



# Violence against Women

## Violence against women - a gross violation of human rights that hinders development

### International framework and definition

Violence against women is no longer regarded as a private matter, but as a serious violation of human rights. This is the result of the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development as well as the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women. Moreover, a 1994 mandate established a Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women.

The United Nations defines violence against women in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women as *“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”* (United Nations 1993).

### Forms and facets of violence against women

There are many forms of violence against women, including sexual, physical, or emotional abuse by intimate partners, family members or others; sexual harassment and abuse by authorities such as teachers, police officers or employers; trafficking for forced labour or sex; and traditional practices such as female genital mutilation, or forced or child marriages. Violence against women often ends with fatalities, such as in the case of honour killings. Systematic sexual abuse during conflict situations is another pervasive form of violence against women.

Violence against women happens in both the private and in the public sphere. It is a widespread and multi-faceted problem with a variety of persons in the roles of perpetrators and victims. However,

to combat the phenomenon, other relevant factors such as health and education must be considered, as well as involving other actors such as police personnel, social workers and educators as well as politicians and legal authorities.

### Magnitude and costs of the problem

Violence against women and girls is a problem of pandemic proportions. Worldwide, an estimated one in five women will be a victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime. One in three will have been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused, usually by a family member or an acquaintance. The perpetrators - more often than not - go unpunished. Each year,



hundreds of thousands of women and children are trafficked and enslaved; millions more are subjected to harmful practices such as female genital mutilation. Violence kills and disables as many women between the ages of 15 and 44 as cancer does. And its toll on women's health surpasses that of traffic accidents and malaria combined (See UNFPA 2005).

The social and economic costs of violence against women are enormous and have significant ripple effects throughout society. Violence against women not only causes suffering and poor health for those directly involved through individual effects such as an inability to work, loss of wages, and lessened ability to care for themselves and their children. But it also leads to major financial strains on all of society with regard to medical care, the judicial system, social services, social insurances, and unemployment, as well as productivity losses. The ILO estimates losses from stress and violence at work consume between 1 to 3.5 per cent of the gross domestic product (ILO 2001). Hence, the existence of violence against women remains a significant obstacle to reducing poverty, achieving gender equality and meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

### Factors that perpetuate violence against women

There is no one single factor to account for violence against women. Several complex and interconnected institutional, social and cultural factors have kept women particularly vulnerable to the violence directed at them. In many countries women are discriminated against culturally, economically, legally and politically. These discriminations promote an environment in which women are subjected to violence.

### Successful approaches to combat violence against women

Research has shown that preventive interventions to stop violence against women cost less than financing the costs that result from violence against women. The 1994 Violence Against Women Act, for example, "resulted in an estimated net benefit of \$16.4 billion" (WHO 2004). Considering the various factors responsible for violence against women, strategies and interventions should be designed within a comprehensive and integrated framework. The German Development Cooperation supports approaches to combat violence perpetrated against women in the fields of prevention and lobbying for improved legal frameworks as well as the training of relevant actors and networking as illustrated in the following examples.

### Enhancing women's rights in Cambodia

Domestic violence is a widespread problem in Cambodia, which has weak prosecution rates because victims rarely bring their cases to court. The Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) implemented a law that focuses on protection against violence. Beyond the improvement of the legal situation of women, this process changed the general attitude towards domestic violence. To accomplish this change of attitude, MOWA also worked with men. By offering services such as refuges and legal advice for battered women, the situation for victims of violence was improved.

### Raising awareness through a music video on violence against women in India

In cooperation with popular Indian singers, the non-governmental organisation "Breakthrough" developed a song and music clips as part of a multimedia campaign. The song "Mann ke Manjeeré", dealing with HIV and violence against women, reached more than 26 million households and triggered a broad public debate on the issue. It was on top of the MTV Charts for five months. In addition, it won the 2001 Indian Screen Award and was nominated as the best Indipop music video for the MTV Award.

### Literature & links

GTZ: [www.gtz.de/gender](http://www.gtz.de/gender)

GTZ has developed an exhibit on gender-based violence, which can be ordered as a travelling exhibit.

GTZ: *Ending violence against women and girls. 2005.*

ILO: *The cost of violence/stress at work and the benefits of a violence/stress-free working environment. 2001.*

UN: *In-depths study on all forms of violence against women: Report of the Secretary General. 2006.*

UNFPA 2005: *State of the world population 2005* and its multimedia exhibition at:

[www.unfpa.org/endingviolence/home.html](http://www.unfpa.org/endingviolence/home.html)

UNIFEM: [www.unifem.org](http://www.unifem.org) and its Global Platform

for Advocacy and Action: [www.unifem.org/campaigns/vaw/](http://www.unifem.org/campaigns/vaw/)

UNICEF: *Domestic violence against women and girls. 2000.*

WHO: *The economic costs of interpersonal violence. 2004.*

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