

Stop Violence Against Women

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Worldwide scandal

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- At least one out of every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or abused in her lifetime. This figure comes from a study based on 50 surveys from around the world.
- More than 60 million women are "missing" from the world today as a result of sex-selective abortions and female infanticide.
- Every year, millions of women are raped by partners, relatives, friends and strangers, by employers and colleagues, soldiers and members of armed groups.
- Violence in the family is endemic all over the world; the overwhelming majority of victims are women and girls. In the USA, for example, women account for around 85 per cent of the victims of domestic violence.
- The World Health Organization has reported that up to 70 per cent of female murder victims are killed by their male partners.
- Small arms and light weapons are the main tools of almost every conflict. Women and children account for nearly 80% of the casualties, according to the UN Secretary-General

Defending defenders

Many human rights defenders face risks, but women encounter additional risks because of their gender and the issues they address. Women who defend the human rights of women, especially women from marginalized racial or ethnic groups, can find themselves under threat of violence.

Because they often challenge cultural, religious or social norms about the role of women in their society, they are frequently subjected to harassment and repression, ranging from verbal abuse to sexual harassment, rape, and murder.

Despite the risks and difficulties, activists – men and women -- continue to defend women from violence and to confront discrimination. Time after time, women refuse, resist and demand remedies.

Violence at home

For countless women home is not a refuge but a place of terror. Every day, in every country in the world, women and girls are beaten and sexually assaulted by husbands, fathers, and other family members.

The Russian government estimates that 14,000 women were killed by relatives in 1999, yet the country still has no law specifically addressing domestic violence.

In South Africa, more women are shot at home in acts of domestic violence than are shot by strangers on the streets or by intruders

All too often, violence against women in the family is considered a private matter and not treated by the authorities as a crime.

However, all governments are responsible for protecting their citizens from abuse, whether committed by officials or by private individuals (“non-state actors”). If a state fails to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence against women with sufficient diligence, then it shares responsibility for the abuses.

Justice not excuses

Most acts of violence against women are never investigated. The perpetrators are not prosecuted. They commit their crimes with impunity. This contributes to a climate where violence against women is seen as normal, rather than criminal, and where women do not seek justice because they know they will not gain it.

In some countries, laws discriminate against women or are flawed so that they fail to protect women from violence.

Women may be prevented from seeking justice because they cannot afford to access the legal system, or fear losing custody of their children.

In many countries, police and prosecutors are unwilling to believe and assist women abused by members of their family. Women who report abuse are told that it is a private matter or that it was “incited” by the woman’s

own behaviour.

In these countries the state has failed in its obligations under international law to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of women. The state is responsible for investigating and prosecuting acts of violence against women.

Too often, communities are complicit in the state's failure to bring perpetrators to justice. Individuals and communities have vital roles to play in overcoming impunity and gaining justice.