

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN MUST STOP

*Toward Achieving the Third Millennium Development Goal
to Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women*



Violence against women **occurs**

in epidemic proportions in many countries around the world. Between 10 percent and 69 percent of women report having been assaulted by an intimate male partner at some time in their lives, according to surveys conducted in various countries (Heise, Ellsberg and Gottemoeller 1999).

Violence against women is a gross violation of women's rights. It also has serious health impacts and is costly to economic development. Although no single intervention will eliminate violence against women, a combination of infrastructural, legal, judicial, enforcement, educational, health and other service-related actions can significantly reduce it and its consequences. For that to happen, however, violence against women must be viewed as unacceptable.

Violence against women is still relatively invisible because it typically occurs within household walls. Furthermore, many people view it as a routine and even acceptable feature of relationships between men and women (Kelly and Radford 1998). A global campaign of zero tolerance for violence, combined with a scaling-up of community-based interventions and analyses that document the costs of violence against women, is needed if violence against women is to become a rare occurrence rather than a global epidemic.

HIGH COSTS FOR WOMEN'S LIVES...

Women are at risk of violence from both intimate partners and strangers. Reliable prevalence data for both types of violence are difficult to obtain because this crime often goes unreported by both victims and police. Recent data, however, show that in Latin America, the proportion of women assaulted by their intimate partners at some point in their lives is between 10 percent and 35 percent. In sub-Saharan Africa, it is between 13 percent and 45 percent (Buvinic, Morrison and Shifter as cited in Morrison and Biehl 1999; Heise, Ellsberg and Gottemoeller 1999). Intimate partner rape also is relatively common. Between 10 percent and 15 percent of women report that they have been forced to have sex with their intimate partner, according to national surveys (Heise, Pitanguy and Germaine 1994).

Sexual violence perpetrated by strangers also is high. At least one in five women worldwide suffer rape or attempted rape (WHO 1997). In South Africa, a woman is raped once every 1 1/2 minutes (Coomaraswamy 1994). Women are at risk of violence when carrying out daily activities, especially early in the morning and late at night. Adolescent girls, particularly in Africa, are at risk of violence at school. This often comes in the form of sexual "favors" in exchange for good grades (Omaar and de Wall 1994). Another form of violence against girls and adolescents is forced sexual initiation—in the Caribbean, this happens to nearly half of young women (WHO 2002).

Sexual violence has been a strategy in nearly all recent armed conflicts (Ward 2002). Women also are extremely vulnerable in post-conflict situations, especially in refugee camps. In the Rwandan camps in 1994, it was reported that every woman and girl past puberty had been sexually assaulted (Coomaraswamy 1998).

...AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Violence against women also exacts a high toll in terms of health and economic costs.

Worldwide, it is estimated to be as serious a cause of death and incapacity among reproductive-age women as cancer. A study in Mexico City found violence to be the third most important cause of death among women (Lozano as cited in Morrison and Biehl 1999). And violence during pregnancy has implications not just for women, but also the fetus: some studies indicate that women who are battered during pregnancy run twice the risk of miscarriage (Stark and others 1981; Bullock and McFarlane 1989). Violence also may be linked to a sizable portion of maternal deaths.

The monetary costs of violence against women—which include goods and services to prevent violence, treat victims, and apprehend and prosecute perpetrators—are thought by many researchers to be substantial. In Canada, for example, the annual cost is estimated at more than \$1 billion (Canadian) a year (Korf and others 1997).

Violence against women exacts enormous indirect costs as well. These costs, while hard to measure, inevitably have a profound impact on the economy because of women's lower productivity and diminished quality of life. The violence affects the economy by reducing women's labor market participation and productivity, resulting in lower earnings, savings and investment. In Chile, for example, domestic violence reduced women's earnings by \$1.56 billion in 1996, or more than 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). In Nicaragua earnings were reduced by \$29.5 million, or 1.6 percent of GDP (Morrison and Orlando as cited in Morrison and Biehl 1999).

Violence also erodes personal relationships and quality of life, both for victims and children who witness violence. Abused women often are socially isolated, preventing them from participating in community and income-earning activities, and—perhaps most important—robbing them of the

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Human Rights Instruments

Over the past one and a half decades, several international treaties have defined violence against women as a human rights violation. These include the following:

- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- The Vienna Declaration and Program of Action
- The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women
- The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action



social interaction that might help end the abuse (Buvinic, Morrison and Shifter as cited in Morrison and Biehl 1999). Moreover, children tend to imitate violent behavior that they see or experience, perpetuating the cycle from one generation to the next.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The scale and complexity of gender-based violence means there are no uniform global solutions to this problem. Multisectoral strategies are needed that deal with the complex dynamics that cultivate and perpetuate violence against women.

National Interventions

Nationally, legal systems are important for protecting women and punishing perpetrators. Indeed, throughout the 1990s countries around the world adopted new legislation on intimate partner violence and reformed laws relating to rape (for instance by broadening the definition of rape to include acts by intimate partners). Complementing national legislation are criminal justice interventions that emphasize criminalization and deterrence of violence. Other innovations pertaining to the legal system include alternative conciliatory mechanisms, judicial and police training, and all-women police stations. Despite these and other advances, however, consistent implementation and enforcement of new violence-related legislation has had uneven success.

Global Interventions

Globally, the international community must rally to address the epidemic of violence against women in the same way it has prioritized other epidemics such as HIV and tuberculosis. For instance, the U.N. General Assembly has established a Trust Fund to End Violence against Women at the U.N. Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). But monies dedicated to this trust scarcely scratch the surface of the enormous demand—about \$15 million is requested annually, but only \$1 million can be disbursed.

Donor institutions also can have an impact simply by integrating efforts to reduce violence against women into development programs. The Inter-American Development Bank, for example, is working to mainstream the objective of reducing violence against women into its lending operations for citizen security. Because violence against women has high economic and social development costs, incorporating this focus is well within the mandate of other regional and international financial institutions.

Civil Society Interventions

Civil society organizations have tried to fill the gaps in governmental action, focusing on changing the norms that condone violence against women. The annual 16 Days of Activism to End Violence against Women engages tens of thousands of nongovernmental organizations worldwide, and the V-Day Campaign uses Valentine's Day to raise awareness of intimate partner violence against women.

Specific sectors and social systems also can help intervene.

- **Health Care Systems:** The health system often is the first entry point for victims of abuse. A range of interventions can provide support for victims and also deter additional violence. These could include training protocols for health care providers, integrated victim service centers, referral systems that link relevant sectors such as health care and law enforcement services, and programs for perpetrators.
- **Education Systems:** The formal education system can serve as a platform for raising awareness about gender-based violence and its damaging effects. Awareness-raising also can be achieved through broader

communications campaigns using broadcast and other media. And community-level interventions can include crisis shelters, hotlines, and locally devised and implemented dispute resolution processes.

- **Public Spaces:** Because violence often occurs in unsafe public spaces, interventions to improve public infrastructure can make a big difference in reducing violence perpetrated by strangers. For example, some cities have adopted initiatives to increase women's safety on public transportation or have made efforts to improve security at public restrooms.

Task Force Recommendations: A Global Campaign

Task Force 3 of the U.N. Millennium Project recommends three ways to extend current efforts to end violence against women.

(1) Sufficient monetary resources must be channeled to the UNIFEM Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, the one mechanism in the U.N. system to address this issue. An initial infusion of \$10 million per year, with a doubling in three years, would demonstrate the international community's resolve to address this problem and go a long way to support the scaling up of interventions to prevent violence, protect women and punish perpetrators.

(2) Governments must provide resources to implement their national plans and the international commitments they have signed.

(3) A global initiative is needed—led by heads of state and coordinated by the U.N. Secretary-General—to change the acceptability of violence against women by highlighting the ways it violates women's human rights, imposes costs to national economies and increases women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. These messages should be directed particularly to men and boys to transform their belief that the definition of masculinity involves aggression and domination.



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