

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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INTRODUCTION:

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women (VAW) continues to be a serious social problem, both in the United States and globally. VAW affects the emotional, physical, spiritual and economic well being of not only women, but all of society. While it is difficult to assess the exact number of women who experience violence at the hands of an abuser, researchers consistently report high rates of VAW. Approximately 22 percent of women surveyed in The National Violence Against Women Survey (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000) report violence at the hands of a “current or former spouse, cohabiting partner, boyfriend or girlfriend, or date in their lifetime.” Intimate partners physically assault approximately 1.3 million women annually in the U.S. These numbers do not include women who experience emotional abuse and stalking, other forms of abuse that can be debilitating for women. In addition, 17.6 percent of all women surveyed report being the victim of attempted or completed rape.

There appeared to be a turning point in the U.S. as non-fatal intimate partner violence had decreased from a rate of 5.8 (per 1,000) individuals reporting intimate partner violence in 1993 to a rate of 2.3 (per 1,000) individuals in 2005 (Catalano 2007). Homicides against women by intimate partners also decreased in the same time frame of 1993 to 2005. While these findings appear optimistic, women continue to be more likely to be killed by an intimate partner in comparison to men (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2007). 2007 National Crime Victimization Survey projections

suggest that domestic violence, rape, and sexual assault incidences drastically increased since the 2005 survey with reports of domestic violence increasing by 42 percent and by 25 percent for reports of sexual assault (Human Rights Watch 2008). The increase is likely to be representative of more accurate measuring technology versus drastic increases in VAW.

Statistics for global incidences of VAW are also difficult to ascertain yet organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO) have made great progress in assessing incidences of VAW. In the WHO’s multi-country study, they found a range of lifetime prevalence of physical violence between 13 and 61 percent and lifetime prevalence of sexual violence between 6 and 59 percent (Garcia-Moreno et. al 2005). Human Rights Watch (2000) chose six countries as case studies to show that while women might experience different forms of violence, they face similar barriers to justice as states failed human rights minimums through their treatment of women victims of violence. For example, in Russia 12,000 women die annually at the hands of an intimate partner and in Pakistan, 80 percent of women report being victims of domestic violence. In Jordan, one-third of homicides are honor killings. It is quite difficult to truly understand VAW simply through prevalence rates, which is exactly why we need more studies like those of Human Rights Watch that demonstrate how women contextually experience VAW.

Former feminist theories of VAW place gender as the common denominator for experiences of abuse. Women’s subjugated roles within marriage, the family, and the economy (Bergmann 1981; Hartmann 1981; McCloskey 1996) encourage gendered hierarchies of power and control. However, theories of violence that suggest gender as the sole explanation for VAW fail to recognize other oppressed categories of identity that intersect with gender.

No one group of women is immune to VAW. While women might similarly be experiencing

physical, sexual and emotional abuse, the dynamics of power and control take shape differently. Current theories of VAW consider the intersecting identities that shape women's experience of abuse (Bograd 1999; Crenshaw 1991; Sokoloff and Dupont 2005) broadening recognition of VAW. The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (2008) report that in 2007 3,319 domestic violence calls were from members of the LGBTQ community. Trans women represent 3 percent of these calls (N=101) and lesbians represent 48 percent (N=1,492) of callers. This study is not a nationally representative sample, but it demonstrates that VAW is a serious problem with the LGBTQ community.

Researchers suggest immigrant women and women refugees are at an increased risk of VAW. Immigrant women's culture and legal status may set them up for abuse as it creates unique barriers to seeking help and abusers use this to control them (Menjívar and Salcido 2002; Raj and Silverman 2002). Thirty to 50 percent of immigrant women report a history of sexual or physical abuse (Dutton, Orloff, and Hass 2000; Song 1996).

Women with disabilities are also believed to be at an increased risk of abuse. Nosek et al. (2003) found that 52 percent of women with disabilities experienced sexual or physical abuse in their lifetime, and they caution us not to treat women with disabilities as a homogenous group as experiences of abuse differ greatly by type of disability.

Women in poverty are also at risk for VAW. Raphael (1999) found that 60 percent of the women in poverty in her study report past abuse. Scott, London, and Myers (2002) found that women on welfare relied on abusive partners for instrumental and direct financial assistance as they negotiated the welfare system. All women are at risk of abuse, but a better understanding of the intersections of aspects of identity will improve responses to VAW.

HERSTORY, POLICIES, and RESPONSES: VAW

The Battered Women's Movement gained significant momentum in the United States in the 1970's with the creation of consciousness raising groups, shelter programs, and outreach services for battered women. However, it was not until 1994 that President Clinton signed into law the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, also known as the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). The lag in time between the beginning of the Battered Women's Movement and VAWA demonstrates the resistance to making VAW a public issue.

VAWA is a comprehensive law that is meant to protect victims of domestic violence, stalking, rape, and dating violence (U.S. Department of Justice 1994), primarily through funding and the criminalization of VAW. In 2000, VAWA was reauthorized. While the overall goal of VAWA was to provide protections for women victims of violence, the 2000 reauthorization focused on the prevention of the trafficking of bodies, strengthening law enforcement responses to VAW, strengthening services to victims of violence, limiting the effects of violence on children, and assisting battered immigrant women (U.S. Department of Justice 2000). In 2005, VAWA was reauthorized again for the next five years. The 2005 reauthorization focuses on child victims of violence, immigrants, minorities, men, and boys (U.S. Department of Justice 2005). While VAWA has been reauthorized, Congress allocates funding on a yearly basis. In times of war and economic downturns, budget cuts are likely to reduce monies allocated to VAW.

It is too early to gauge the effect that President Barack Obama will have on the reduction of violence against women, but it is worth noting that on his first day in office he posted his agenda for women on his website. The three items relating to violence against women

include: reducing violence against women, strengthening domestic violence laws, and fighting global gender violence (Obama 2009).

Creating, strengthening and enforcing laws that reduce violence against women are both a priority and challenge for activists and lawmakers. Civil and criminal protective orders (CPO) serve two goals: to make VAW a public issue and to provide safety to the woman experiencing abuse (Jordan 2004). CPO's provide protection to many women through the criminalization of any form of abuse listed on the protective order, but CPO's cannot stop abusers who do not fear the consequences of their actions. Pro-arrest or mandatory arrest policies (Hirschel and Buzawa 2002) are another set of policies created to reduce VAW through the criminalization primarily physical abuse. Pro-arrest police jurisdictions strongly encourage officers to make an arrest on domestic violence calls. Mandatory arrest policies, singular and dual, require that the responding officer make an arrest on a domestic violence call. The unintended consequence of arrest policies is that women experiencing abuse will not call the police because they either do not want their abuser arrested or they fear retaliatory abuse. Mandatory arrest policies have been coupled with no-drop policies (Jordan 2004), which prevent the victim to drop court cases. The rationale for the marriage of these two policies is that they will take the pressure and blame off the victim and place it on the criminal justice system, the police and courts. However, battered women advocates suggest these policies conflict with a victim empowerment model (McDermott and Garofalo 2004). In addition, mandatory arrest policies have increased the number of women who are arrested (DeLeon-Granados, Wells, and Binsbacher 2006).

There has been a global movement toward ending violence against women. Two of the movements are based out of the United Nations. The Convention on the Elimination of

all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is an international bill of rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. CEDAW defines discrimination against women as "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field 1979 (Department of Economic and Social Affairs 1979)."

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW) is the first international human rights declaration to focus exclusively on violence against women. According to DEVAW, violence against women is defined as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (United Nations A/Res/48/104)." Both exist to create a coordinated response to global VAW. Both of these movements provide recommendations for countries to ensure appropriate responses to VAW.

The United States is slowly moving toward taking a stance on the global status of women. In April 2008, the International Violence Against Women Act (IVAWA) was introduced to Congress. The goal of this act is to organize a coordinated response by the U.S. government to global issues faced by girls and women, particularly "female genital mutilation, domestic violence, 'honor' killings, acid burnings, dowry deaths, and other gender-based persecutions (H.J. Res. 10)." On January 7, 2009, the bill was referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. Increasingly there has been a focus on reducing VAW in the United States and abroad. Countries begin to recognize the economic and social effect that

VAW has on society as well as recognize VAW as a human rights violation.

MYTHS of VAW

MYTH 1: *VAW occurs more often among certain groups of women - Increasingly* we are learning that VAW is not contained to any one particular group of women. Regardless of race, ethnicity, age, ability, social class, gender expression, sexuality, citizenship, or religious beliefs, VAW is prevalent among all groups of women. Determining prevalence of violence within particular groups of women is difficult, particularly if we consider the barriers to reporting abuse. For example, Renzetti (1998) found that the women who identified as lesbian in her study were less likely to report abuse due to fears of encountering homophobia, not wanting to out themselves, and/or because they did not think they would be believed that another woman was abusing them.

MYTH 2: *Women should just remove themselves from abusive relationships* - This myth is one of the most frustrating because it assumes abuse is the fault of the woman for putting herself in an abusive relationship. For example, the question “why doesn’t she just leave?” often arises from those outside of the relationship. Perhaps the question should be “why does that individual choose to be violent?” Research shows there are a number of reasons why women stay in abusive relationships. Sources state that women are most likely to be severely injured or killed in the process of leaving their abuser (Campbell et al. 2003; Wilson and Daly 1993). This perspective suggests that women stay because they fear retaliatory violence if they leave. Women also stay to keep their family together. Economics have also proven to be a large reason why women remain in abusive

relationships. Women who are not in the paid labor force often rely economically on their partner. In addition, abusers often keep their partner dependent on them for money as a way to control them. Women in abusive relationships often hold low self-esteem as a result of the cycle of abusive behavior from their partner. Abusers convince their partners that they deserve the abuse. We must also not forget that women once loved or still love their abusive partners and hope that they will change their abusive ways.

MYTH 3: *Alcohol, mental illness, or stress causes individuals to abuse their partners* - Alcohol and mental illness might be viewed as triggers to VAW, but not the cause of VAW. Not all individuals who drink alcohol, have a mental illness, or experience stress abuse the women in their lives. Alcohol, mental illness, and stress are excuses for violence; in reality abusers desire to exert power and control over their partners. In our current economic climate, it is particularly important that we examine stress as a cause of VAW. As more individuals and families experience financial-related stress, it is important that we remember that abusers choose to be abusive and desire to exert power and control over their partners.

MYTH 4: *Most sexual assault happens between individuals who don't know one other* - Many people equate rape with stranger rape yet statistics show that rape and sexual assaults are most likely in dating scenarios, marriage and intimate partnerships. The Department of Justice report, from the 2007 National Crime Victimization Survey, that 64 percent of rapes and sexual assaults are committed by non-strangers; intimates, other family members, or acquaintances. Strangers commit 31 percent of rapes and sexual assaults with 6 percent having an unknown relationship (Rand 2008).

VAW SOCIAL ACTIVIST ORGANIZATIONS and INFORMATION

Amnesty International <http://www.amnesty.org/>
AYUDA, Inc. <http://www.ayudainc.org>
Battered Women's Justice Project (BWJP) <http://www.bwjp.org/>
Coalition Against Trafficking in Women <http://www.catwinternational.org>
Equality Now <http://www.equalitynow.org/>
Family Violence Prevention Fund <http://endabuse.org/>
Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) <http://www.glaad.org/>
Human Rights Watch <http://www.hrw.org/>
Miles Foundation <http://www.vva.org/Committees/WomenVeterans/MilesFoundationSAMM.htm>
Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse <http://www.mincava.umn.edu/>
National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence (NCSDV) <http://www.ncdsv.org/>
National Center for Victims of Crime <http://www.ncvc.org/>
National Coalition Against Domestic Violence <http://www.ncadv.org/>
National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs <http://www.ncavp.org/>
National Network to End Domestic Violence <http://www.nnedv.org/>
National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women <http://new.vawnet.org/>
National Organization for Women (NOW) <http://www.now.org/>
Office of Violence Against Women <http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/regulations.htm>
One in Four, Inc. <http://www.oneinfourusa.org/>
Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network (RAINN) <http://www.rainn.org/>
Standing Against Global Exploitation (SAGE) <http://www.sagesf.org/>
Tribal Court Clearinghouse <http://www.tribal-institute.org/>
UNIFEM <http://www.unifem.org/>
VDAY <http://newsite.vday.org/>
Women's Law Project <http://www.womenslawproject.org/>
Women Thrive Worldwide <http://www.womensedge.org/>
WomenWarPeace.Org <http://www.womenwarpeace.org/>
World Health Organization (WHO) <http://www.who.int/en/>

VAW TEACHING RESOURCES

Domestic Abuse Intervention Project. "Power and Control Wheel." National Center for Domestic and Sexual Violence: Duluth, MN. Retrieved February 28, 2009 (http://www.ncdsv.org/publications_wheel.html).

The power and control wheel is a useful teaching tool to demonstrate power and control dynamics between men and women in intimate heterosexual relationships. The tool has been adapted to be relevant in other communities including but not limited to: GLBTQ, military, Deaf, disabled, and the police.

Keating, Barbara. 2007. "Teaching about Family and Gender Violence: A Collection of Instructional Materials." The American Sociological Association.

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