

## Chapter 6

# Violence against women

### Key findings

- Violence against women is a universal phenomenon.
- Women are subjected to different forms of violence – physical, sexual, psychological and economic – both within and outside their homes.
- Rates of women experiencing physical violence at least once in their lifetime vary from several per cent to over 59 per cent depending on where they live.
- Current statistical measurements of violence against women provide a limited source of information, and statistical definitions and classifications require more work and harmonization at the international level.
- Female genital mutilation – the most harmful mass perpetuation of violence against women – shows a slight decline.
- In many regions of the world longstanding customs put considerable pressure on women to accept abuse.

### Introduction

Violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. It both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. In all societies, to a greater or lesser degree, women and girls are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse that cuts across lines of income, class and culture. The low social and economic status of women can be both a cause and a consequence of this violence.<sup>1</sup>

Violence against women throughout their life cycle is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between women and men. It is perpetuated by traditional and customary practices that accord women lower status in the family, workplace, community and society, and it is exacerbated by social pressures. These include the shame surrounding and hence difficulty of denouncing certain acts against women; women's lack of access to legal information, aid or protection; a dearth of laws that effectively prohibit violence against women; inadequate efforts on the part of public

authorities to promote awareness of and enforce existing laws; and the absence of educational and other means to address the causes and consequences of violence. Images in the media of violence against women – especially those that depict rape, sexual slavery or the use of women and girls as sex objects, including pornography – are factors contributing to the continued prevalence of such violence, adversely influencing the community at large, in particular children and young people.<sup>2</sup>

The Beijing Platform for Action requested all governments and the United Nations, among others, to promote research, collect data and compile statistics relating to the prevalence of different forms of violence against women (especially domestic violence) and to encourage research into their causes, nature, seriousness and consequences as well as the effectiveness of measures implemented to prevent and redress violence against women.<sup>3</sup> An elaboration of the situation with regard to statistics on violence against women was presented in the previous issue of *The World's Women*.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, 2006a.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, 2005.

The United Nations has recently significantly stepped up activities aimed at combating violence against women. The United Nations Secretary-General's 2006 study on violence against women<sup>5</sup> elaborates on the context and causes of this violence and on its forms, consequences and costs. The study dedicates a separate chapter to issues related to data collection and the gaps and challenges in the different sources of data used for quantification, with an emphasis on types of violence and ethical and safety issues related to population-based surveys used as sources. Furthermore, the study points to the fact that the development and use of common indicators on violence against women is critical for a full and comprehensive overview of this phenomenon.

The General Assembly adopted four resolutions<sup>6</sup> in the period 2006–2009 on intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women, thus emphasizing countries' concern about the issue. It also built on the Secretary-General's call for developing global indicators, requesting in its resolution 61/142 of December 2006 that such undertakings take place as a matter of urgency to assist governments in assessing the scope, prevalence and incidence of violence against women.

Simultaneously the United Nations is undertaking work on defining and identifying the different forms this violence takes in order to enable accurate assessment and quantification. This is best reflected in the Secretary-General's Campaign UNiTE to End Violence against Women. The overall objective is to raise public awareness and increase political will and resources. One of the five key outcomes as benchmarks for the campaign to be achieved in all countries by 2015 is the "establishment of data collection and analysis systems on the prevalence of various forms of violence against women and girls".<sup>7</sup> Three outputs are listed under this benchmark: (1) All countries have undertaken a dedicated population-based survey or module on violence against women and girls; (2) All countries have integrated data collection on violence against women and girls in their administrative and routine reporting systems, including for health, police and justice; and (3) All countries, the international community and other actors commit to ensuring the gender disaggregation of existing data, where possible.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, 2006b.

<sup>6</sup> General Assembly resolutions 61/143 of 2006, 62/133 of 2007, 63/155 of 2008 and 64/137 of 2009.

<sup>7</sup> United Nations, 2009a.

This chapter focuses on relevant methodological issues and sources of statistics that influence the availability of accurate, robust and comparable data on violence against women. It also describes the work on global statistical indicators for measuring such violence. The interim set of these global indicators is then used to present data on violence against women compiled from national and international surveys. The final sections of the chapter look at statistics on female genital mutilation and at the attitudes of women towards the violence inflicted on them.

## A. Statistical methodology

### 1. Development of global statistical indicators

Comparability of statistics on violence against women is one of the major requirements for providing an accurate quantification of this phenomenon across time, nations, regions and the world. Violence experienced by women takes many different forms, and it is necessary to classify them into sets of indicators to create a common statistical instrument that should be applied in data collection exercises.

The work on global statistical indicators is mandated by the General Assembly.<sup>8</sup> The United Nations Statistical Commission, in response, established the Friends of the Chair group to identify and list statistical indicators on violence against women.<sup>9</sup> Since population-based surveys and administrative records are the source of statistics measuring this violence, the indicators are differentiated on that basis. For surveys, the list of indicators consists of:

- i. Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to physical violence in the last 12 months by severity of violence, relationship to the perpetrator and frequency
- ii. Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to physical violence during lifetime by severity of violence, relationship to the perpetrator and frequency
- iii. Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to sexual violence in the last 12 months by severity of violence, relationship to the perpetrator and frequency

<sup>8</sup> United Nations General Assembly, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> For the composition and proceedings of the group, visit: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/vaw/default.htm>.

- iv. Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to sexual violence during lifetime by severity of violence, relationship to the perpetrator and frequency
- v. Total and age-specific rate of ever-partnered women subjected to sexual and/or physical violence by current or former intimate partner in the last 12 months by frequency
- vi. Total and age-specific rate of ever-partnered women subjected to sexual and/or physical violence by current or former intimate partner during lifetime by frequency
- vii. Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to psychological violence in the past 12 months by intimate partner
- viii. Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to economic violence in the past 12 months by intimate partner
- ix. Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to female genital mutilation

Statistics on the following indicators should be drawn from administrative records:

- i. Femicide and spousal homicide by personal characteristics of the victim and the perpetrator
- ii. Forced marriage
- iii. Trafficking of women

The work on identifying and listing statistical indicators for measuring violence against women is on-going and will result in the development of guidelines<sup>10</sup> for producing statistics that will allow for international statistical standards. All national statistical authorities will be urged to apply them in order to ensure the availability of accurate and regular information on the issue.

## 2. Administrative records as a source of statistics on violence against women

Police and court statistics represent a potential source of statistics on violence against women. A detailed elaboration of the use of these sources is provided in the previous issue of *The World's Women*.<sup>11</sup> The value of police statistics for measuring violence against women is currently limited as this is often not reported to the authorities, especially in cases of domestic violence. However, for crimes such as femicide police statistics could provide use-

ful statistics, provided that data on the victim – as well as data on the perpetrator, if available – are disaggregated by age and other personal characteristics. The adaptation of crime statistics in general to produce data on violence against women is part of the work on developing and adopting international statistical standards for measuring such violence.<sup>12</sup>

The health sector is another source of statistics on various forms of violence, as are records kept by non-governmental organizations involved with the protection of abused and battered women. It should be noted, however, that statistics from these sources are scarce and lack full reliability. This is because information on the occurrences and consequences of violence is usually collected on a voluntary basis since recording incidents and reporting on victims of violence is often not mandatory for health-care and other systems.

## 3. Surveys as a source of statistics on violence against women

In principle, population-based stand-alone surveys are the instruments of choice for collecting statistics on violence against women.<sup>13</sup> Where there are resource problems, however, a well-designed module within a general or other purpose survey would be an appropriate tool as well. In both cases they need to comply with strict protocols of confidentiality and security for the interviewees.<sup>14</sup>

Specialized, stand-alone statistical surveys provide the possibility of examining in detail the characteristics of the woman, the perpetrator and their relationship, the number of occurrences of violence and all the other pertinent information. These surveys require careful preparation, sampling design and training of the interviewers, and they raise a whole set of ethical concerns in terms of ensuring confidentiality of data and the protection of respondents.<sup>15</sup>

Gender violence in general and violence against women in particular is recognized as a global phenomenon. The roots of such violence, however, are many and varied, which poses serious challenges to developing monitoring instruments.

<sup>12</sup> See the report of the meeting of the Friends of the Chair of the United Nations Statistical Commission on Statistical Indicators for Measuring Violence against Women at: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographicmeetings/vaw/default.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations, 2009b.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Statistics Division, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Expected to be issued in 2011.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations, 2006a.

Researchers point to the fact that interpersonal behaviours must be understood within the wider contexts of power and inequality.<sup>16</sup> Thus one of the major issues in designing and conducting statistical surveys on violence against women is ensuring the cooperation of respondent victims, primarily in overcoming the societal barriers to disclosing intimate partner violence.

Even when surveys are conducted, their results are often difficult to compare as a consequence of the lack of international statistical standards and also due to the nature of the phenomenon. Surveys use different approaches and sample design; they define the acts of violence in different ways; and they differ in their coverage in terms of perpetrator – intimate partner(s) versus all men, for example.

Another issue is that the level of severity of violence experienced by women is often difficult to properly assess. While certain forms of physical violence by themselves might not be interpreted as severe, inflicting them repeatedly often causes significant harm to the victim. On the other hand, occasional or even a one-time occurrence of violence may result in serious injury. Most statistical surveys attempting to grasp the severity of violence apply a classification of different physical violent acts that hurt the victim and further qualifying these as either “moderate” or “severe” violence. However, another – more subjective – approach is also applied in some surveys and essentially solicits the victim’s assessment of the severity of the violence.

The results of different national and international surveys are not completely comparable also due to yet another of their components: phrasing and sequence of questions. The framing and wording of the questions may have adverse effects on the willingness of the respondent to cooperate and, due to the fact that questions have to be sensitive to national circumstances, the statistics produced from these surveys do not always describe the same phenomenon. The sequence of the questions is also often different among different surveys; some ask questions regarding violence suffered from an intimate partner first and then turn to violence committed by other perpetrators, while other surveys<sup>17</sup> start with experience of physical violence irrespective of the perpetrator.

<sup>16</sup> Merry, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> International Violence against Women Surveys (IVAWS), for example, as presented in Johnson and others, 2008.

Differences between surveys also arise as a consequence of the choice of data collection method. Whether telephone or face-to-face interviews were used can affect the willingness and the readiness of the respondents to discuss sensitive topics such as violent acts.

All of these issues highlight the need to develop, adopt and implement international statistical standards in this field to ensure sub-national, national, regional and international comparability. The statistics and their description that follow need to be interpreted keeping in mind the characteristics of violence against women surveys that have just been discussed.

## B. Prevalence and incidence of violence against women

In the past 15 years, a number of countries have conducted statistical surveys in an attempt to provide data on violence against women. In preparing this issue of *The World's Women* the United Nations Statistics Division undertook the compilation of data collected by these surveys (to the extent possible) based on the set of indicators listed above – i.e., the percentage of women subjected to physical and sexual violence in their lifetime and in the 12 months prior to data collection. While every effort was made to incorporate as many surveys as possible, the results from some surveys could not be included due either to the timing of the release of the results or the unavailability of data for some other reason. The complete list of surveys is presented in the Statistical Annex.

As noted in the first section, there are significant differences in the methodologies applied in the surveys and so the results might not be directly comparable. Major statistics for indicators as elaborated above are presented here as an approximation of the prevalence of violence against women in countries that conducted surveys on this issue and for which data were available.

### 1. Physical violence against women

#### *Overall physical violence*

Physical violence against women during their lifetime is expressed as a percentage of women, out of the total number of women, that experienced this at least once in their lifetime (usually after age 15). As already noted, data are usually collected on the physical violence women suffered

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

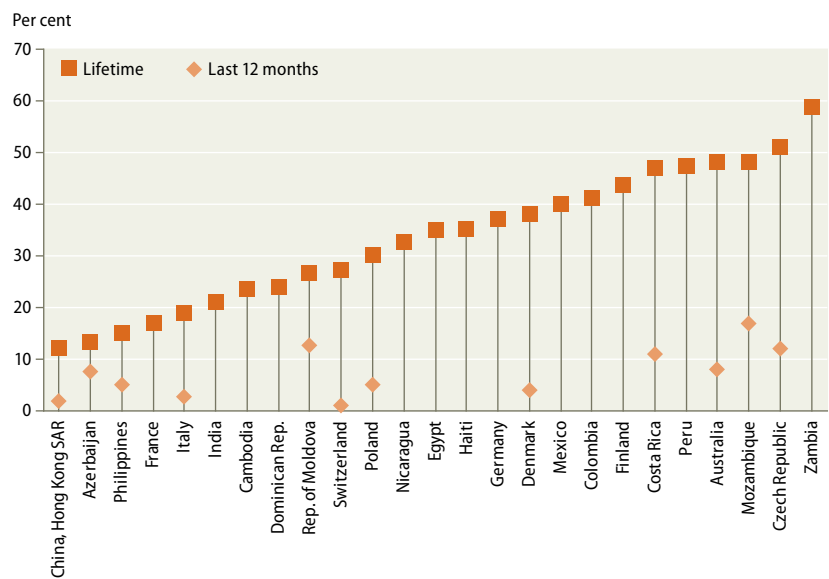
Violence that women suffer from their intimate partners carries particularly serious and potentially long-lasting consequences, as it tends to be repetitive and accompanied by psychological and sexual violence as well. This form of violence is especially in the focus of statistical surveys on violence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

### Intimate partners physically abuse women

Statistics indicate that there are significant differences in the prevalence of intimate partner physi-

Figure 6.1

Proportion of women experiencing physical violence (irrespective of the perpetrator) at least once in their lifetime and in the last 12 months, 1995–2006 (latest available)



Source: Compiled by the United Nations Statistics Division from national and international surveys on violence against women.

Note: Statistics on physical violence against women in the last 12 months were not available for all the countries. Data for India and Cambodia refer to ever-partnered women. Data for Finland refer to at least one form of violence or threat.

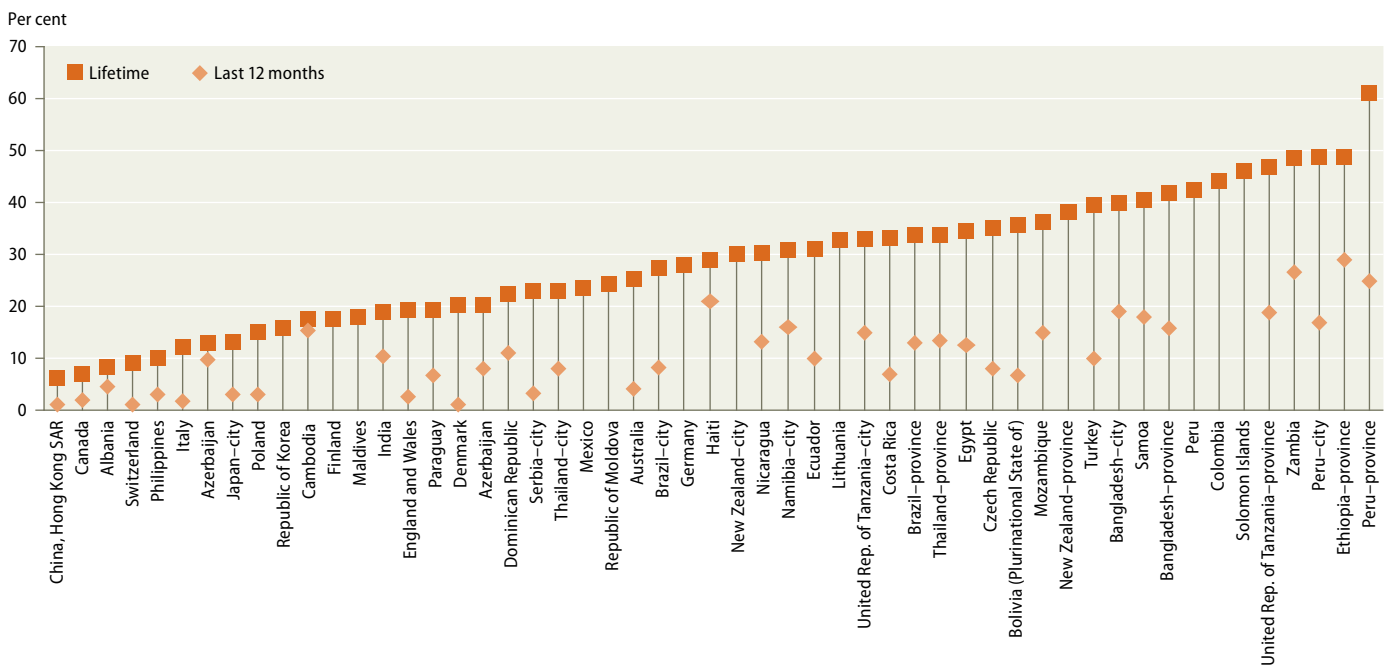
cal violence around the world. According to data from national and international statistical surveys presented in graph 6.2, the percentage of ever-partnered or ever-married women that suffered physical violence perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner at least once in their lifetime ranges 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<sup>18</sup>, 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

<sup>18</sup> 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.

Figure 6.2

Proportion of women experiencing intimate partner physical violence at least once in their lifetime and in the last 12 months, 1995–2006 (latest available)

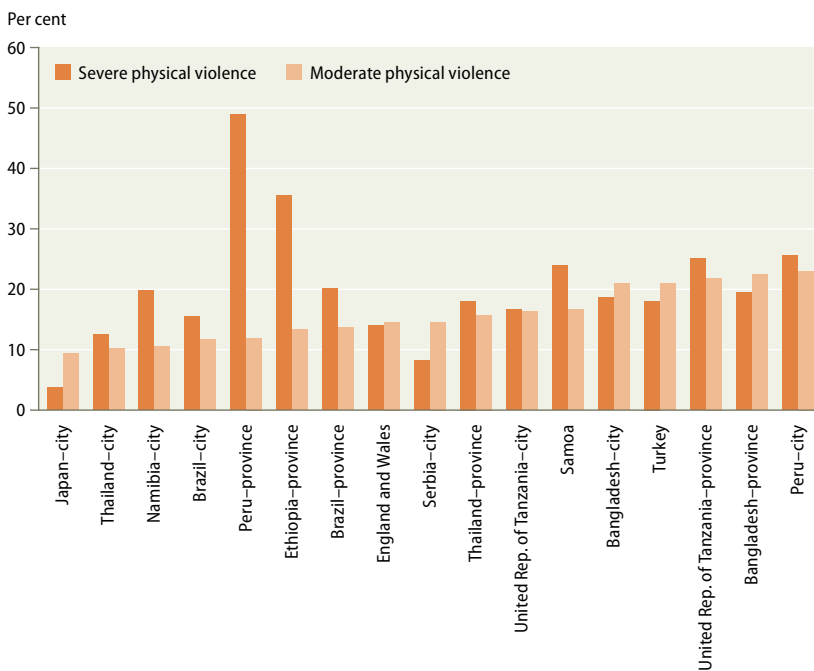


Source: Compiled by the United Nations Statistics Division from national and international surveys on violence against women.

Note: Statistics on intimate partner physical violence against women in the last 12 months were not available for all the countries. Data for India and Cambodia refer to ever-partnered women. Data for Finland refer to at least one form of violence or threat. Data for Canada refer to spousal assaults only. Data for the Plurinational State of Bolivia refer to hits by partner's hand only; not included are showings, hits with hard objects and attempted strangulation.

Figure 6.3

Proportion of women experiencing intimate partner physical violence at least once in their lifetime by severity, 2000–2008 (latest available)



Source: Compiled by the United Nations Statistics Division from national and international surveys on violence against women.

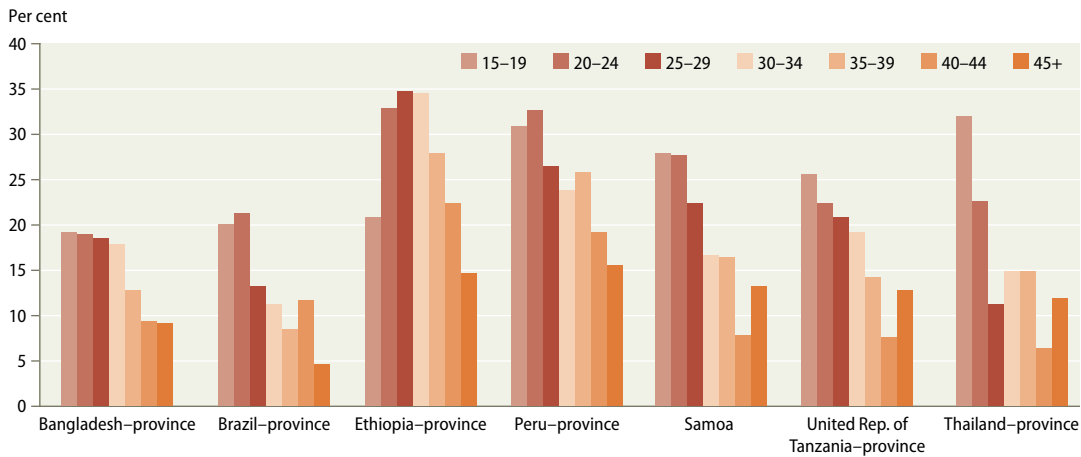
months was 3 per cent or less in China, Hong Kong SAR, Canada (data refer to spousal assaults only), Switzerland, the Philippines, Poland, England and Wales and Denmark. While expressing these results as percentages allows for easier comparison, it is also important to look at the absolute values in order to fully understand the magnitude of this phenomenon. For example, the total number of women falling within the scope of this survey in Poland in 2004 was around 17.8 million while the total rate of women who were physically victimized was just over 3 per cent. This indicates that physical violence affected almost 534 thousand individual women in 2003 – in the 12 months prior to the survey – or 1,463 women on any given day.

Women are subjected to both moderate and severe physical violence from their intimate partners, with the preponderance of one or the other varying by country

Whether the violence experienced by women from their intimate partners in their lifetime is moderate or severe varies across the countries with avail-

Figure 6.4

Age-specific rates of women subjected to physical violence by their intimate partners in the last 12 months prior to data collection, 2000–2002 (latest available)



Source: Garcia Moreno and others, *WHO Multi-country Study on Domestic Health and Domestic Violence against Women* (2005).

able statistics, as presented in figure 6.3. There are countries where severe violence was experienced by many more women than those experiencing moderate physical violence – for example, almost 50 per cent of women in Peru–province experienced severe violence compared to around 12 per cent of women victimized by moderate violence. This difference was also significant in Ethiopia–province and the United Republic of Tanzania–province. On the other hand, significantly more women were subjected to moderate rather than severe physical violence during their lifetime in Bangladesh (both province and city) and Turkey, for example.

#### Young women are more exposed to intimate partner physical violence

Young women are more likely to be exposed to violence than older women. Standard (five-year interval) age-specific rates of women subjected to physical violence in the last 12 months consistently showed that women in younger age groups have been victimized in greater numbers (figure 6.4). This is particularly the case for the first two five-year intervals – i.e., women from 15–24 years of age. For example, one third of all women of that age were subjected to physical violence in Peru–province, as were around a fifth in both Bangladesh–province and Brazil–province. The situation was not the same in all countries, however – for example, women aged 25–34 in Ethiopia–province were proportionately more exposed to violence than those aged 15–24.

## 2. Sexual violence against women

Although not as frequent as physical violence, sexual violence has consequences that usually severely affect the victim for a prolonged period of time and often last a lifetime. The term “sexual violence”, broadly interpreted, may include aggressive and abusive behaviours of different intensity and consequences, from unwanted touching to forced intercourse and rape.

#### Many women are sexually molested in their lifetimes

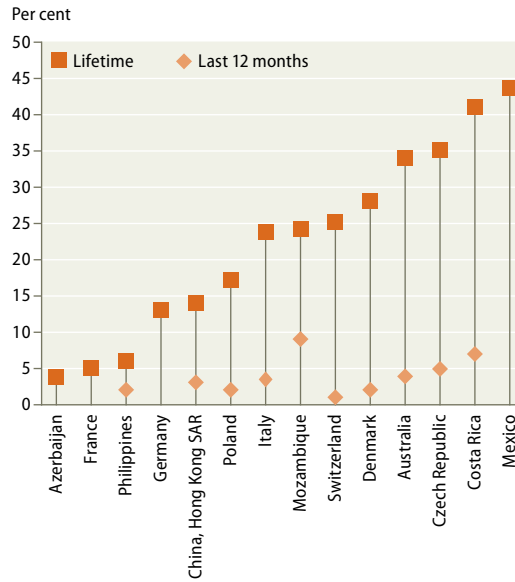
The percentage of women experiencing sexual violence at least once in their lifetime ranges from around 4 per cent in Azerbaijan, 5 per cent in France and 6 per cent in the Philippines, to a quarter or more women in Switzerland (25 per cent), Denmark (28 per cent), Australia (34 per cent), the Czech Republic (35 per cent), Costa Rica (41 per cent) and Mexico (44 per cent), as presented in figure 6.5.

#### Intimate partners often sexually assault women

As is the case with physical violence, sexual violence experienced by women in intimate partnerships carry a heavy toll on the victim and the partnership. In societies with traditional gender roles and attitudes toward marriage and divorce, it may be more difficult to leave a partner even if violent and women continue to endure ongoing abuse.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Holly Johnson and others, 2008.

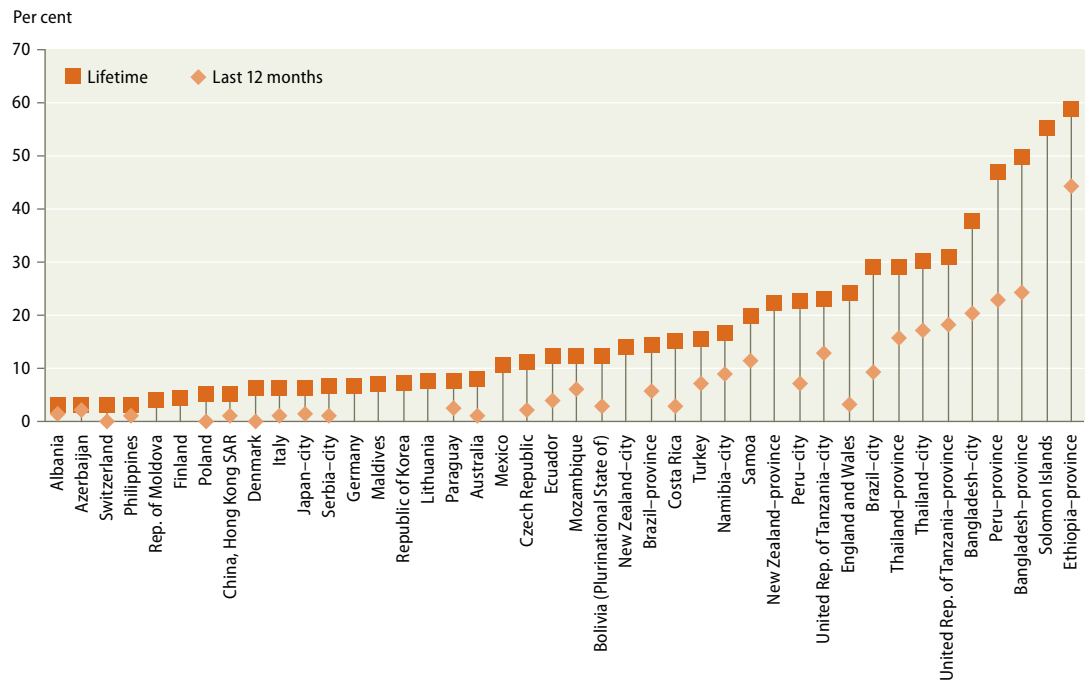
**Figure 6.5**  
**Proportion of women experiencing sexual violence (irrespective of the perpetrator) at least once in their lifetime and in the last 12 months, 2002–2006 (latest available)**



**Source:** Compiled by the United Nations Statistics Division from national and international surveys on violence against women.  
**Note:** Statistics on sexual violence against women in the last 12 months were not available for all the countries.

Figure 6.6 displays the percentage of ever-partnered women that were subjected to sexual violence committed by their intimate partner at least once in their lifetime and in the last 12 months

**Figure 6.6.**  
**Proportion of women experiencing intimate partner sexual violence at least once in their lifetime and in the last 12 months, 2000–2006 (latest available)**



**Source:** Compiled by the United Nations Statistics Division from national and international surveys on violence against women.  
**Note:** Statistics on intimate partner sexual violence against women in the last 12 months were not available for all the countries.

prior to the survey. This percentage varies considerably among countries or areas that collected these statistics. For example, while the lifetime experience of sexual violence in intimate partnership was reported by around 3 per cent of women in Albania, Azerbaijan, Switzerland and the Philippines, this percentage was considerably higher in quite a few countries in all the regions. The recent – in the past 12 months – intimate partner sexual violence was extremely low (up to 2 per cent of total number of ever-partnered women) in a number of countries or areas, such as Albania, Australia, Azerbaijan, China, Hong Kong SAR, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Italy, Japan-city, the Philippines, Poland, Serbia-city and Switzerland.

### 3. Femicide

Femicide is the name given to the gender-based murder of women, implying that women are targeted and murdered solely on the basis of gender inequalities in contemporary societies.

Out of different modalities of femicide *intimate femicide* – i.e., the killing of the woman by her male intimate partner – appears to be predominant. For example, over half of all the women murdered in South Africa in 1999 were killed by an intimate partner (husband, common-law husband, boy-



friend), resulting in one intimate femicide every six hours.<sup>20</sup> Other forms of femicide include “honour killings”, dowry deaths (bride burning), targeting women in civil conflicts and so forth.

However, internationally uniform statistical definitions of femicide are still in the making and different sources that could lead to reliable data on this phenomenon (police statistics, mortuary statistics and so forth) require adjustments in order to properly quantify and describe these occurrences, as well as to allow a more accurate assessment at regional and global levels.

In conclusion, while the percentage of women exposed to and experiencing physical and sexual violence (including femicide) varies among countries and regions in the world, statistics clearly and unambiguously document the existence of this phenomenon and give an idea of its extent and frequency. It is of crucial importance to establish violence against women surveys as regular statistical exercises within all national statistical systems, thus ensuring regular and accurate monitoring.

### C. Female genital mutilation

The term “female genital mutilation” (FGM, also called “female genital cutting” and “female genital mutilation/cutting”) refers to all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.<sup>21</sup> Female genital mutilation has been reported to occur in all parts of the world.<sup>22</sup> It is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women.<sup>23</sup>

The World Health Organization (WHO) groups female genital mutilation into four types:

- a) Clitoridectomy: partial or total removal of the clitoris (a small, sensitive and erectile part of the female genitals) and, in very rare cases, only the prepuce (the fold of skin surrounding the clitoris).
- b) Excision: partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora (the labia are “the lips” that surround the vagina).

- c) Infibulation: narrowing of the vaginal opening through the creation of a covering seal. The seal is formed by cutting and repositioning the inner, or outer, labia, with or without removal of the clitoris.
- d) Other: all other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, e.g. pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterizing the genital area.<sup>24</sup>

Female genital mutilation is always traumatic. Apart from excruciating pain, immediate complications can include shock, urine retention, ulceration of the genitals and injury to the adjacent tissue. Other outcomes can include septicaemia (blood poisoning), infertility and obstructed labour. Haemorrhaging and infection can lead to death.<sup>25</sup>

#### Female genital mutilation continues to be widely performed but appears to be declining slightly

Statistics on the prevalence of female genital mutilation among women come from population surveys focusing on demographic phenomena and health. Figure 6.7 presents these statistics for countries where such data was collected through two surveys at different points in time in recent years. In several countries the percentage of women aged 15–49 that were subjected to female genital mutilation is extremely high, and it even approaches 100 per cent in Guinea, Egypt and Eritrea. Another three countries where more than half the women have undergone these procedures are Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Mali. Statistics indicate a downward trend in the percentage of women subjected to female genital mutilation in most of the countries presented here. For example, in Mali, 92 per cent of women aged 15–49 had undergone the procedure in 2001, but by 2006 this figure had dropped to around 86 per cent. Similar decreases were recorded in Benin, Central African Republic, Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Egypt, Eritrea, Kenya, Nigeria and the United Republic of Tanzania. An increase was recorded in two countries: Burkina Faso, where the share of women aged 15–49 that were cut increased from 72 per cent in 1998 to 77 per cent in 2003, and Yemen, where this figure was around 23 per cent in 1997 only to reach 38 per cent in 2003. Chad was the only country out of those with available statistics where the share

<sup>20</sup> Mathews, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> OHCHR, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNECA, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIFEM, WHO, 2008.

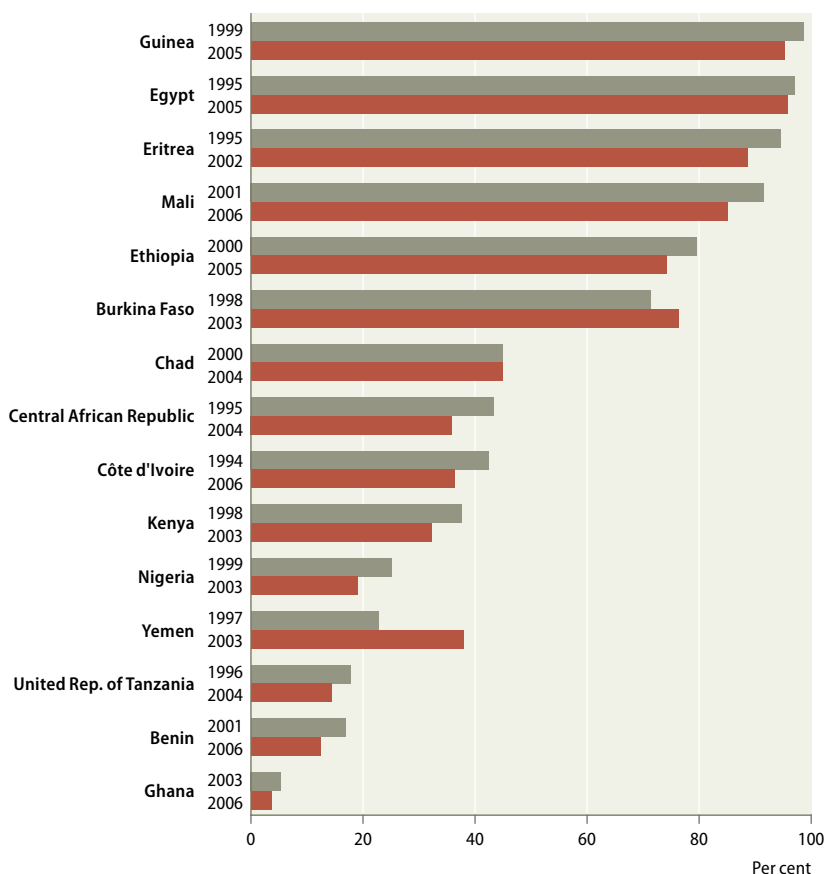
<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> WHO, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> WHO, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> UNICEF, 2005.

Figure 6.7  
Women aged 15–49 subjected to female genital mutilation, two points in time



Sources: Population Reference Bureau, *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: Data and Trends* (2008); and UNICEF, *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A Statistical Exploration* (2005).

of women subjected to genital mutilation did not change – in both 2000 and 2004 it was recorded at around 45 per cent.

#### Female genital mutilation is more prevalent in older women

Findings that female genital mutilation appears to be less prevalent in young women as compared to older generations of women further substantiates the positive developments in quite a few countries. Figure 6.8 presents the ratio of two age-group values of FGM prevalence<sup>26</sup>. A ratio closer to the value of 1 indicates that prevalence

<sup>26</sup> In producing the ratio of female genital mutilation, the first step is to compute the unweighted average of percentage of women subjected to female genital mutilation for three age groups: 15–19, 20–24 and 25–29. The second step is to compute the unweighted average of percentage of women subjected to female genital mutilation for the remaining four age

is almost identical in both age groups – 15–29 and 30–49 years of age. When the ratio exceeds the value of 1 it indicates that prevalence among women in the younger age group is lower than in the older group. Conversely, ratio values below 1 indicate that prevalence is higher in younger than in older women.

The figure indicates that in the majority of countries for which data were available the value of the ratio exceeds 1, thus showing that female genital mutilation is being performed less on younger generations of women and girls. In Kenya the ratio reached 1.7 as around 43 per cent of women aged 30–49 were subjected to the practice compared to only 26 per cent of women aged 15–29. Similar occurrences were noted in Benin, Central African Republic, Ghana and Nigeria and to a smaller extent in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Senegal. There were no differences in prevalence in younger and older women in Egypt, Guinea, Mali and Mauritania, and in Niger there were actually proportionally more younger women undergoing these procedures than older ones. It should be emphasized, however, that the overall prevalence rate in Niger is relatively low – just around 5 per cent of all women aged 15–49.

There are many factors that influence the practice of subjecting women to genital mutilation, including education, place of residence (urban/rural), religion, ethnicity and household wealth. Establishing a relationship between a women's genital mutilation status and her educational level can often be difficult, however, as mutilation usually takes place before education is completed and often even before it commences. Findings do show though that prevalence levels are generally lower among women with higher education, indicating that circumcised girls are also likely to grow up with lower levels of educational attainment.<sup>27</sup> Mothers' level of educational attainment, moreover, appears to be a significant determinant of the genital mutilation status of their daughters. It is generally observed that women with higher education are less likely to have their daughters subjected to genital mutilation than women with lower or no formal education.<sup>28</sup>

groups: 30–34, 35–39, 40–44 and 45–49. In the last step, the older group average is divided by the younger group average.

<sup>27</sup> UNICEF, 2005.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

## D. Women's attitudes towards wife-beating

Wife-beating is a clear expression of male dominance; it is both a cause and consequence of women's serious disadvantage and unequal position compared to men. Indicators related to perceptions of wife-beating aim to test women's attitudes towards gender roles and gender equality.<sup>29</sup> In many regions of the world, women are still expected to endure being beaten based on ingrained social conditioning about the status of a wife. The strength and weight of traditions is such that many women even find it justifiable to be physically punished in certain circumstances.

The series of Demographic and Health Surveys conducted in countries and regions all over the world included questions regarding women's attitudes towards violence they suffered or were expected to suffer as a consequence of their acts and behaviours. Specifically, questions asked whether a husband was justified in hitting or beating his wife if she (1) burnt the food, (2) argued with him, (3) refused to have sex with him (4) went out without telling him, and (5) neglected the children.

### Women continue to accept wife-beating

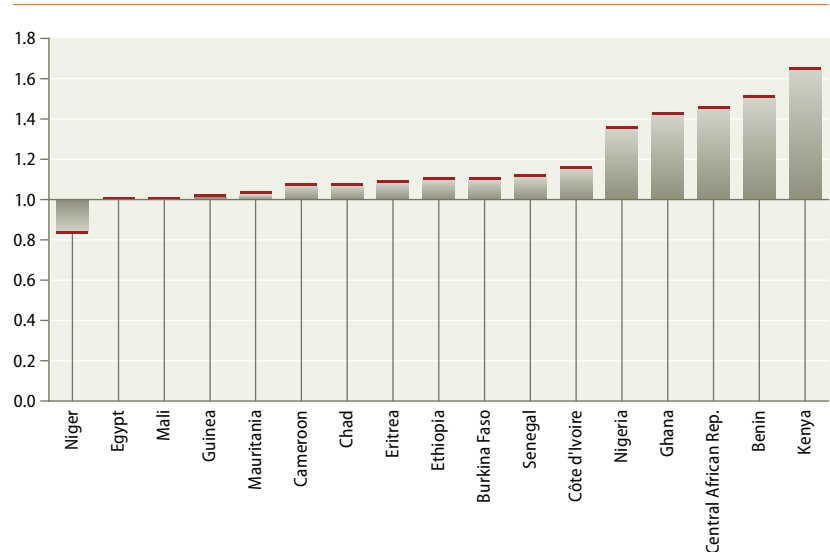
In 33 countries for which statistics are available, the percentage of women that found it appropriate to be hit or beaten for one of these acts varies considerably.

Around 29 per cent of women agreed that being hit or beaten for arguing with the husband was justifiable, 25 per cent for refusing to have sex with the husband and 21 per cent for burning the food. Figure 6.9 illustrates that, for example, 74 per cent of women in Mali would accept physical punishment for refusing to have sex with the husband, 62 per cent in the case of arguing with him and 33 per cent for burning the food. In the majority of countries arguing with the husband is the most accepted reason for being hit or beaten out of the three justifications mentioned above, according to the percentage of women that find it appropriate, as per figure 6.9.

However, a higher percentage – around 41 per cent of all women in these countries on average – found it appropriate to be physically punished for neglecting children and around 36 per cent

Figure 6.8

Ratio of FGM prevalence for 30–49 years old to FGM prevalence for 15–29 years old, 1998–2004 (latest available)



Source: UNICEF, *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A Statistical Exploration* (2005).

for going out without telling the husband. In terms of neglecting the children, the percentage varied from around 7 per cent and 9 per cent in Dominican Republic and Nicaragua, respectively, to around 70 per cent in Ethiopia, Guinea, Mali and Uganda, as presented in figure 6.9.

Statistics show that, in general, the majority of women considered neglecting children a more serious “offence”, although more women in a few countries – such as in Eritrea, Guinea, Haiti, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and Zambia – considered going out without telling the husband to be more “punishable”.

It has to be emphasized that not all women in these societies and countries have the same level of acceptance of physical punishment. Education certainly plays a crucial role in rejecting these “entitlements to violence” bestowed on husbands. For example, in Benin, while 51 per cent of interviewed women with no education found it appropriate to be hit or beaten for venturing outside without telling the husband, the percentage of women with the same opinion who had a primary education was 39 per cent and this dropped to 20 per cent in the case of women with secondary or higher education. Another example, in Rwanda in 2000, shows that 46 per cent of women with no education found it appropriate to be physically punished for venturing outside without telling the husband, as opposed

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Figure 6.9

Proportion of women justifying wife-beating for: 1) burning the food, 2) arguing with the husband, 3) refusing to have sex, 4) going out without telling husband, and 5) neglecting children, 1999–2005 (latest available)



Source: Macro International, MEASURE DHS STATcompiler (2009).

to 36 per cent of women with primary education and only 17 per cent of women with secondary or higher education.<sup>30</sup>

In conclusion, attitudes of women in regard to the violence to which they are exposed in their marriages and other intimate relationships is still

<sup>30</sup> Macro International Inc, 2009.

largely based on concepts and constructs that heavily favour inequity and dominance of men in quite a few regions of the world. Statistics document that the impact of these misconceptions varies significantly among regions and societies; yet, it is clear that, even if the numbers of women under their influence is small, they still persist almost everywhere.

### Trafficking in women

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Trafficking in women is a serious issue that has been addressed at the international level by the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol), which supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. In its most recent resolution on this topic – resolution 63/156 of 30 January 2009 – the United Nations General Assembly expressed serious concern regarding an increasing number of women and girls being trafficked from some less developed countries and countries with economies in transition to more developed countries as well as within and between regions and States.

The ILO has estimated that more than 43 per cent of people trafficked across borders are used for forced commercial sexual exploitation, of whom 98 per cent are women and girls.<sup>a</sup> However, accurate statistics on the volume and patterns of trafficking of women are very hard to come by and, while a wealth of individual evidence and testimonies exists, it is generally not possible to generate reliable data on this topic. This calls for further research into the most appropriate statistical measurements to meet this challenge.

<sup>a</sup> See ILO, *Forced labour statistics* (2005).