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Editorial

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Violence Against Women: A Global Perspective

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Violence against women is rampant in all corners of the world and devastates the lives of millions of women. It is rooted in a global culture of discrimination which denies women equal rights with men, legitimizing the appropriation of women's bodies for individual gratification or political ends.[1] It feeds off discrimination and serves to reinforce it. This is compounded by discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnicity, sexual identity, social status, class, and age. Such forms of discrimination restrict women's choices, increase their vulnerability to violence and deprive them of justice.

The United Nations defines violence against women as, "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life".[2 (p1)] Violence against women, particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence are major public health problems and violations of women's human rights. Global estimates indicate that about 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. Such violence can negatively impact a women's physical, mental, and reproductive health. It also affects their children, family, social and economic life. Some have fatal outcomes like homicide or suicide.

Violence against women can lead to physical health problems such as chronic headaches, back pain, fibromyalgia, GI disorders, limited mobility, abdominal pain, and overall poor health. It also leads to smoking, drug misuse and alcoholism. Impact on their mental health can include depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, insomnia, eating disorders, alcoholism, and suicide attempts. In addition, such violence during pregnancy increases the likelihood of an abortion, stillbirth, preterm births, sexually transmitted infections, and low weight newborns.[2]

Children who witness violence or grow up in families where they are exposed to violence may suffer from a range of behavioral and emotional disturbances. They too may become perpetrators later in their lives or be a victim of violence. Either way, they are negatively impacted for life.

The social and economic damage caused by violence against women are tremendous and have a ripple effect throughout the society. Many women, as a result of violence, may suffer isolation, face an inability and unwillingness to work or support themselves, loss of productivity in the workforce, lack participation in normal activities of life, and have a limited ability to care for themselves and their families.

There are numerous forms of violence against women, such as femicide (intentional murder of women), sexual assaults, female genital mutilation/cutting, human trafficking, sexual harassment, rape, forced child marriages, intimate partner violence, stalking, dating violence, and elder abuse.[3] Thirty years ago, most forms of violence against women were hidden under a cloak of silence or acceptance – No more! As more women came out with allegations of abuse and violence, it became apparent that violence occurred on a massive scale; that no woman is immune, and that family, friends, and public institutions had become insensitive to it. Since

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then, women have mobilized to offer direct services and shelter those who have encountered violence, to educate communities about the rage of violence against women, and to develop strategies for change.

People need to come out in large numbers to actively address and draw attention to this global disgrace. Activist movements happen in many forms and operate at local, national and international levels to bring about change. Until women become empowered and educated worldwide, their status will continue to remain low and they will always be mistreated. The international community needs to work together to enforce women's rights and equality.

Violence against women is a violation of human rights that cannot be justified by any political, religious, or cultural norm. It is not only a consequence of gender inequality, but reinforces women's low status in society and the multiple disparities between women and men. Violence against women emanates from their lack of control and power, as well as the social norms that prescribe men and women's roles in our society. A global culture of discrimination against women allows violence to occur daily and without punishment to the perpetrator. This narrative should evoke awareness and raise your conscious to this global injustice. Look deep inside yourself to help eradicate violence against women and endow them with lives of equality and human dignity!

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