

BUSTING MYTHS ABOUT VAW

MYTH: Violence against women is an accepted part of some cultures.

FACT: Violence against women is common in all cultures, races, and societies. The fact that it may be a common occurrence does not lessen the suffering and damage it causes to the woman, the family and society. Nor does it lessen its significance as a crime. Violence against a woman, including sexual violence, is a breach of the human rights of that woman.

MYTH: Generally speaking, violence against women is perpetrated by uneducated men from the lower class.

FACT: Violence against women occurs around the world, within all cultures, in all creeds and all socio-economic backgrounds. People from the middle and upper classes may have the resources to enable them to conceal the violence.

MYTH: Women from some cultures are more passive and submissive. That is why they are more likely to become victims of violence.

FACT: Not all women from any specific culture are passive and submissive. Women may be relegated to specific roles and they may be repressed by State or religious laws, but this does not mean they are themselves passive or submissive. Violence against women is a social construction that reflects and reinforces the unequal distribution of power between men and women in society generally. Being passive and submissive does not invite violence or give anyone the right to perpetrate violence against them.

MYTH: Conciliation and marriage counselling are the most culturally appropriate forms of intervention.

FACT: Conciliation and joint counselling operate out of the premise of an equal relationship between the parties. This myth therefore negates the power imbalances in the relationship with the woman. Often, women are given or are expected to take greater responsibility in keeping the relationship together.

MYTH: Our culture allows physical force to be used as a means of disciplining women.

FACT: Some practices, such as physical force, may be common in most or all cultures. Such practices reinforce the power disparity between men and women. Because they are common does not mean they are lawful, or that it is desirable that they are maintained.

MYTH: Cultural traditions must be respected and remain unchallenged.

FACT: A woman's basic human rights must be upheld regardless of cultural values and traditions. Furthermore, violence must be challenged and discussed at every opportunity with the woman. Promoting discussion with the woman about her cultural traditions allows women to think and reconsider traditional cultural norms that foster violence towards women and children.

MYTH: All women from the same cultural background have the same values and beliefs.

FACT: There is not one group from any country that is homogeneous. People's political, religious, social, educational and geographical location influence their values and beliefs.

MYTH: Religion tells people that it is okay for a husband to assert his sexual needs, and that a woman is there to satisfy the sexual needs of her husband.

FACT: All religions and religious texts speak of the importance of respect and honour between men and women or husbands and wives. No religious text (Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu) either advocates or provides for the abuse of women, irrespective of their marital status. A man treating a woman without honouring and respecting her needs is reinterpreting religious text out of context and from a self-interest viewpoint. Many women and men are not aware that rape in marriage is a crime in the same way that rape anywhere is a crime.

MYTH: Domestic and sexual violence against women does not happen in "our" community.

FACT: Domestic and sexual violence are prevalent in all communities regardless of the culture, creed, educational or socio-economic background of the individual. From experience we know that women's experiences of violence are often minimised, dismissed and disbelieved by the community. There may be a tendency to justify violence as part of the cultural norms within a community. Thus, secrecy and silence are encouraged.

MYTH: The promotion of women's rights endangers the social stability of communities.

FACT: Stopping violence in a community can only strengthen its fabric and social stability. However, perpetrators of violence are threatened by public discussion and acknowledgement of the human rights of women and children and their right to safety.

MYTH: Women invite sexual assault by the way they dress and behave.

FACT: A study of judgments by the Supreme Court and high court, between 1950 and 1990, reveals that in almost all cases women were dressed in traditional attire, and that a majority of those raped were minors. Therefore, no complaint conformed to a stereotypical image of a woman who "asked for it". Irrespective of attire, no one has the right to violate a person's sexual dignity and personal freedom.

MYTH: Women mean "yes" even when they say "no".

FACT: Women have a right to say "no". The assumption that "no" really means "yes" denies women sexual autonomy and implies that women are always in a state of consent to sexual activity. This myth denies a man's responsibility in sexual assault.

MYTH: Husbands cannot sexually assault their wives.

FACT: This is the most common type of sexual assault. It takes place within the four walls of a home. Sexual assault is a crime regardless of past or present relationship with the offender. Marital rape is recognised as a crime in international law.

MYTH: All men are potential abusers of women.

FACT: Men aren't naturally violent and abusive. However, all men have roles and responsibilities in ending violence against women. The majority of men are not physically violent. Researchers tell us many past cultures had little or no violence. At the same time, some men have learned to express their anger or insecurity through violence. Far too many men have come to believe that violence against a woman, child or another man is an acceptable way to control another person, especially an intimate partner. By remaining silent about these things we allow other men to poison our work, schools and homes. Caring men are also concerned with the impact of this violence on the lives of men and boys.

INTERSECTIONAL VAW

The incidence of VAW gets accentuated manifold when gender intersects with other identities and/or conditions of disadvantage. For instance, the vulnerability of a Muslim, uneducated, rural, lesbian woman in a communally sensitive locality is several times higher than a Hindu, educated, urban, heterosexual woman. Here are some instances of VAW due to intersections of disadvantage factors. Factors like disability, poverty and displacement further marginalise women.

Caste and VAW: Khairlanji

On September 29, 2006, it was towards evening when a mob of upper-caste landlords descended upon the Bhotmange household -- a dalit family in Maharashtra's Khairlanji village. In their ramshackle hut, Bhaiyyalal's wife, 44-year-old Surekha, was preparing the evening meal while her bright 18-year-old daughter Priyanka studied in one corner. Surekha's sons, Roshan, 23, and Sudhir, 21, sat nearby. The landlords dragged the mother, her daughter and two sons outside just as Bhaiyyalal was about to reach his home. Hearing the cries of his family, Bhaiyyalal halted and hid behind a hut.

Surekha and Priyanka were stripped naked and taken to the village chaupal, 500 metres away. For almost two hours they were beaten up, bitten and raped by the mob. One of them was even strapped to a bullock cart. After more than an hour of rape and plunder of their bodies, Surekha and Priyanka died. Eye-witnesses have told the police that sticks were pushed into their private parts; even after they were dead some people continued to rape their bodies. Roshan, who was blind, and his brother were beaten up and stabbed to death. Their bodies were thrown at various spots in the village. Priyanka's body was fished out of a nearby canal by the police the following afternoon.

Religion and VAW: Gujarat

During the 2002 riots in Gujarat, scores of Muslim women and girls were sexually violated -- raped, gangraped or mutilated. Some saw family members being killed and their homes and businesses destroyed. After these traumatising events many women victims were left to care for their families in makeshift relief camps with inadequate support, conditions and reparations. Few perpetrators were convicted and the victims' attempts to obtain legal redress have been largely frustrated.

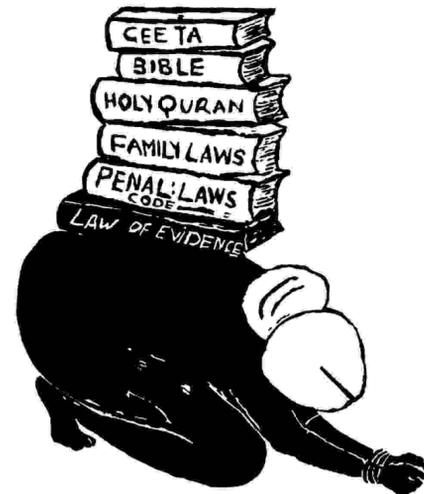
In one particular case, Bilqis Yakoob Rasool, five months pregnant and fleeing violence in her home village, was gangraped on March 3, 2002, when a Hindu mob caught up with the family near the town of Limkheda. She saw at least three other relatives raped and her three-year-old daughter violently thrown to the ground and killed. She reported the rape and killing of 14 relatives to the police, but in January 2003 the police closed the case stating that "the offence is true but undetected", i.e. that those responsible could not be found.

Source: 'India: Justice, the Victim -- Gujarat state fails to protect women from violence' (Amnesty International Report) <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA20/001/2005/en/dom-ASA200012005en.html>

Sexuality and VAW: Boro Chupria

Boro Chupria is a small village about 25 km from Krishnagar in West Bengal. On December 25, 2006, newspapers reported an incident concerning a young woman who was dragged to Gyanrapota, the village across the main road, stripped, beaten, tonsured and photographed naked because she behaved "like a boy". The reports suggested that the villagers thought she was a lesbian. Mamata Biswas (name changed) was beaten up for allegedly "preying on" another young, but married, girl who lived in a nearby village. Mamata lived in a run-down brick hut that stood out from the rest of the houses. On December 22, Ramakrishna Moitra, a resident of Gyanrapota village, descended on her house and forcibly took Mamata to his residence in Gyanrapota. There, he, his mother-in-law Kusum and another person called Tarak beat her, tonsured her, stripped her and then photographed her naked to show the world that biologically "she was not a girl".

Source: 'The Case of Boro Chupria's Tomboy' by Chandrima S Bhattacharya (The Telegraph, Kolkata) http://www.telegriphindia.com/1070215/asp/opinion/story_7390076.asp



Armed conflict and VAW: Manipur

Security officials say that Thangjam Manorama Devi was a dangerous member of the separatist People's Liberation Army in Manipur. According to the army, she was responsible for a number of bomb blasts, including one that killed some soldiers. Her family insists she was a peaceful activist and was not involved in any criminal activities. Most human rights activists and journalists agree privately that she was a member of an underground group, but differ on the details, including what role she played.

The truth may never be fully known because no police complaint was ever filed against Manorama: she was never given an opportunity to be tried in court and found guilty or innocent. Instead, on July 11, 2004, the 32-year-old was arrested from her home by soldiers of the paramilitary Assam Rifles and killed while in their custody. Her bullet-ridden corpse was left in a field not far from her home where it was discovered by villagers. The Assam Rifles claimed she had been shot dead while trying to escape. It has been alleged that she was raped before being shot through her vagina.

Source: "These Fellows Must Be Eliminated": Relentless Violence and Impunity in Manipur' (Human Rights Watch Report). http://hrw.org/reports/2008/India0908/3.htm#_Toc208813095

Freedom or protection: What will end VAW?

For too long, girls and women have been kept (locked) inside the house in an effort to prevent sexual abuse. Some years ago, the ticket collector of a train would lock the entire bogey if women passengers were left alone in the compartment. Likewise, the station master would lock the waiting room if women passengers had to spend the night waiting for a connecting train. Such attitudes, though an expression of concern for the safety of women, only end up reinforcing the message that women are not safe and that they need 'good' men to protect them from 'bad' men. Do we want protection for women that will curb their freedom or enhance it? Is it useful to suggest that imposition of a deadline on women moving around at night is an effective way of stopping VAW? Or should the demand be that public places are made safe by the government to allow women to access them at any time? Should women be stopped from working in factories and call centres during nocturnal hours because it is unsafe for them, or should these work spaces be made safe for them to work at night? We need to demand that protection and freedom are not pitted against each other to protect women from violence. Protection from violence cannot come at the cost of the freedom to move, because that in itself perpetuates another kind of violence and discrimination.

What can I do to end VAW?

It is important to continue to raise awareness about the impact of violence against women so that more groups, communities and leaders prioritise this as a programme of work that deserves attention and resources. Awareness helps break down myths and stereotypes that are sometimes used to justify violence, and it also allows those at risk of violence to be able to better understand how they can protect themselves and those around them.

In addition to empowering women and girls to protect themselves, it is essential to address the sources and perpetrators of violence, whether actual or potential. This requires hands-on engagement with men and boys to help shift attitudes about the use of violence and to empower.

- Break the silence: Never condone VAW. Always raise your voice and report it.
- Know the law: Gain basic awareness of the laws on VAW so that you are able to recognise when VAW is taking place and know what law to use when.
- Build solidarity: With a concerned and committed group of friends and colleagues build an informal solidarity group within your organisation or institution which can extend solidarity to victims of GBV.
- Connect with women's rights groups: Get in touch with local women's rights groups if you hear of any VAW-related incident, or if you wish to attend or organise trainings on VAW for your colleagues, friends and peers.
- Demand to know your rights as a woman: Within an institution or organisation you have a right to find out the processes in place to combat VAW. For instance, you have a right to know whether your office or college has set up an anti-sexual harassment cell, and the right to demand that it is set up.

Join and mark the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence

The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence is an international campaign. Participants chose the dates -- November 25: International Day Against Violence Against Women, and December 10: International Human Rights Day -- in order to symbolically link violence against women and human rights and to emphasise that such violence is a violation of human rights. This 16-day period also highlights other significant dates including November 29: International Women Human Rights Defenders Day, December 1: World AIDS Day, and December 6 that marks the anniversary of the Montreal massacre.

The 16 Days campaign has been used as an organising strategy by individuals and groups around the world to call for the elimination of all forms of violence against women by:

- Raising awareness about gender-based violence as a human rights issue at the local, national, regional and international levels.
- Strengthening local work around violence against women.
- Establishing a clear link between local and international work to end violence against women.
- Providing a forum in which organisers can develop and share new and effective strategies.
- Demonstrating the solidarity of women around the world organising against violence against women.
- Creating tools to pressure governments to implement promises made on eliminating violence against women.

To learn more about the 16 Days campaign look up <http://www.cwgl.rutgers.edu/16days/home.html>

Calling men to join the White Ribbon Campaign

The White Ribbon Campaign (WRC) is the largest effort in the world of men working to end violence against women. In over 55 countries, campaigns are led by both men and women, even though the focus is on educating men and boys. In 1991, a handful of men in Canada decided they had a responsibility to urge men to speak out about violence against women. Wearing a white ribbon would be a symbol of men's opposition to violence against women. Wearing a white ribbon is a personal pledge to never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women and girls. Wearing a white ribbon is a way of saying, "Our future has no violence against women".

This content has been researched and written by Oishik Sircar and Nalini Bhanot.

Material for this pamphlet has been adapted, collated and quoted from:

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- Aurina Chatterjee, 'Sexual Harassment, Battling Unwelcome Sexual Attention'. <http://infochangeindia.org/200602095631/Agenda/Claiming-Sexual-Rights-In-India/Sexual-harassment-Battling-unwelcome-sexual-attention.html>
- Lawyers Collective, Women's Rights Initiative. www.lawyerscollective.org
- International Centre for Research on Women. www.icrw.org
- Immigrant Women's Support Service. www.iwss.org.au

FAQs ON VAW

Are some women more vulnerable to violence than others?

All women are vulnerable to male violence. Violence affects women of all ages and all ethno-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Although violence against women is universal, many women are targeted for specific forms of violence because of particular aspects of their identity. Race, ethnicity, culture, language, sexual identity (including real or perceived sexual orientation), poverty and health (particularly HIV status) are some of the many risk factors for women. This is particularly true where widely held prejudices and discrimination result in public indifference or even active endorsement of such violence.

Poverty and marginalisation make some women more vulnerable to violence. The negative effects of globalisation leave some women trapped on the margins of society. It is extremely difficult for women living in poverty to escape abusive situations, to obtain protection, and to access the criminal justice system to seek redress. Illiteracy and poverty severely restrict a woman's ability to organise to fight for change.

Why are some men violent?

There is no simple answer to this question. The phenomenon of violence against women is complex and is the result of a combination of factors. Among other things, male violence is the result of behaviours learnt at a young age to express "masculinity".

Throughout the world, men learn at an early age to use their strength and power to dominate and control others around them. Unfortunately because of this, the use of violence appears acceptable in their eyes.

The lack of severe penalties for violent acts compared with the gravity of these acts also contributes to the continuing perpetration of violence by men. While there are many explanations for violence, there are no excuses.

What about violence against men?

Many forms of violence are suffered uniquely by women, such as forced pregnancies, forced abortion, bride-burning, dowry-related abuses. Other forms of violence such as domestic violence, rape and sexual violence are suffered disproportionately by women. Statistics show that globally, one in three women will be beaten, forced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime.

We do not deny that men can also be victims of gender-based violence, and we do not deny that some women can perpetrate violence against men. However, the raw statistics prove that women are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence, and in most circumstances, the effects of this violence are much more severe.

In many instances where a woman has been arrested and/or charged with perpetrating violence against a man (specifically within the context of domestic violence) it has been found that the woman has been a victim of domestic violence in the lead-up to her act of violence.

Additionally, an element of women's violence against men can also be attributed to the power struggles that exist when a woman defies or confronts a cultural norm by challenging male authority.

Much of the reasons why women are targeted for violence are based on deep-seated discrimination. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims that all people are born free and equal. Sadly, for millions of women around the globe, this fundamental freedom does not exist.

What do we say to men who may feel that you're 'blaming' them for everything?

The idea is not to blame all men for perpetrating domestic violence -- domestic violence is obviously only carried out by a very small proportion of men.

Any campaign on violence against women should especially target the vast majority of non-offending men who may tend to think that this is "nothing to do with me". It is this group that can move attitudes forward in this area.

Source: Amnesty International UK

"Eliminate Inequality, NOT WOMEN"



DON'T EXIST!

- Don't go out alone at night
- That encourages men
- Don't go out alone at any time
- Any situation encourages some men.
- Don't stay at home
- Intruders and relatives can both rape.
- Don't go without clothes
- That encourages men.
- Don't go with clothes
- Any clothes encourage some men.
- Avoid childhood
- Some rapists are turned on by little girls.
- Avoid old age
- Some rapists prefer aged women.
- Don't have a father, grandfather, uncle or brother...
- These are all relatives that most often rape young women.
- Don't have neighbours
- These often rape.
- Don't marry
- Rape is legal within marriage
- To be quite sure

FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION

OPENSOURCE RESOURCES

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Tel No.: 020 25457371. Email: openspace@eth.net,
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