



ISSUE NOTE

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

On average, at least one in three women is beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused by an intimate partner in the course of her lifetime. It is estimated that, worldwide, one in five women will become a victim of rape or attempted rape in her life. In addition to the 60 - 101 million “missing women”, the World Bank estimates that violence against women kills and incapacitates as many women of reproductive age as cancer does. Violence against women is the most common but least punished crime in the world and it poses an enormous obstacle to achieve gender equality worldwide. The United Nations defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

There are many forms of violence against women, including sexual, physical, or emotional abuse by an intimate partner; or by family members or others; sexual harassment and abuse by authority figures (such as teachers, police officers or employers); trafficking for forced labour or sex; and such traditional practices as forced or child marriages, dowry-related violence; and honour killings, when women are murdered in the name of family honour. The most common form of violence experienced by women globally is physical violence inflicted by an intimate partner.

Violence against women not only constitutes a gross violation of human rights but also has enormous social and economic costs. They include the direct costs of services to treat and support abused women and their children, and to bring perpetrators to justice. The indirect costs include lost employment and productivity, as well as human pain and suffering. Furthermore, violence against women poses a serious threat to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Studies show that girls who are victims of violence are less likely to attend or complete school, and women who have been raped are more often exposed to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.

Sexual violence has severe and long-lasting consequences for the health and well-being of the individual and the community, including increased rates of HIV/AIDS, the development of vaginal fistulas, unwanted pregnancies, severe psychological trauma, isolation and further abuse of victims, the dissolution of community and family bonds, decreased access to food, shelter and work and, as a consequence, high economic costs in health care. Women and girls who suffer from these consequences are constrained in their contribution to development, peace and security.

Another form of violence against women is systematic sexual abuse in conflict situations or after armed conflicts. This form of violence has been reported in every international or non-international war zones. It is estimated that between 250,000 and 500,000 women were raped during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda; between 20,000 and 50,000 women were raped during the conflict in Bosnia, and from Goma in the Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo 1,100 rapes are being reported every month.

Conflict-related sexual violence occurs in homes, fields, places of detention, military sites, and camps for refugees and displaced persons. It occurs at the height of armed conflict, during population displacement, and continues after conflict. Sexual violence is primarily targeted at women and girls; however, men and boys are increasingly being

victimized. Sexual violence is aimed at both civilians and combatants. Combatants use it to humiliate and demoralize opponents, to initiate and discipline their own troops, and to forcibly displace populations. Sexual violence serves as an instrument to perpetuate conflict through the disruption and displacement of communities and individuals. Sexual violence undermines the ability of women and girls to participate in conflict resolution, elections, governance and post-conflict reconstruction processes.

