both during their whole lifetime and in the past 12 months prior to the data collection. Physical violence consists of acts aimed at hurting the victim and include, but are not limited, to pushing, grabbing, twisting the arm, pulling the hair, slapping, kicking, biting or hitting with the fist or an object, to trying to strangle or suffocate, burning or scalding on purpose and attacking with some sort of weapon, a gun or knife. The proportion of women who were victimized by physical violence (irrespective of the perpetrator) at least once in their lifetime and in the past 12 months is presented in figure 6.1.

Women are exposed to physical violence throughout their lifetime

The proportion of women exposed to physical violence in their lifetime ranges from 12 per cent in China, Hong Kong SAR and 13 per cent in Azerbaijan to about a half or more in Australia and Mozambique (48 per cent), the Czech Republic (51 per cent) and Zambia (59 per cent). As for the violence experienced in the 12 months preceding the survey, the proportion of women is, as expected, lower. Still, over one-tenth of women report recent abuse in Costa Rica, the Republic of Moldova, the Czech Republic and Mozambique. In interpreting these results it is necessary to take into account the different methodologies used in these surveys and the fact that definitions of violence and collection methods were not identical (see the discussion earlier in this chapter). For example, the rate for India refers only to ever-married women, not the total number of women. Nevertheless, all statistics clearly point to the fact that a significant share of women was physically abused at least once in their lifetime, whether by their intimate partners or some other men.

Intimate partner physical violence

Violence that women suffer from their intimate partners carries particularly serious and potentially long-lasting consequences, as it tends to be repetitive and accompanied by psychological and sexual violence as well. This form of violence is especially in the focus of statistical surveys on violence against women.

Intimate partners physically abuse women

Statistics indicate that there are significant differences in the prevalence of intimate partner physical violence around the world. According to data from national and international statistical surveys presented in graph 6.2, the percentage of ever-partnered or ever-married women that suffered physical violence perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner at least once in their lifetime ranges from 6 per cent in China, Hong Kong SAR and 7 per cent in Canada (data refer to spousal assaults only), to over 48 per cent in Zambia, Peru-city 18, Ethiopia–province and Peru–province. These available statistics do not point to any particular pattern of these prevalence rates in terms of geographical distribution of countries/areas or their level of development. However, it needs to be pointed out that violence against women surveys were not conducted in many countries of the world, thus making identification of regional or developmental trends considerably difficult.

The proportion of women subjected to physical violence by their intimate partners in the last 12 months

18 In a number of countries covered in this chapter, surveys on violence against women were conducted separately in a city and in a province in an attempt to distinguish between urban and rural areas. In all such cases the annotation indicates whether the data and findings refer to the city or the province of the country.