

Violence Against Women and Reproductive Health



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“Violence against women is an obstacle to achieving 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.”¹

Women who experience violence are more likely to become pregnant when they do not want to and more likely to seek a termination. They are also less likely to be able to make an informed choice about the use of family planning methods or be able to plan the number or spacing of their children free from coercion.

Definition of Violence Against Women

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defines violence against women 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”.²

Types of Violence

The UN recommends that all countries collect information on four different types of violence against women; in addition, where relevant, it recognises the importance of collecting data on female genital mutilation.⁴

• Physical violence

intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual.

• Sexual violence

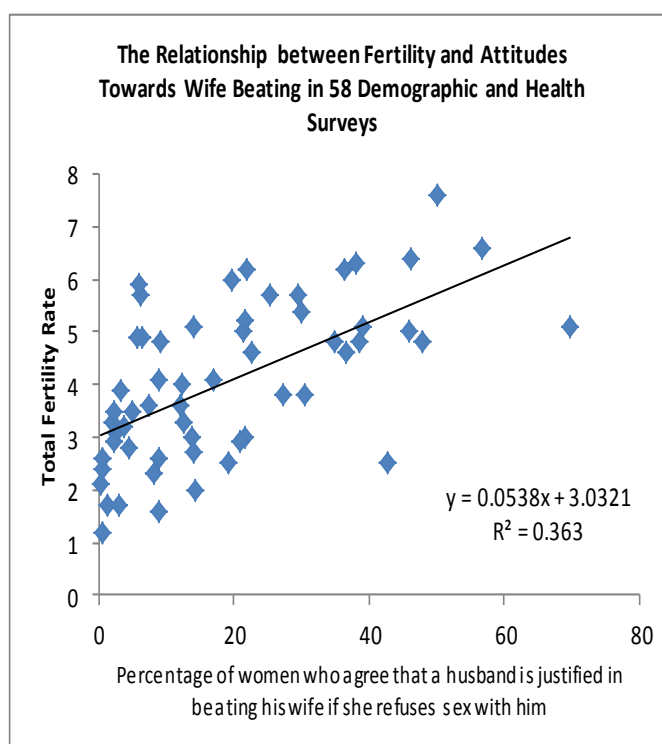
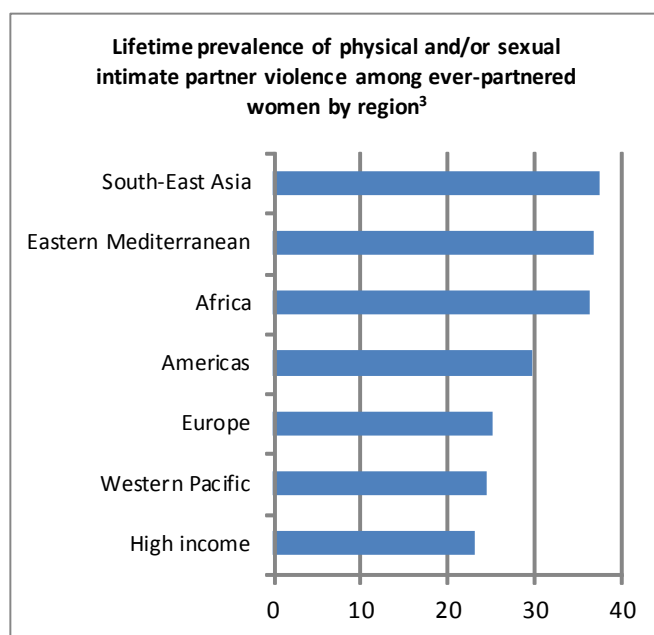
an act aimed to force the woman to engage in sexual acts against her will or without her consent.

• Psychological violence

a range of behaviours that encompass acts of emotional abuse and controlling behaviours. These often co-exist with physical and sexual violence

• Economic violence

depriving an intimate partner from having access to financial resources, typically as a form of abuse or control, or in order to isolate her.



Worldwide Context

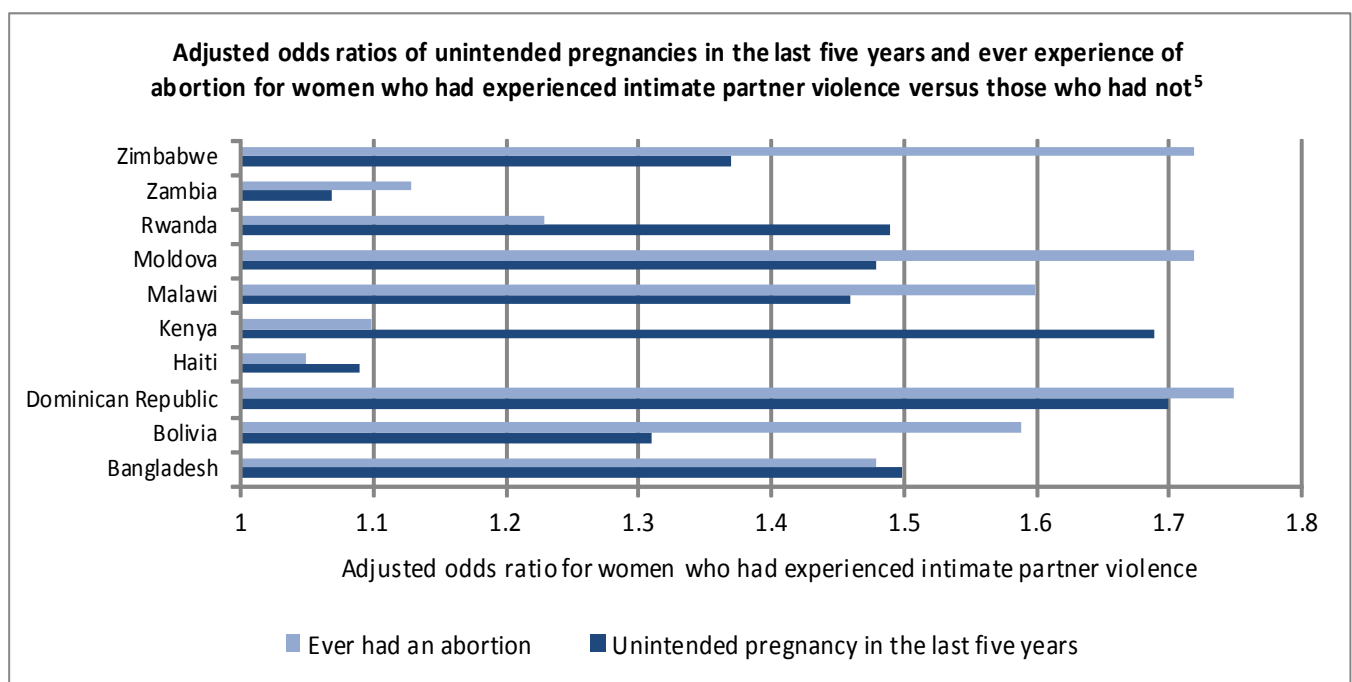
Violence against women is a worldwide issue, but prevalence, incidence and attitudes vary a great deal. That said, recent estimates indicate that in Asia and Africa nearly 40% of women will experience physical or sexual violence during their lifetime. Even in high income countries, almost 25% of women experience violence.³

Social acceptance of violence against women in a country is associated with higher levels of fertility. This is a result of a lack of female empowerment as well as more direct reproductive and sexual health consequences of violence. There are many consequences of violence against women including physical, mental, behavioural, and sexual and reproductive. The major sexual and reproductive health consequences include:

- **unintended/unwanted pregnancy**
- **restricted access to contraception and information on contraception**
- **abortion (safe and unsafe)**
- **Sex selective abortion**
- **sexually transmitted infections (including HIV)**

- **pregnancy complications and miscarriage**
- **maternal mortality**
- **low birth weight and prematurity**

There is relatively little data on violence against women, but Demographic and Health Surveys sometimes collect information on experience of violence as well as attitudes towards violence. The figure below shows estimates of the effect of intimate partner violence on unintended pregnancy and abortion in 10 countries where the Demographic and Health Survey included questions on intimate partner violence. In seven of the ten countries (Bangladesh, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Kenya, Malawi, Moldova, and Rwanda) intimate partner violence was associated with higher likelihood of unwanted pregnancies, while in six countries violence was associated with higher likelihood of experiencing a pregnancy termination.⁵



References

1. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, paragraph 112.
2. United Nations (1995), General Assembly resolution A/RES 48/104, Articles 1 and 2.
3. WHO, Department of Reproductive Health and Research, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, South African Medical Research Council (2013), Global and regional estimates of violence against women. Prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence.
4. United Nations (2013), Guidelines for Producing Statistics on Violence Against Women, ST/ESA/STAT/SER.F/110
5. Hindin, M., Kishor, S. and Ansara, D.L. (2008), Intimate Partner Violence among Couples in 10 DHS Countries: Predictors and Health Outcomes. DHS Analytical Studies No. 18.