



Violence Against Women

Centre for Women
UN- ESCWA

A monthly ECW issuance aiming at raising the gender awareness and responsiveness through highlighting the gender dimensions in various fields.

Violence, torture and war affect both men and women, causing untold pain and suffering and hindering human development. Men and women, however, experience violence in different ways. Violence against women is intricately linked to gender based discrimination, and though rampant throughout the world, goes largely unreported. Such violence is so wide-spread that it represents a major impediment to efforts to promote gender equality and empower women, and poses hefty costs to society in general. As stated in the Secretary General's In-Depth Study on Violence against Women, "the persistence of violence against women is inconsistent with all the Millennium Development Goals¹"

Rather than being discussed openly as an important social issue, violence against women has been taboo in many countries. Traditionally, most forms of violence against women have been perceived as better dealt with in the private than in the public sphere, which has resulted in tolerance for and perpetuation of such violence. In recent years, however, increasing attention is being paid both to violence against women as a human rights issue and to what women and men can do so that such violence is not perpetuated.

¹ In-Depth Study on all Forms of Violence against Women: Report of the Secretary General, A/61/122/Add.1 pg. 22

Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, article 1

"Violence against women means any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to a woman, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.²"

² General Assembly resolution 48/104.

Violence against Women as a Human Rights Issue:

Violence against Women is "a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to dominion over and discrimination against women by men³" Vulnerability to violence is a condition created by the absence of or denial of rights. The Secretary General and General Assembly have affirmed that violence against women is a form of gender-based discrimination and a human rights violation; as such, freedom from gender-based violence is a universal right that should be guaranteed in any culture.

Thus, although violence against women has long been tolerated as a private issue or a function of culture and tradition, states have an obligation to meet the standard of due-diligence 'to protect women from violence, to hold perpetrators accountable and to provide justice and remedies to its victims.⁴'

³UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993)

⁴ In-Depth Study on all Forms of Violence against Women, 9

Highlights:

3-Forms of Violence Against Women

Violence Against Women within the Family

Violence Against Women within the Community

Violence against Women in Custody, Conflict or Displacement

4- Price of Violence against Women

5- Combating Violence against Women



Special events in the ESCWA Centre for Women

▶ ECW will be holding an EGM on the impact of wars and armed conflict on the advancement of women in the Arab region on March 13, 2007 in Abu Dhabi.

▶ ECW will host the third session of the Committee on Women from 14 - 15 March 2007 in Abu Dhabi.

▶ ECW will soon launch an e-forum for the national Mechanisms for the Advancement and Empowerment of Women in the Arab region.

▶ EC W participated in an UN-ESCWA Expert Group Meeting on the preparation of the 2007 United Nations Report on the Millennium Development Goals in the Arab World, and presented a paper on how to integrate a gender perspective into the MDGs entitled " Gender equality: a vehicle for the achievement of all MDGs"

Forms of Violence against Women:

Violence against Women within the Family:

Violence against Women within the family includes 'physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation.'⁵

⁵ General Assembly resolution 48/104

The most common form of violence experienced by women is violence in the domestic sphere. Intimate partner violence, which includes beating and marital rape among other forms, is the most common form worldwide, and an acute problem in the ESCWA region. There have been several high profile cases of domestic violence in recent years in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan. A few countries in the region have taken measures to collect data and made statistics on domestic violence available. These figures show the alarming proportion of women who experience violence in the home. 22% of women in the Syrian Arab Republic have experienced some form of violence within the family⁶. 35% of married women in Egypt and 32% of Palestinian women report physical abuse by their partners.⁷

Around the world, traditional practices exist which are violent to women. Early, child and forced marriage is one form. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a particularly harmful practice, which is still carried out in parts of Egypt, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.⁸ In addition to violating a woman's sexual rights, FGM has lifelong health consequences such as recurrent infections and complications during childbirth including fistula and even death.

⁶ UNIFEM, Violence against Women Study, Syria, 2005

⁷ Innocenti Digest, No. 6, *Domestic Violence against Women and Girls*, Florence Italy: UNICEF Innocenti Research Center, 2000

⁸ Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, Cultural practices in the family that are violent toward women E/CN.4/2002/83



It is important to note that violence in the home is not limited to the family; an under-documented form of domestic violence is violence against women working in the home. This aspect is of particular importance in the Middle East, where an estimated 1.2 million women are employed as domestic servants and many enjoy only limited legal protection, thus increasing vulnerability to physical and sexual abuse⁹.

The underlying causes of domestic violence are often related to gender relations. Violence is often perpetrated in order to enforce standards of female behavior. This may include abuse for failure to fulfill domestic obligations, or so-called honour crimes, where violence is used to prevent or punish real or perceived transgressions from accepted female behavior. The most serious cases are so-called honour killings. UNFPA estimates that 5,000 women are victim to so-called honour killings by male relatives each year worldwide.¹⁰

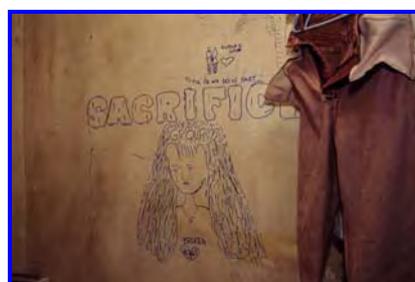
So-called honour killings are reported in Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Yemen and other Mediterranean and Gulf countries¹¹; it is estimated 25 – 30 women are killed in such incidents each year in Jordan alone¹².

⁹ United Nations, *Human Rights, Violence against Women* <http://www.un.org/rights/dpi1772e.htm>

¹⁰ In-Depth Study on all Forms of Violence against Women, 40

¹¹ Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, Cultural Practices in the family that are violent against women E/CN.4/2002/83

¹² Human Rights Watch, *Jordanian Parliament Supports Impunity for Honor Killings*, 1/27/00



Thousands of Asian women live in fear due to exploitation and mistreatment in their place of work. In the Philippine Embassy a young refugee has drawn her ideas of martyrdom on the wall of her bedroom.

“UNFPA estimates that 5,000 women are victim to so-called honour killings by male relatives each year worldwide.”

Violence against Women within the Community:

Violence against Women within the Community includes 'physical, sexual and psychological violence within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, educational institutions and elsewhere, and trafficking in women and forced prostitution.'¹³

¹³ UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993)

Many instances of violence against women outside of the household are acts of sexual violence. A growing human rights concern in the ESCWA region is the trafficking of large numbers of women from Asia, Eastern Europe, and the region, who are forced into prostitution against their will and subject to physical, sexual and psychological violence.

Rape exists in every society. Of critical importance is how rape is dealt with; consequences of rape are closely related to gender relations and a woman's level of empowerment. In many cases, the reaction to an act of rape may actually re-victimize the survivor. In some cases of rape, the victim, rather than the perpetrator, may be punished so that a family's honour may be restored; rape may result in so-called honour crimes or the forced marriage of the victim to the perpetrator. Far from protecting victims, aspects of some legal systems may actually facilitate such harmful reactions to rape, and institutionalize tolerance for such crimes. The laws in some ESCWA countries, for example, may allow for more lenient sentencing for so-called honour crimes or rape in cases where a perpetrator agrees to marry the victim. The punishing of rape victims, or allowing such punishment, compounds the violation of their sexual rights by violating numerous other human rights as well.



Aziza (not her real name) is a 29-year-old mother of 3 who was raped in front of her children.

"The consequences of rape are closely related to gender relations and a woman's level of empowerment. In many cases, the reaction to an act of rape may actually re-victimize the survivor."

Violence against Women in Custody, Conflict or Displacement

All too often, women are subject to violence by those whose supposed role is to protect them. Custodial violence against women by members of the law enforcement and criminal justice systems is widespread. This includes physical abuse such as rape and torture while in police custody or detention, as well as verbal abuse and harassment. Women may also be subjected to violence as a means of torturing male suspects. Such violence is not limited to times of conflict, although the number and severity of such instances may increase in times of occupation and emergency.

Civilians compose an increasing number of casualties in armed conflict. Women and children are often affected disproportionately. In addition to being killed and mutilated as a consequence of fighting, women are subject to gender based-violence. Rape is used as a weapon of war to reinforce policies of ethnic cleansing, and to torture and trample the dignity of victims and the men in their communities. Refugee and internally displaced women are often subject to sexual abuse even in the supposed refuge of the camps.

Thousands of women in Darfur have been subject to rape multiple times. Rape has also been documented as a tool of war in Algeria. In Iraq, women have been subject to violence both as a direct result of armed conflict and as a tool in the political process.¹⁴

¹⁴ MADRE, Announcement for *Promising Democracy, Imposing Theocracy: Gender-based Violence and the US War in Iraq*
<http://www.madre.org/articles/me/iraqreportintro.html>



Price of Violence against Women:

Violence against women entails direct and indirect social and economic costs.



- **Health:** Women who experience violence suffer a range of health problems, and face increased risk of maternal mortality. Their children are also significantly more at risk for health problems and child mortality.
 - **Economic:** Violence against women causes decreased productivity when women are forced to miss work due to injury. Loss in human capital is intergenerational; girls suffering
- violence and the children of women suffering violence are more likely to have poor school performance and behavioral disturbances. There is also the cost of services needed to treat and combat violence against women; this involves medical costs and funds for programmes required for victims.
- **Social:** Hefty costs are posed by the contribution of intergenerational transmission of violence to future political and social instability.

Combating Violence against Women:

Combating violence against women requires the transformation of cultures of tolerance for violence against women and ending impunity for perpetrators of these crimes. Legal codes must reflect an unequivocal stand against violence against women and include legislation which specifically criminalizes such acts.

Globally, many countries now have legislation to prevent and punish domestic violence, and challenges lies in enforcing such legislation and providing extra-legal support. Many ESCWA countries, however, have still not adopted domestic violence legislation and few regard marital rape as a prosecutable offence. Additionally, personal status codes and the difficulty faced by a woman when filing for divorce under current laws, particularly the burden of proof for spousal abuse, make it extremely difficult for a woman to leave an abusive household in many ESCWA countries.

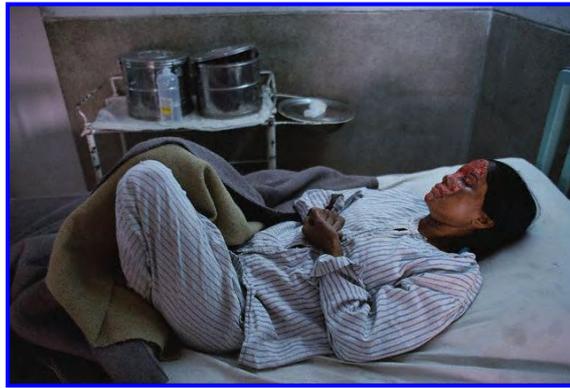
In order to assure that victims come forward and laws are applied, investigations and court proceedings must not only be fair, but must also be conducted in a manner that does not humiliate the victim. Due to the close relationship between most victims and perpetrators of violence against women, legal systems must also assure the victim's right to come forward by providing physical protection. Ending impunity for all forms of violence against women requires thus not only legal reform, but also training law enforcement and legal officials, and expansion of legal mechanisms to support victims.



Skin doused with kerosene and set aflame, ears and noses cut off to disfigure and make a woman ugly, strangulation, electrocutions, beating, and rape. This is only a partial list of the abuse women undergo.

Tahida had her nose cut off by her father-in-law and husband because they claimed she was an ungrateful wife. With her nose reattached, she is now at a women's crisis center.

“Combating violence against women requires the transformation of cultures of tolerance for violence against women and ending impunity for perpetrators of these crimes.”



Azra, 30, was burned with acid by her brother-in-law and now cries every time she has to show her face. Azra now lives at a shelter opened for abused women seeking refuge in 1990 by the AGHA Legal Aid Cell. Authorities at the shelter say they have arranged medical care and treatment for her burns and scarring.

Lessons Learned: progressive use of customary and/or religious law¹⁵

In Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Yemen, family codes are being transformed using customary laws

¹⁵ Division for the Advancement of Women Good Practices in Combating and Eliminating Violence against Women, Expert Group Meeting, Vienna, Austria, May 2005



Original caption: A weekend night at the Accident and Emergency department of Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto. Frequently this department is completely overrun as it attempts to treat the victims of weekend crime and violence.

States are obliged to ensure that those whose human rights are violated have access not only to justice, but also health care and support services to address their short term injuries and long term needs, and to protect them from further violations. Support services for victims of violence against women should not only provide a safe environment and address practical needs, but should also promote their overall well-being and long-term physical and economic security and empower victims to take control of their lives.



(L-R) Gulbibi Sale Mohammed, 13, skills trainer Shakoofah Rahmi, and Mejgon Amoni, 16, leave their literacy classes provided by the shelter run by Women Activities & Social Services.

First and foremost, efforts must be made to prevent violence against women from occurring in the first place. Transforming cultures of tolerance for violence against women at the family, community and state level, through education and awareness campaigns, is essential in this process.

Lessons Learned: Association of Legal Aid for Egyptian Women¹⁶

In Egypt, women's non-governmental organizations began a process of awareness-raising – collecting and using information to demonstrate the need for a response. The Association of Legal Aid for Egyptian Women collected data on "Honour crimes" from court records, and then organized meetings, roundtables and national conferences to share this information with others. As a result they broke the taboo about speaking on the issue and a network of non-governmental organizations linked together to address the issue from different angles, setting the foundation for the development of services.

16 Ibid



Sanariya, 9, watches her mother work in the kitchen in her building from which she was been abducted and raped. Since the end of the coalition-led war against Iraq, and the subsequent rise in crime, reports of sexual violence and abduction of women and girls abound.

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.escwa.org.lb

About Our Organization...

The ESCWA Centre for Women was established on October 1, 2003, following the Commission's adoption of Resolution 240(XXII). This resolution, recognizing that a fundamental part of development is the empowerment of women, called for the creation of a Committee on Women comprising the member countries, and for the establishment of a women's Centre at ESCWA. The Centre continues and expands on the work carried out by the Women Empowerment and Gender Mainstreaming Team, formerly a part of the Social Development Division at ESCWA.

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