

A public health and human rights emergency

Violence against women is a violation of their human rights and includes a wide range of violations of women's human rights, such as trafficking in women and girls, rape, wife abuse, sexual abuse of children, and harmful practices and traditions that irreparably damage girls' and women's reproductive and sexual health.

In addition, the social consequences of violence against women are staggering. Violence against women is a public health emergency and a major cause of death and disability for women 16 to 44 years of age¹. It has been estimated that violence against women is 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.

All countries and all socio-economic groups are affected

Violence against women occurs in every country in the world. In Cambodia, 16 per cent of women are physically abused by their husbands; in the UK 30 per cent are physically abused by partners or ex partners; this figure is 52 per cent in the West Bank; 21 per cent in Nicaragua, 29 per cent in Canada, and 22 per cent in the US².

Based on several surveys from around the world, half of the women who die from homicides are killed by their current or former husbands or partners. Women are killed by guns, beatings and burns among numerous other forms of abuse³. A study conducted in São Paulo, Brazil reported that 13 per cent of deaths of women of reproductive age were homicides; of which 60 per cent were committed by the victims' partners⁴.

Although a majority of countries now have legislation that addresses domestic violence, high levels of violence still persist. There is clearly a need for greater focus on implementation and enforcement of legislation, and an end to laws that emphasise family reunification over the rights of women and girls.

Violence against women

- ▼ Involves a pattern of abusive and threatening behaviours, which includes, physical, sexual, psychological, isolation, coercion, and intimidation
- ▼ Is an exertion of male power and control over women,
- ▼ Is not caused by genetics or illness, but learned through observation and reinforcement in both the family and society
- ▼ Is reinforced by society's acceptance that men have the right to control women in relationships and the right to use force to ensure that control

Specific groups of women are more vulnerable to violence, such as indigenous women, migrant women, women refugees, women in armed conflict, women with disabilities, women in detention and institutions, female children, young women and the elderly.

¹ UNIFEM, www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/facts_figures_2.php#

² Krug et al. 2002. World Report on Violence and Health. Geneva: WHO. 93.

³ Krug et al. 2002. World Report on Violence and Health. Geneva: WHO. 93.

⁴ Referred to by S.G. Diniz, A F. d'Oliveira. International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics. 63 Suppl.1 (1998). 34.

**Where to
find more
information:**

Your national YWCA and World YWCA www.worldywca.org
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) country offices and www.unfpa.org
UNIFEM country offices www.unifem.org
UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women
www.unhchr.ch