

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS

THE FACTS

Violence affects one in three women globally and is one of the most widespread abuses of human rights worldwide. It is a leading cause of death and disability among women of all ages.

In some parts of the world, the risks of different types of gender-based violence are even higher. In Colombia for example, a woman is killed by a current or former partner every six days. In Somalia, 98% of women have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting.¹ In Amhara, Ethiopia, 50% of girls are married by the time they are 15 years old.³

Violence against women and girls is both a cause and consequence of unequal relations between men and women. It is an abuse of the power imbalance between women and men and a means of social control that maintains unequal power relations between women and men, reinforcing women's subordinate status.

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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." It includes: physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, in the community, or perpetuated by the state. It includes battering, sexual abuse of female children, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence, rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, trafficking in women and forced prostitution; (c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs."

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



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THE IMPACT

- Violence against women is a fundamental barrier to eradicating poverty and building peace. It impoverishes individual women, and their families, communities and countries.
- VAW places a huge economic burden on society: It drains public resources, undermines human capital, and lowers economic productivity.³ Even the most conservative estimates measure national costs of violence against women and girls in the billions of dollars.⁴
- Violence against women is also a major barrier to achieving other key social outcomes. For example, violence against girls in schools contributes to low enrolment rates, poor performance in school, absenteeism and high dropout rates among girls. In some countries, as many as 50% of girls report 'forced intercourse' with teachers or male classmates.⁵
- Violence against women, including sexual violence, is also the cause of many sexual and reproductive health problems. Girls and women often lack access to contraception and safe abortion forced pregnancy, and are targeted for violence once they become pregnant.⁶ Women who experience violence are significantly less likely to access natal care, which increases rates of maternal and child mortality.⁷ Violence undermines the ability of women and girls to control if, with whom, when, and under what circumstances they have sex, increasing rates of HIV and sexually transmitted infections. In some places, up to one third of women report that their first sexual experience was forced.⁸
- Women are often at increased risk of violence as they enter politics and public life. In some places, violence has been deliberately used to target, control, penalize and silence women who are active in public arenas and politics.⁹ Women human rights defenders are at particular risk of being targeted, both because of their work to advance women's rights and because they are women.¹⁰
- State responses to violence are universally inadequate on a number of levels: states are failing to prevent violence from occurring in the first place;

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they are withholding vital support and rehabilitation services from survivors of violence; and they are also failing to ensure women and girls have access to justice after violence. This is the case whether violence against women and girls is perpetrated by family members, those in the community or agents of the state.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We ask member states to:

- Take action against all forms of violence outlined in the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and recognize that violence against women and girls is both a development and a human rights issue.
- Recognize that good governance requires both the eradication of violence against women and an increase in women's representation at all decision-making levels, and take concrete steps towards realizing this.

REFERENCES

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