevail and where all women and girls are able to realise their rights free from discrimination. Our goal is to ensure that international development policy and practice promotes gender equality and women's and girls' rights. Our role is to support our members by sharing information and expertise, to undertake and disseminate research, and to provide expert advice and comment on government policies and projects.

Gender and Development Network,
c/o One World Action, Bradley Close
White Lion Street, London
N1 9PF, United Kingdom
Registered Company No. 06975360

Direct Line: 020 7833 7319 / Fax: 020 7833 4102
Email: gadnetwork@oneworldaction.org
www.gadnetwork.org.uk

Design and layout: Alesia Rivera | Cover photos: Amanda Marshal, Katherine Ronderos,
http://www.flickr.com/photos/un_photo/492316507/in/photostream/