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## Safeguarding Women from The Clutches of Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse

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*Social conventions play an important role in the continuance of the phenomenon of child prostitution. These include child marriages, polygamy, dowry and social stigma against single, unwed, divorced women and girls who have been sexually abused (Trade in Human Misery, 1998). Children, especially young girls, in these circumstances are especially vulnerable to the prostitution racket. There have been instances of girls being driven into the sex trade following traumatic sexual experiences during childhood, including rape. If, in the case of Shahida of Kozhikode, it was the violence inflicted by her father's younger brother followed by molestation by her cousin and men rape (The Hindustan Times, 2 Oct 1998), Lakshmi's tale of woe began when she was raped by her step father at age 8 and her further sexual exploitation for food when she left home (Uniya1,1998). Prostitution thus becomes a viable option for children who have been abandoned, for those from disrupted families and for those who are financially supporting their families.*

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### The Family

Women have emerged as the most significant agents of change in the struggle against gender-based violence. While women's organizations have played a critical pole (see section on civil society), the collective strength and courage of individual women has been notable in fighting many forms of violence. Poor and often illiterate, these women have managed to mobilize hundreds of other women, raised resources, designed strategies and forced policy-makers to revise laws and policies.

A systematic effort has to be made to listen to the voices of grassroots women and survivors of domestic violence, and to incorporate solutions they have to offer. Their perspectives will provide valuable lessons in making programmes and services effective and targeted to their needs.

Women need to be empowered through education, employment opportunities, legal literacy, and right to inheritance. Human rights education and information regarding domestic violence should be provided to them because this is a matter of their absolute rights.

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Human rights education and information regarding violence should be provided to them because this is a matter of their absolute rights. Integrated supportive services, legal intervention and redress should be made available in situations of domestic violence. Assistance to help women rebuild and recover their lives after violence should be part of the intervention strategy, including counselling, relocation, credit support, and employment.

Consistent support for women must be provided by all relevant sectors - the criminal justice system, health, welfare, and the private sector. Support must also be available to women via informal networks such as family, friends, neighbours, and local community groups. Community groups and government institutions should be trained to identify women, men, adolescent boys and girls, and children at risk of domestic violence, and to refer them to confidential and accessible services. Where such services are not available, communities must be helped to establish local culturally appropriate mechanisms to support women.

Children need to be identified as victims of domestic violence, and their safety has to be ensured. This requires ensuring the safety of their mothers and making childcare facilities available to women in shelters. The community and the state to assist children to recover from the violence and abuse they have suffered and/or witnessed should develop appropriate programs.

### Domestic Violence

Physical violence as well as explicit forms of aggression are used by the more powerful in the household as methods to ensure obedience of the less powerful and therefore related to power dynamics in a household. At every stage in the life cycle, the female body is both the objects of desire and of control (Thapan 1997).

Domestic violence includes not only inter-spousal violence, but also violence perpetrated by other family members. Generally, an important part of the power relationship between spouses and their families relates to dowry and its ramifications (Karlekar, 1995).

There is a wide societal tolerance for wife-abuse, which is very often even considered justifiable under certain circumstance: Disputes over dowry, wife's sexual infidelities, her neglect of household duties, and her disobedience of her husband's dictates are all considered legitimate causes for wife-beating. It is only when the torture becomes unbearable or death appeared imminent that most women appeared willing to speak out (Karlekar, 1995).

Glass defines domestic violence as "anything that is experienced as fearful, controlling and threatening when used by those with power (invariably men) against those without power (mainly women and children)" (Ravindran, 1991).

Domestic violence includes, harassment, maltreatment, brutality or cruelty and even the threat of assault - intimidation. It includes physical injury, as well as "willfully or knowingly placing or attempting to place a spouse in fear of injury and compelling the spouse by force or threat to engage in any conduct or act, sexual or otherwise, from which the spouse has a right to abstain". Confining or detaining the spouse against one's will or damaging property are also considered as acts of violence (BediK, 1999).

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## Violence Against Women

Violence against women is the most disturbing consequence of cultures which tolerate unequal relations between the sexes. In launching his 2008 campaign, Unite to End Violence Against Women, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon observed that "at least one out of every three women is likely to be beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime." Examples of appalling gender-based violence extend beyond the smokescreen of poverty and war. None is more horrifying than the practice of sex-selective abortion and female infanticide, associated particularly with China and India.

## Sexual Harassment at Work

According to Mac Kinnons (1979) sexual harassment of working women is primarily a problem faced by women than men rarely face this problem and therefore it should be considered a form of sex discrimination (Sikri, 1999:128).

Sexual harassment as defined by the court stipulates:

- Such unwelcome sexually determined behaviour (whether
- directly or by implication) as physical contact and advances,
- A demand or request for sexual favours, sexually coloured remarks,
- Showing pornography and any other unwelcome physical, verbal or nonverbal conduct of sexual nature.

Burt (1980) says "unwanted sexual overtures", has the virtue of parsimony but necessarily concerns intentions and motivation, not just overt behaviour. Defining sexual harassment as unwanted sexual overtures has the same problem inherent in defining rape as unwanted sexual relations. In practice the woman has to prove that the sexual relations or the sexual overtures were unwanted (Sikri, 1999: 128). The male colleague will go out of the way to prove that the woman is of loose character (Ibid. 40).

According to Quinn (1977) defining sexual harassment means setting boundaries on the term and differentiating sexual harassment from expressions of sexual interest. Not all expressions of sexuality in the workplace could possibly be called sexual harassment.

Men and women do meet dating partners and future spouses at work. Some people may even enjoy sexual jokes and flirting that can be ego enhancing and enrich their fantasy life.

## Physical abuse

A growing body of research studies confirms the prevalence of physical violence in all parts of the globe, including the estimates of 20 to 50 per cent of women from country to country who have experienced domestic violence. Statistics are grim no matter where in the world one looks. Data from industrialized and developing countries as well as from transitional countries provide an overview of the global problem. The data in this table focus only on physical assault. There are few comparable statistics on psychological violence, sexual abuse, and murder of women at the hands of intimate partners and other family members. As already mentioned, physical violence is usually accompanied by psychological abuse, and in many cases by sexual assault.

### Sexual abuse and rape in intimate relationships

Sexual abuse and rape by an intimate partner are not considered a crime in most countries, and women in many societies do not consider forced sex as rape if they are married to, or cohabiting with, the perpetrator. The assumption is that once a woman enters into a contract of marriage, the husband has the right to unlimited sexual access to his wife. Surveys in many countries reveal that approximately 10 to 15 per cent of women report being forced to have sex with their intimate partner. Some countries have begun to legislate against marital rape. These include Australia, Austria, Barbados, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Mexico, Namibia, New Zealand, Norway, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Trinidad SI Tobago, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Although provision of such laws represents considerable progress, it is often difficult for a woman to press charges because of the evidential rules concerning the crime.

### Psychological and emotional abuse

Because psychological violence is harder to capture in quantitative studies, a full picture of the deeper and more insidious levels of violence defies quantification. Victim-survivors report that ongoing psychological violence - emotional torture and living under terror - is often more unbearable than the physical brutality, with mental stress leading to a high incidence of suicide and suicide attempts. A close correlation between domestic violence and suicide has been / established based on studies in the United States, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Peru, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Suicide is 12 times as likely to have been attempted by a woman who has been abused than by one who has not. In the United States, as many as 35 to 40 percent of battered women attempt suicide. 10 In Sri Lanka, the number of suicides by girls and women

### Conclusions

All studies on the costs of violence against women have the same goal and use the same accounting model. Differences arise in the details of how the research is carried out and the jurisdiction to which it applies, rather than the questions asked or approach taken. Although each research project has attempted to reach the same challenging goal, the data resources available to them vary widely. This, more than anything, determines the differences in how researchers have approached the techniques of the common goal of estimating a nation's costs of violence against women. The costs of violence against women are enormous. Economic development is limited as long as violence against women exists. All of the economic costing literature indicates that the whole of society pays for the costs of not addressing this pressing social concern. The sooner that countries bring in effective policies and programs to end violence against women, the sooner they will begin to reduce the economic cost of that violence to their society and benefit in the long run.

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