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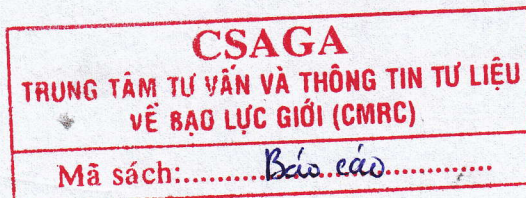
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World report on violence and health

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CHAPTER 4

Violence by intimate partners

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Background

One of the most common forms of violence against women is that performed by a husband or an intimate male partner. This is in stark contrast to the situation for men, who in general are much more likely to be attacked by a stranger or acquaintance than by someone within their close circle of relationships (1–5). The fact that women are often emotionally involved with and economically dependent on those who victimize them has major implications for both the dynamics of abuse and the approaches to dealing with it.

Intimate partner violence occurs in all countries, irrespective of social, economic, religious or cultural group. Although women can be violent in relationships with men, and violence is also sometimes found in same-sex partnerships, the overwhelming burden of partner violence is borne by women at the hands of men (6, 7). For that reason, this chapter will deal with the question of violence by men against their female partners.

Women's organizations around the world have long drawn attention to violence against women, and to intimate partner violence in particular. Through their efforts, violence against women has now become an issue of international concern. Initially viewed largely as a human rights issue, partner violence is increasingly seen as an important public health problem.

The extent of the problem

Intimate partner violence refers to any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship. Such behaviour includes:

- Acts of physical aggression – such as slapping, hitting, kicking and beating.
- Psychological abuse – such as intimidation, constant belittling and humiliating.
- Forced intercourse and other forms of sexual coercion.
- Various controlling behaviours – such as isolating a person from their family and friends, monitoring their movements, and restricting their access to information or assistance.

When abuse occurs repeatedly in the same relationship, the phenomenon is often referred to as “battering”.

In 48 population-based surveys from around the world, between 10% and 69% of women reported being physically assaulted by an intimate male partner at some point in their lives (see Table 4.1). The percentage of women who had been assaulted by a partner in the previous 12 months varied from 3% or less among women in Australia, Canada and the United States to 27% of ever-partnered women (that is, women who have ever had an ongoing sexual partnership) in León, Nicaragua, 38% of currently married women in the Republic of Korea, and 52% of currently married Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. For many of these women, physical assault was not an isolated event but part of a continuing pattern of abusive behaviour.

Research suggests that physical violence in intimate relationships is often accompanied by psychological abuse, and in one-third to over one-half of cases by sexual abuse (3, 8–10). Among 613 women in Japan who had at any one time been abused, for example, 57% had suffered all three types of abuse – physical, psychological and sexual. Less than 10% of these women had experienced only physical abuse (8). Similarly, in Monterrey, Mexico, 52% of physically assaulted women had also been sexually abused by their partners (11). Figure 4.1 graphically illustrates the overlap between types of abuse among ever-partnered women in León, Nicaragua (9).

Most women who are targets of physical aggression generally experience multiple acts of aggression over time. In the León study, for instance, 60% of women abused during the previous year had been attacked more than once, and 20% had experienced severe violence more than six times. Among women reporting physical aggression, 70% reported severe abuse (12). The average number of physical assaults during the previous year among women currently suffering abuse, according to a survey in London, England, was seven (13), while in the United States, in a national study in 1996, it was three (5).

TABLE 4.1
Physical assault on women by an intimate male partner, selected population-based studies, 1982–1999

Country or area	Year of study	Coverage	Sample			Proportion of women physically assaulted by a partner (%)		
			Size	Study population ^a	Age (years)	During the previous 12 months	In current relationship	Ever
Africa								
Ethiopia	1995	Meskanena Woreda	673	II	≥ 15	10 ^b		45
Kenya	1984–1987	Kisii District	612	VI	≥ 15		42	
Nigeria	1993	Not stated	1 000	I	—			31 ^c
South Africa	1998	Eastern Cape	396	III	18–49	11		27
		Mpumalanga	419	III	18–49	12		28
		Northern Province	464	III	18–49	5		19
		National	10 190	III	15–49	6		13
Zimbabwe	1996	Midlands Province	966	I	≥ 18			17 ^d
Latin America and the Caribbean								
Antigua	1990	National	97	I	29–45			30 ^d
Barbados	1990	National	264	I	20–45			30 ^{c,e}
Bolivia	1998	Three districts	289	I	≥ 20	17 ^c		
Chile	1993	Santiago province	1 000	II	22–55		26/11 ^f	
	1997	Santiago	310	II	15–49	23		
Colombia	1995	National	6 097	II	15–49		19	
Mexico	1996	Guadalajara	650	III	≥ 15			27
		Monterrey	1 064	III	≥ 15			17
Nicaragua	1995	León	360	III	15–49	27/20 ^f		52/37 ^f
	1997	Managua	378	III	15–49	33/28		69
	1998	National	8 507	III	15–49	12/8 ^f		28/21 ^f
Paraguay	1995–1996	National, except Chaco region	5 940	III	15–49			10
Peru	1997	Metro Lima (middle-income and low-income)	359	II	17–55	31		
Puerto Rico	1995–1996	National	4 755	III	15–49			13 ^g
Uruguay	1997	Two regions	545	II ^h	22–55	10 ^e		
North America								
Canada	1991–1992	Toronto	420	I	18–64			27 ^c
	1993	National	12 300	I	≥ 18	3 ^{d,e}		29 ^{d,e}
United States	1995–1996	National	8 000	I	≥ 18	1.3 ^c		22 ^c
Asia and Western Pacific								
Australia	1996	National	6 900	I	—	3 ^d	8 ^d	
Bangladesh	1992	National (villages)	1 225	II	<50	19		47
	1993	Two rural regions	10 368	II	15–49		42	
Cambodia	1996	Six regions	1 374	III	—			16
India	1993–1994	Tamil Nadu	859	II	15–39			37
	1993–1994	Uttar Pradesh	983	II	15–39			45
	1995–1996	Uttar Pradesh, five districts	6 695	IV	15–65			30
Papua New Guinea	1998–1999	National	89 199	III	15–49	11 ⁱ		19 ^j
	1999	Six states	9 938	III	15–49	14		40/26
	1982	National, rural villages	628	III ^h	—			67
Philippines	1984	Port Moresby	298	III ^h	—			56
	1993	National	8 481	V	15–49			10
Thailand	1998	Cagayan de Oro City and Bukidnon Province	1 660	II	15–49			26 ^j
	1989	National	707	II	≥ 20	38/12 ^f		
Thailand	1994	Bangkok	619	IV	—		20	