SF3.4. Intimate Partner Violence

Definitions and methodology
This indicator measures intimate partner violence through the self-reported lifetime prevalence of physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner. Information comes from cross-national or national surveys, including the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (EU FRA) Violence Against Women survey. In principle, data cover women aged 18-74, refer to physical and/or sexual violence only, and cover both current and previous partners. However, definitions and population groups differ across countries, which affects comparability. (See the notes to Chart SF3.4.A and the “Comparability and Data Issues” section below for more detail).

Attitudes among women towards intimate partner violence are measured through the percentage of women aged 15-49 years who consider a husband to be justified in hitting or beating his wife for at least one of the specified reasons, i.e. if his wife burns the food, argues with him, goes out without telling him, neglects the children or refuses sexual relations. Data come from the OECD Gender, Institutions and Development Database (https://oe.cd/ds/GIDDB2019), which itself uses data from the World Values Survey (www.worldvaluessurvey.org) and UNICEF (https://data.unicef.org/).

Key findings
It is difficult to measure intimate partner violence, and even more difficult to compare the prevalence of intimate partner violence across countries. Based on self-reported information from population surveys, across OECD countries with recent data, an average of about one quarter (23%) of women report having experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point their lifetime. In some countries, including Denmark, Latvia, Turkey and the United States, about one in three women self-report ever having experienced intimate partner violence. However, these data, and especially cross-national differences in these data, should be interpreted with caution. Survey-based estimates likely underestimate the extent of the problem as many victims are reluctant to admit abuse, and cross-national differences in survey-based estimates are further affected by differences in interviewing and survey methodology. (See “Comparability and Data Issues” below). This makes comparison very difficult.

Social norms and legal frameworks can either drive social transformation or act as barriers to ending violence against women. Data from the OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) 2019 shows that, despite years of advocacy to protect women’s physical integrity, legislative progress has been uneven across OECD countries. In 14 countries, the legal framework protects women from violence, including intimate partner violence, rape and sexual harassment, without any legal exception. In 16 OECD countries, survivors of violence still face legal obstacles: one country still allows reduced penalties in case of so-called honour crimes; in four countries domestic violence is not a criminal offense; in 11 countries, the law provides legal protection from sexual harassment but does not include criminal penalties.

Social norms can also be powerful disincentives for women to report and pursue legal recourse against perpetrators. Social acceptance of domestic violence against women by women themselves weakens the functioning of legal frameworks and is an obstacle to addressing violence against women. Data from SIGI 2019 shows that, within OECD countries, 8% of women say that a husband may be justified in hitting or beating his wife, with rates ranging from 1% or less in Denmark and Ireland, up to 18% in Korea and 20% in Germany (Chart SF3.4.B). In emerging economies, acceptance of violence against women can be much higher – 34% of women in Indonesia and 61% of women South Africa say that spousal violence can be justified.

Other relevant indicators: SF3.1: Marriage and divorce rate; SF3.3: Cohabitation rate and other forms of partnership; CO4.3: Substance abuse by young people; CO4.4: Teenage suicides; CO1.2: Life expectancy at birth.
Chart SF3.4.A. Prevalence of intimate partner violence

Self-reported lifetime prevalence of physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner, women, 18- to 74-year-olds, selected countries, latest year available

Note: Data refer to 2012, except for Turkey (2014), Argentina and the United States (2015), and Australia and Mexico (2016). Data for Mexico refer to women aged 15-49, for Turkey to ever-married women aged 15-59, for Argentina to women aged 18-69, and for Australia and the United States to women aged 18 and over. Data for European countries come from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (EU FRA) Violence Against Women survey 2012. Data for other countries come from a range of secondary sources. Cross-country differences in definitions, question wording and survey methodology mean that comparisons should be made with caution. For example, unlike all other countries, data for Turkey cover ever-married women and violence by a male partner, only. Data for the United States include “stalking”, in addition to physical and sexual violence. Data for Mexico cover previous partners only if the woman was married to or in a union with the previous partner. See Table SF3.4.A for detailed information on the sources, definitions, and question wordings used.


Chart SF3.4.B. Attitudes among women towards partner violence

Percentage who consider a husband to be justified in hitting or beating his wife, 15-49 year-olds, women, 2010-2017
Comparability and data issues

Measuring intimate partner violence and other forms of Violence Against Women (VAW) is difficult. Many victims are reluctant to admit to abuse, so survey-based estimates likely underestimate the problem. Administrative data, like police reports, are often even less informative; many violent crimes go unreported because victims fear further violence and mistrust the criminal justice system to provide adequate protection. Cultural norms, fear of harm (towards the woman and her loved ones), stigma, and inadequate ability to self-support also contribute to non-disclosures of violent behaviour.

Comparisons of intimate partner violence across countries are especially difficult. Where surveys do exist, differences in survey methods (e.g. question wording, sampling methods, population coverage, definitions, and survey timing) greatly affect comparability. For example, even among the limited number of countries shown in Chart SF3.4.A, there are several cross-country differences in age groups, definitions of violence, and definitions of “intimate partners”. More information on the survey estimates used in Chart SF3.4.A can be found in Table SF3.4.A.

Countries also differ in respondents’ likelihood of reporting harassment. Many factors explain observed differences across countries in the reported prevalence of IPV: the social acceptability of talking about violence with other people, underlying levels of gender equality, acceptance of IPV in society, women’s exposure to the risk of violence (e.g. whether or not they work outside the home), and differences in countries’ overall levels of violent crime may all contribute to higher or lower levels of disclosure of violence. Data collection agencies largely define IPV as including four broad categories of “direct” violence (physical, sexual, psychological and economic), but different organisations have different interpretations of how IPV is defined and understood. There is also the challenge of whether to measure prevalence versus incidence of violence – in other words, whether to measure each individual act of violence experienced by a victim, for each perpetrator. Measuring each event can help illustrate the gravity of the abuse, but it places a high burden of recollection on the victim and, in the aggregate, may be less accurate than a simple prevalence count.

Differences in political and cultural factors mean that individual countries need to collect their own data to serve as baselines for measuring progress. For countries that have carried out multiple waves of surveys with questions on sexual harassment and/or violence against women, it is possible to observe change over time. However, it is difficult to say whether higher or lower rates of reporting indicate substantive change on the ground, greater awareness of what constitutes sexual harassment, and/or willingness to report.

A leading cross-national survey on violence against women (the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (EU FRA) Violence Against Women survey) shows the difficulty in interpreting violence rates. The survey finds a counterintuitive result: there is a positive correlation between the prevalence of gender-based violence and European Gender Equality Index scores (EU FRA, 2014). European countries that score high in gender equality (like the Nordics) also often have some of the highest levels of reported violence against women (see e.g. Chart SF3.4.A). However, when comparing extreme forms of violence – so-called “coercive control”, in which an intimate partner supresses a victim’s autonomy, rights, and liberties through physical, emotional, and psychological abuse – countries with higher levels of gender equality perform better. Countries with the lowest share of women under a partner’s coercive control were Sweden, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Denmark, and the Czech Republic, all of which had rates below 5%. The highest prevalence of coercive control was in Eastern Europe (EU FRA, 2014).

Sources and further reading:


Table SF3.4.A. Details on the sources used for Chart SF3.4.A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Source organisation</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Population covered</th>
<th>Description and notes</th>
<th>Question wording</th>
<th>Link to source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
<td>Personal Safety Survey (PSS)</td>
<td>Women aged 18 and over</td>
<td>Data refer to the percentage of women who report having experienced physical assault and/or forced sexual activity by a current or previous partner since age 15. Physical assault includes pushing, grabbing, shoving, slapping, kicking, biting, hitting, being hit with an object and having an object that could hurt being thrown at them. Forced sexual activity includes any forced or attempted forced sexual activity against the respondent’s will. Partners are defined as a person the respondent lives with, or lived with at some point, in a married or de facto relationship. These includes current and previous partners, as long as the respondents lived with the partner at some point. Boyfriend/girlfriends or dates, which refer to a person that the respondent dated, or was intimately involved with, but did not live with, are not included. The partner can be a man or a woman.</td>
<td><strong>WS1</strong>: The next questions are about any sexual activity you may have been forced into, since the age of 15 Has any man [WS2: including your current partner] ever forced you, or tried to force you, into sexual activity against your will?</td>
<td><a href="https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4906.0">https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4906.0</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos Humanos</td>
<td>Primer estudio nacional sobre violencias contra la mujer: basado en la International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS)</td>
<td>Women aged 18-69</td>
<td>Data refer to the percentage of women who report having experienced physical violence and/or sexual violence by a current or previous partner since age 16. Physical violence includes pushing, grabbing, hair pulling, slapping, kicking, biting, hitting, being hit with objects, strangulation or suffocation, burning or scalding, and the threat or use of a weapon. Sexual violence includes forced sexual intercourse (through physical force or threats), attempted forced sexual intercourse, unwanted and distressing sexual touching, and forced sexual activity with a third party. Data refer to acts by men only. Partners are defined as current or former spouses (husband or common-law partner) and/or current or former boyfriends. The couple may or may not be living together.</td>
<td><strong>WS2</strong>: Apart from any incidents you have already mentioned, has/Has a woman [WS3: including your current partner] ever done any of these to you with the intent to harm or frighten you? Thrown anything at you that could hurt you; pushed, grabbed or shoved you; slapped you; kicked, bitten or hit you with a fist; hit you with something else that could hurt you.</td>
<td><a href="http://www.saij.gob.ar/primer-estudio-nacional-sobre-violencias-contra-la-mujer-basado-en-la-international-violence-against-women-survey-ivaws-ministerio-justicia-derechos-humanos-nacion">http://www.saij.gob.ar/primer-estudio-nacional-sobre-violencias-contra-la-mujer-basado-en-la-international-violence-against-women-survey-ivaws-ministerio-justicia-derechos-humanos-nacion</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** All questions refer to incidents occurring since the age of 16. Questions 2c-7a refer to incidents occurring since the age of 15.
C8a [...] (Since the age of 16,) Has a man ever FORCED YOU INTO SEXUAL INTERCOURSE by threatening you, holding you down, or hurting you in some way? Remember to include husbands and other intimate partners. Please at this point exclude ATTEMPTS to force you. (¿La forzaron a un acto sexual amenazándola, lastimándola o presionándola?)

C9a (Apart from anything you have just mentioned,) (Since the age of 16,) Has any man ever ATTEMPTED TO FORCE YOU INTO SEXUAL INTERCOURSE by threatening you, holding you down or hurting you in some way? This is an attempt where sexual intercourse did not take place. (¿Intentaron forzarla a tener relaciones sexuales amenazándola, lastimándola o presionándola?)

C10a (Besides anything you have already mentioned,) (Since the age of 16,) Has any man ever TOUCHED YOU SEXUALLY when you did not want him to in a way that was DISTRESSING to you? (¿La tocaron sexualmente sin su consentimiento?)

C11a (Since the age of 16,) Has any man ever forced or attempted to force you into SEXUAL ACTIVITY WITH SOMEONE ELSE, including being forced to have sex for money or in exchange for goods? (¿La forzaron o intentaron forzarla a alguna actividad sexual con otra persona?)

C12a (Since the age of 16,) Has any man ever been sexually violent towards you in a way that I have not already mentioned? (¿Ha sido algún hombre sexualmente violento de otra manera?)

**European Union Member States**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights</th>
<th>Violence against Women: An EU-wide survey</th>
<th>Women aged 18-74</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Data refer to the percentage of women who report having experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a partner since age 15. Physical violence includes pushing, shoving, slapping, being hit by a thrown object, hair pulling, punching and kicking, burning, suffocation, stabbing or shooting, and having the head banged against something. Sexual violence includes forced sexual intercourse, attempted forced sexual intercourse, and other forms of sexual activity performed without consent or with consent out of fear of the partners’ actions. Partners are defined as “persons with whom the respondents were, or had been, married, living together without being married, or involved in a relationship without living together”. The partner can be of any sex or gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Research Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Bott S, Guedes A, Ruíz-Celis AP, Mendoza JA. (2019), &quot;Intimate partner violence in the Americas: a systematic review and reanalysis of national prevalence estimates&quot;, Rev Panam Salud Publica. Vol. 43, No. 26. <a href="https://doi.org/10.26633/RPSP.2019.9.26">https://doi.org/10.26633/RPSP.2019.9.26</a></td>
<td>Encuesta Nacional sobre la Dinámica de las Relaciones en los Hogares (ENDIREH)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Directorate General on the Status of Women</td>
<td>Domestic Violence Against Women in Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention</td>
<td>National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Definitions:**
- Physical violence includes pushing, shoving, slapping, tying up, kicking, being hit by a thrown object, hanging or choking, hitting, stabbing and shooting.
- Sexual violence includes forced sexual intercourse, sexual intercourse performed out of fear of the partner’s actions, threatened forced sexual intercourse, and sexual acts that the respondent found degrading or humiliating.
- Partners refers to current or former intimate partners such as husbands, fiancés, betrotheds and boyfriends. Data cover ever-married women only.

**References:**
violence includes rape, being made to penetrate
someone else, sexual coercion, and unwanted
sexual contact. Stalking involves a pattern of
harassing or threatening tactics used by a
perpetrator that is both unwanted and causes fear or
safety concerns in the victim. Partners are defined
as romantic or sexual partners and include spouses,
boyfriends, girlfriends, people with whom the
respondent dated, were seeing, or “hooked up.”
Partners can be of any sex or gender, although
some of the asked-about sexual acts refer
specifically to acts committed by men.

you did not want it to happen? D05_01 The first time these things happened to you,
how did you know the person who did any of these things to you? ... D05_10 The
10th person?

How many people have you had vaginal, oral, or anal sex with after they pressured
you by doing any of the following? D15 Telling you lies, making promises about the future they knew were untrue,
threatening to end your relationship, or threatening to spread rumors about you?; D16
Wearing you down by repeatedly asking for sex, or showing they were unhappy?; D17
Using their influence or authority over you, for example, your boss or your teacher?
D18_01 The first time these things happened to you, how did you know the person
who did any of these things to you? ... D18_10 The 10th person?

How many PEOPLE have ever used physical force or threats of physical harm to
put their mouth on your vagina or anus? E33 put their fingers or an object in your
vagina or anus? How many MALES have ever used physical force or threats of
physical harm to E35 put their penis in your vagina? E36 put their penis in your anus?
E37 put their penis in your mouth? E45_01 The first time these things happened to
you, how did you know the person who did [the aforementioned] to you? ... E45_10
The 10th person?

Has anyone ever: CO1 followed you around and watched you when you did not want
them to? CO2 approached you or showed up in places, such as your home, work, or
school when you did not want them to? CO3 used GPS technology or equipment to
monitor or track your location when you did not want them to? This includes GPS
technology used in a phone or in social media, such as Facebook. CO4 left strange or
potentially threatening items for you to find? CO5 sneaked into your home or car and
did things to scare you by letting you know they had been there? CO6 used
technology such as a hidden camera, recorder, or computer software to spy on you
from a distance? CO7 made unwanted phone calls to you, including hang-ups and
voice messages? CO8 sent you unwanted text messages, photo messages, emails,
or messages through Facebook, Twitter, or other social media? CO9 sent you cards,
letters, flowers, or presents when they knew you didn’t want them to? C10 How many
people did any of these things to you on more than one occasion? C11a Now,
thinking ONLY about the person/people who followed contacted or harassed you on
more than one occasion, how many of those people ever made you fearful or feel
threatened, or concerned for your safety or the safety of others? C11b Now, thinking
ONLY about the person/people who followed contacted or harassed you on more than
one occasion, how many of those people ever made you fearful or feel
threatened, or concerned for your safety or the safety of others? C12_01 The first time these things happened to you,
how did you know the person who did any of these things to you? ... C12_10 The
10th person?