

Violence against women and girls

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Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is considered one of the most pervasive human rights abuses of our times, affecting more than one in three women globally. VAWG is most likely to be perpetrated by someone known to the victim, such as a family member or intimate partner, and takes many different forms. This includes, but is not limited to: domestic and intimate partner violence (IPV); sexual violence (including rape); sexual harassment; emotional/psychological violence; sexual violence in conflict; sexual exploitation; and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting, child, early and forced marriage, honour killings and dowry-related violence.

VAWG cuts across cultures, socio-economic status, ethnicities and other demographic diversities. However, rates and patterns of violence vary significantly across settings and across the life-cycle, showing that violence against women and girls is not inevitable. Particular groups of women and girls may be more vulnerable to violence and exposed to multiple forms of violence due to compounded forms of discrimination and socio-economic exclusion: such as members of racial, ethnic and sexual minorities; HIV-positive women; women with disabilities; older women; and women affected by armed conflict.

VAWG is now recognised as a profound public health issue with well-documented impacts on women's sexual and reproductive health, their overall mental health, their risk of chronic disease, and the health and wellbeing of their children. VAWG also adversely affects a country's human, social and economic development, and is a fundamental barrier to eradicating poverty and building peace. Globally, estimates of lost productivity resulting from IPV range from 1.2 of GDP in Brazil and Tanzania, 2 percent of GDP in Chile, and up to 10 percent of GDP in the UK when accounting for the total costs including reduced well-being.



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Research has shown that violence against women and girls emerges from the interplay of multiple interacting factors at different levels of the social 'ecology'¹, but is deeply rooted in gender inequality and social norms that condone violence and control over women. At the same time violence is used as a tool to reinforce gender hierarchies and power imbalances between women and men.

The issue of violence against women and girls is now firmly placed on the international development agenda after decades of work by the women's movement, researchers and practitioners. This is reflected in the high-level global commitments to addressing violence against women and girls, such as the 2013 UN Commission on the Status of Women which focused on prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls, the Global Summit on Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict, the Girl Summit on FGM and CEFM, the Call to Action to protect women and girls in emergencies, and the recent inclusion of three specific targets to address violence against women and children in the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, many national governments have passed laws to prevent violence against women, developed national action plans, and undertaken efforts to improve the health and justice sector responses to violence.

There is increasing recognition that efforts to respond to survivors of violence must be complemented by holistic prevention efforts to stop violence before it starts. The eight readings selected for this pack illustrate core elements of the challenges in addressing this complex and deeply rooted problem, including: stronger enforcement of laws and policies to prohibit VAWG; improved access to comprehensive support for survivors; more holistic and longer term investment in prevention, including shifting discriminatory social norms and engaging men and boys; and further evidence about what works to prevent VAWG, cost-effectiveness and how efforts can be taken to scale.

Key readings

Reading 1: Devries, K.M.; Mak, J.Y.; & García-Moreno, C. et al. (2013). The global prevalence of intimate partner violence against women. *Science*, 340(6140), 1527-1528.
<http://twileshare.com/uploads/q.pdf>

This brief article brings together decades of work, and synthesises existing prevalence data world-wide to provide new reliable estimates of global and regional prevalence of IPV against women.

For more detailed information: WHO. (2013). *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organisation.
http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/85239/1/9789241564625_eng.pdf

Reading 2: Jewkes, R.; Fulu, E; Roselli, T; & Garcia-Moreno, C. (2013). Prevalence of and factors associated with non-partner rape perpetration: findings from the UN multi-country cross-sectional

¹ The socio-ecological model for understanding violence against women usually considers factors operating at the individual level (i.e. age, education, childhood experiences); the relationship or household level (i.e. unequal decision making, male dominance in the family); the community level (i.e. community norms) and the larger macro or societal level (i.e. discriminatory laws and policies, rigid gender roles, harmful models of masculinity). The latest research also suggests including a global level to the model to account for the influence of some elements of globalisation (see Reading 3).

study on men and violence in Asia and the Pacific. *The Lancet Global Health* 1 (4), e208-e218.
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214109X1370069X>

This article presents data on men's perpetration of non-partner rape from one of the largest multi-country studies on men's use of violence in low and middle income countries. It is a significant contribution to VAWG literature as its focus on drivers of men's perpetration is an under-researched area.

Reading 3: Fulu, E. & Miedema, S. (2015). Violence Against Women Globalizing the Integrated Ecological Model. *Violence against women*. 21 (12), 1431 – 1455.
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4638316/>

This article argues for the addition of a global level to the ecological model framework, the reigning paradigm for understanding how partner violence emerges from an array of interconnected factors operating at multiple levels of society popularized by Lori Heise in 1998. It details case studies from two low incomes countries to illustrate how a range of factors (ideologies, economic development and integration, religious fundamentalisms, and global cultural exchange) interact as components of a larger globalisation process and affect men and women's experiences and perceptions of violence against women.

Reading 4: Hossain, M.; Zimmerman, C.; & Kiss, L. et al. (2014). Men's and women's experiences of violence and traumatic events in rural Cote d'Ivoire before, during and after a period of armed conflict. *BMJ open*, 4(2). DOI:10.1136/bmjopen-2013-003644
<http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/4/2/e003644.full>

This recent and rigorous study on violence against women and girls in a conflict setting looks at experiences before, during and after the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire, and explores both men's and women's experiences of violence. It finds that other forms of violence, including intimate partner violence, may be more widespread than conflict-related sexual violence.

For information and practical guidance on interventions to tackle violence against women and girls in conflict and humanitarian settings, see the 2015 *IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action*.
http://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2015-iasc-gender-based-violence-guidelines_full-res.pdf

Reading 5: Heise, L. L. & Kotsadam, A. (2015). Cross-national and multilevel correlates of partner violence: an analysis of data from population-based surveys. *The Lancet Global Health*, 3(6), e332-e340
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214109X15000133>

This ground-breaking article draws on data compiled on the 12 month prevalence of partner violence from 66 surveys across 44 countries and representing 481,205 women. It uses complex data analysis techniques to examine associations between macro-level measures of socioeconomic development, women's status, gender inequality, and gender-related norms and the prevalence of current partner violence at a population level. This is one of the first articles to systematically demonstrate that gender inequality is a key driver of population-level prevalence of violence against women.

Reading 6: Ellsberg, M.; Arango, D.J.; & Morton, M. et al. (2015). Prevention of violence against women and girls: what does the evidence say?. *The Lancet*, 385(9977), 1555-1566.
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mary_Ellsberg/publication/268743170_Prevention_of_violence_against_women_and_girls_what_does_the_evidence_say/links/547495ee0cf2778985abe99a.pdf

This comprehensive review examines evidence from high, low and middle income on interventions to reduce the prevalence and incidence of violence against women and girls. It covers a broad range of intervention models and many forms of violence including: intimate partner violence; non-partner sexual assault; female genital mutilation; and child marriage. It highlights which interventions are most promising and gaps in the evidence base that merit further research.

Reading 7: Sen, P. (2005). Crimes of honour, value and meaning. In: Welchman L. and Hossain S. (eds.) *Honour: crimes, paradigms and violence against women*. London, UK: Zed Books, 42-63.
<http://bit.ly/1K12dFn>

This book explores the nature, extent and causes of crimes of honor and locates its discussion in the broader framework of international human rights law. Sen's chapter presents an enlightening discussion of the meaning of crimes of honour including some challenges with the term itself. It identifies the elements that characterise crimes of honour and how such crimes fit within a broader continuum of violence against women.

Reading 8: Jewkes, R.; Flood, M.; & Lang, J. (2015). From work with men and boys to changes of social norms and reduction of inequities in gender relations: a conceptual shift in prevention of violence against women and girls. *The Lancet*, 385(9977), 1580-1589.
<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140673614616834>

This article outlines why engaging men and boys to prevent violence against women and girls is essential, and how such approaches have evolved over time. Through a review of evidence, this paper identifies the most effective types of interventions that engage men and boys, and highlights the key features of more effective approaches. Ultimately the authors argue that future work should promote more programmes with women and girls, in addition to boys and men, for effective and sustained gender transformation.

Questions to guide reading

- How do the rates and patterns of violence against women and girls vary across setting and among different population groups? What makes some women more vulnerable to violence?
- What factors contribute to women's and girls' experiences of VAWG and how do they cut across multiple levels of society?
- What are some of the common elements of the most effective programmes and policies to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls?
- Men are the primary perpetrators of violence against women and girls, but they must also be part of the solution. How should men and boys be engaged in the agenda without marginalising women's voices or shifting key resources away from the women led organisations?
- How are the types, causes and solutions to violence against women and girls in conflict different or similar to violence in non-conflict settings?
- Given the scale of the problem, what more can be done to promote scale-up of interventions to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls, in both humanitarian and development programming?

Further resources

DFID VAWG Guidance Notes series

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/violence-against-women-and-girls-guidance-notes#guidance-notes>

DFID VAWG Evidence Digests

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/violence-against-women-and-girls-guidance-notes#evidence-digest>

What Works to Prevent Violence programme

<http://www.whatworks.co.za/>

UN Women Virtual Knowledge Centre to End VAWG

<http://www.endvawnow.org/>