

# Backgrounder for: *“Beyond Legal Reforms: Culture and Capacity in the Eradication of Violence Against Women and Girls.”*

Prepared by the Bahá’í International Community

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# **BACKGROUNDER FOR *BEYOND LEGAL REFORMS: CULTURE AND CAPACITY IN THE ERADICATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS***

**July 2006**

## **Introduction**

Take a moment, and picture your mother daughter, or sister. According to statistics, one of them will be a victim of violence.<sup>1</sup> As shocking as the statistics may seem, violence against the mothers, grandmothers, daughters, and sisters of humanity – women and girls - truly affects each of us. The fact is that violence against women and girls results from conscious human decisions. While it is an epidemic, it does not have readily visible or diagnosable symptoms neither does the epidemic result from one malicious germ or virus. Rather, it is the product of human choices over time – choices that have resulted in a world where women and girls of every age, race, class, culture, and religion are at risk of violence.

The problem of violence against women and girls is one that has haunted the world for ages, but even now, the complexity and daunting nature of the issue has prevented most people from being as informed on the topic as they could be. After all, the first step towards solving a problem is understanding the issue and all of its facets. The purpose of this backgrounder, then, is to provide a glimpse into this very near world of violence that is perpetrated against women and girls every second, with the hope that greater understanding will engage each of us in conversations and actions that will eliminate such atrocities and enable all humanity to realize the goal of full equality between the sexes.

This backgrounder is designed to accompany the 2006 Bahá'í International Community Statement on violence against women and girls, entitled *Beyond Legal Reforms: Culture and Capacity in the Eradication of Violence Against Women and Girls*, and is intended for men, women, and children alike - with the aim of assisting Baha'i communities to thoroughly understand the issue of violence against women and girls, its myriad causes, scope and consequences and to stimulate thought and discussion, with the ultimate goal of eradicating violence against women and girls. Throughout the backgrounder, you will notice references to the statement, which are designed to help connect the definitions, statistics, and explanations offered in this backgrounder to the issues and ideas presented in *Beyond Legal Reforms*. While this backgrounder cannot cover all of the intricacies of this issue, it will hopefully create greater awareness, and inspire more research, dialogue, and action. In addition, the work *Beyond Legal Reforms: Culture and Capacity in the Eradication of Violence Against Women and Girls* references several primary sources, and this will hopefully add to its value as a resource to Bahá'í communities.

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<sup>1</sup> “Ending Violence Against Women, Population Reports”, Issues in *World Health*, Series L, number 11, XXVII, Population Information Program, the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, December 1999, cited in UNIFEM’s “Violence Against Women -Facts and Figures,” pg. 1.

For ease of reference, a summary table of contents is provided below:

1. What is Violence Against Women and Girls?
2. What is the Scope of the Issue?
3. Measuring Violence Against Women and Girls.
4. Consequences
5. How and Why is Violence Against Women and Girls Perpetuated?
6. Creating a Culture to Enable Women and Girl's Security and Prosperity.
7. For Discussion
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## **1. What Is Violence Against Women and Girls?**

Violence against women was defined by the United Nations and adopted by the General Assembly in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in 1993. The definition reads:

“any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”

This definition, of course, includes girl children, who are also subject to violence. The UN definition also makes sure to point out that it considers no distinction between violence in public and violence in private. Violence in the private sphere, also known as domestic violence or intimate-partner violence, has long been considered by many to be a matter not to be touched upon by public discussion or intervention. Domestic violence was (and still is, by some) thought to be too private an issue to be dealt with by public institutions. In its definition, the UN makes sure to include violence in private life (domestic violence, marital rape, etc.), so as to provide the definitive basis necessary to take institutional measures against all types of violence, including types that occur in the private sphere. (*Beyond Legal Reforms, Para. 3*)

Violence against women and girls reaches far beyond the association of violence against women and girls with domestic violence and rape. Regrettably, the World Health Organization (WHO) identifies those as “universal” forms of violence against women and girls.<sup>2</sup> Violence against women and girls is an issue that transcends traditional boundaries. It is not necessarily confined to the home, but neither is it entirely a product of state or international forces.

*“Although intimate-partner violence and sexual coercion are the most common and “universal” types of violence affecting women and girls, in many parts of the world violence takes on special characteristics according to cultural and historical conditions, and includes murders in the name of honour (so-called “honour killings”), trafficking of women and girls, female genital mutilation, and violence against women in situations of armed conflict.”<sup>3</sup>*

As this quotation also points out, violence against women and girls is evidence of a grave, historical trend of inequality sponsored by communities and upheld by traditions and cultural practices that seek – whether overtly or unconsciously - to ensure that women and girls remain subservient to men on every level. In October 2006, the United Nations released the Secretary General’s Study on Violence Against Women in which the nexus of discriminatory practices and violence against women was noted. “...violence against women constitutes a form of gender-based discrimination and that discrimination is a major cause of such violence.”<sup>4</sup> The single term of “violence” therefore encompasses a whole array of injustices perpetrated against women and girls –whether the injustices are of an institutional or structural, physical, sexual or psychological nature. (***Beyond Legal Reforms, Para. 2***)

Article 2 of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in 1993 further expands the definition:

*Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:*

*(a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;*

*(b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;*

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<sup>2</sup> WHO Multi-country Study on Women’s Health and Domestic Violence against Women: Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women’s responses. By: Claudia García-Moreno, Henrica A.F.M. Jansen, Mary Ellsberg, Lori Heise and Charlotte Watts. P.5.

[http://www.who.int/gender/violence/who\\_multicountry\\_study/Introduction-Chapter1-Chapter2.pdf](http://www.who.int/gender/violence/who_multicountry_study/Introduction-Chapter1-Chapter2.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Secretary General’s Study on Violence Against Women. Released, October 2006.

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/index.htm>. UN Documentation Reference: A/61/122/Add. 1

*(c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.*<sup>5</sup>

This extensive definition seeks to leave no loopholes in the legal definition of violence against women. This is important also in light of accountability, and of the need to bring perpetrators of violence against women and girls to justice. Victims of violence can use this definition as a tool to legally support that the violence committed against them was, in fact, a crime. The definition itself is a platform for advocacy for women seeking to bring their perpetrators to justice.

The Bahá'í International Community has described violence against women as:

***...a yardstick by which one can measure the violation of all human rights. [Violence against women] can be used to gauge the degree to which a society is governed by aggressivity, dominated by competition and ruled by force...In the Bahá'í view, "the harvest of force is turmoil and the ruin of the social order"<sup>6</sup> and violence against women is a grave symptom of this larger disorder.***<sup>7</sup>

In this way, violence against women and girls takes on a new perspective – it is not just an unfortunate occurrence, but is also a direct threat to the progress of the entire human race. It is with that sense of urgency that it must be addressed. Violence against women and girls threatens and harms the way of life of all people on this earth. It cannot be ignored, nor its effects downplayed. Violence against women and girls shows just how forceful and violent humanity has become. The fact that millions of women and girls suffer from violence every second is a symptom, though not new, of a greater malady that has infected humanity. This sickness is rooted in violence; in cruelty in the basic denial of human rights to so many men, women and children on the planet; in prejudice and discrimination against women and girls; and the disintegration of the role of parenting and family life, to name just a few of the causes. Its scope and effects have only begun to be realized.

The chart below, adapted from one given by the World Bank,<sup>8</sup> illustrates the different kinds of violence that haunt a woman from childhood to old age, leaving her at no point free from the threat, fear, or reality of violence.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, pgs 114-115.

<sup>7</sup> Bahá'í International Community, "Ending Violence Against Women", presented to the 51<sup>st</sup> session of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland, 20 January-10 March 1995.

<sup>8</sup> L. Heise, *Violence Against Women: The Hidden Health Burden. World Bank Discussion Paper*, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1994.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

## 2. What is the Scope of the Issue?

*At least one out of three women in the world has been subjected to physical or sexual violence at some point in her lifetime.<sup>9</sup>*

The statistics speak for themselves, but it is important to note just how widespread issue violence against women and girls is. It is an issue that afflicts both the developed and the developing world. It affects both the rich and the poor, both the healthy and the sick, on a scale of horrific proportions.

*“[Violence against women] cuts across social and economic situations and is deeply embedded in cultures around the world — so much so that millions of women consider it a way of life.”<sup>11</sup>*

<b>Gender Violence Throughout a Woman’s Life<sup>10</sup></b>	
<i>Phase</i>	<i>Type of Violence</i>
Prenatal	Sex-selective abortions, battering during pregnancy, coerced pregnancy (rape during war)
Infancy	Female infanticide, emotional and physical abuse, sexual violence, differential access to food and medical care
Childhood	Genital mutilation; physical violence; incest and sexual abuse; differential access to food, medical care, and education; child prostitution
Adolescence	Dating and courtship violence, physical violence, incest, economically coerced sex, sexual assault in the workplace, rape, sexual harassment, forced prostitution
Reproductive	Abuse of women and girls by intimate partners, marital rape, dowry abuse and murders, partner homicide, psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual assault in the workplace, sexual harassment, rape, abuse of women and girls with disabilities
Old Age	Abuse of widows, elder abuse (which affects mostly women), physical violence, abuse by intimate partners, marital rape

<sup>10</sup> “Ending Violence Against Women,” Population Reports, World Health.

<sup>11</sup> Cate Johnson, “Violence Against Women: An Issue of Human Rights,” in *Genderaction*, Washington, D.C.: Office of Women in Development, United States Agency for International Development.

### 3. Measuring Violence Against Women and Girls:

**According to studies by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces:**

- Between 13% and 61% of the women and girls in the world have suffered from physical violence by an intimate partner;
- Close to 50% of women and girls in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Peru have been subjected to **physical or sexual violence** by their intimate partner;
- Around 30% of women and girls in the UK and 22% of women and girls in the US have been subjected to **physical or sexual violence** by their intimate partner;
- 40 to 70% of the women and girls who suffer or have suffered from **physical violence** by their intimate partner are murdered;
- An average of 10-27% of women and girls have suffered from **sexual violence** either as children or as adults;<sup>12</sup>
- 11-32% of women and girls worldwide report having experienced **childhood sexual abuse**;<sup>13</sup>
- 40 to 60% of **sexual assaults** in the world committed within the family are perpetrated against girls aged 15 and younger;<sup>14</sup>
- 20 to 75% of women and girls report having been **emotionally abused** at some point in their lives;<sup>15</sup>
- Two million girls between ages 5 and 15 are introduced into the **commercial sex market** each year;
- At least 130 million women and girls have been forced to undergo **female genital mutilation (FGM)** or cutting; another 2 million are at risk each year from this practice;

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<sup>12</sup> *The preceding information was taken from WHO’s multi-country study on women’s health and domestic violence against women*, September 2005. Note: the wide range of these statistics reflects the minimum and maximum prevalence rates for the 15 sites focused on in the study. This, in turn, reflects the variability not only between the countries, but also within the countries themselves.

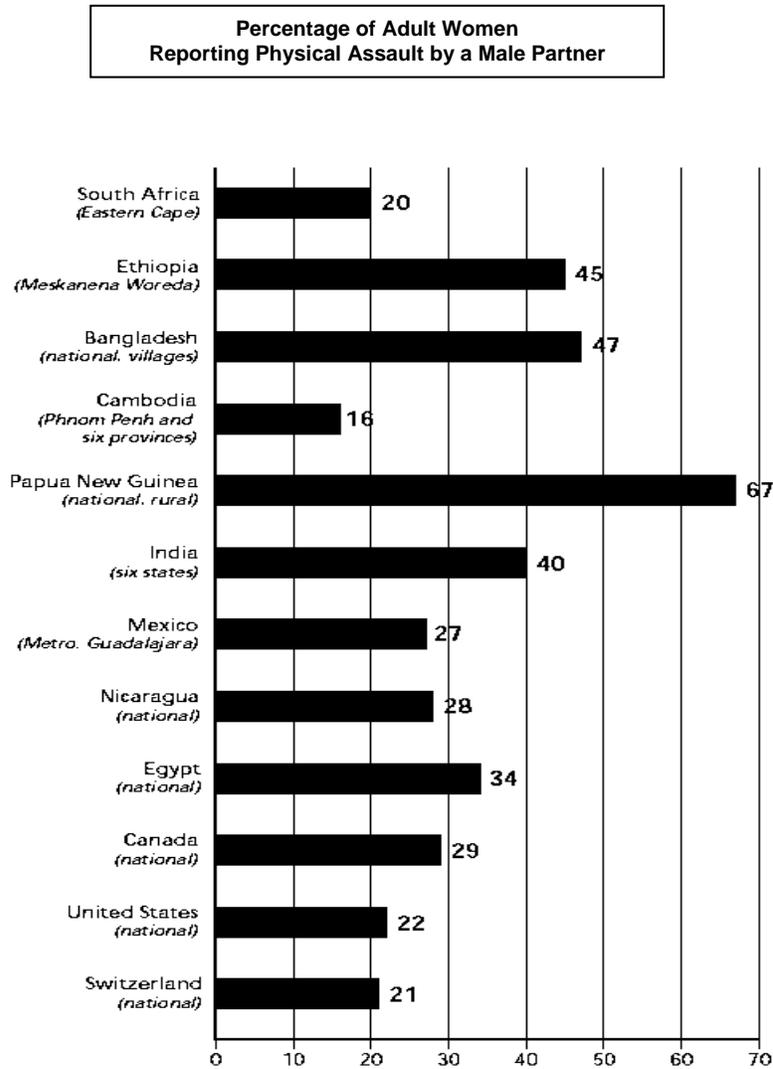
<sup>13</sup> Marie Vlachova and Lea BIASON, *Women in an Insecure World Executive Summary*, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2005. [http://www.dcaf.ch/women/pb\\_women\\_ex\\_sum.pdf](http://www.dcaf.ch/women/pb_women_ex_sum.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> *Domestic violence against women and girls*, UNICEF, Innocenti Digest, June 2000.

<sup>15</sup> For more information please see the United Nations Development Fund for Women’s (UNIFEM) “Facts and Figures on Violence Against Women”

<[http://www.unifem.org/gender\\_issues/violence\\_against\\_women/facts\\_figures.php](http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/facts_figures.php)>.

- "**Honour**" killings take the lives of thousands of women and girls every year, mainly in Western Asia, North Africa and parts of South Asia. At least 1,000 women and girls fell victim to this type of killing in Pakistan in 1999.<sup>16</sup>



Source: L. Heise, *Violence Against Women: The Hidden Health Burden*. World Bank Discussion Paper, Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1994.

These statistics are not just numbers; they are evidence of widespread violence against women and girls. They show just how severe violence against women and girls is, and how, as an epidemic it manifests in every culture and society.

<sup>16</sup> The preceding information was taken from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)'s *State of World Population 2000*, Ch. 3.

## 4. Consequences

Consider the following:

“More than **60 million women and girls** who should be alive today are missing because of violence against them.”<sup>17</sup>

60 million women and girls have simply vanished, which means that 60 million mothers, daughters, contributors to society, and members of humanity are no longer alive – they have fallen victim to violence - and that estimate is from nearly ten years ago. This is not the result of some unavoidable catastrophe. This is the tragic consequence of a very preventable phenomenon: violence perpetrated against women and girls.

### Costs of Violence Affecting Women and Girls

#### *Physical Consequences:*

- Death or Serious Injury
- Disability/disfigurement
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Unwanted pregnancy
- Miscarriage/Abortion
- Pelvic Inflammatory Disease
- Sexual dysfunctions
- Increased blood pressure and cholesterol
- Rapid weight gain/weight loss

#### *Mental Consequences:*

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Eating disorders
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
- Alcohol/Drug abuse
- Suicidal tendencies
- Psychosomatic disorders<sup>18</sup>
- Interruptions in education
- Sleep disorders
- Nightmares
- Shame

As discussed in *Beyond Legal Reforms*, reforms in all levels of society, from personal to family to community to international, are needed to help stop violence against women and girls. This is in part because violence against women and girls has harmful effects at every level of

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<sup>17</sup> Charlotte Bunch, “The Intolerable Status Quo: Violence Against Women and Girls,” *The Progress of the Nations 1997*, UNICEF: 1997.

<sup>18</sup> The previous information was extracted from the WHO *Violence Against Women Factsheet*, <<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/print.html>>.

social order. The effects may begin at a personal level - the woman, but spread to affect every facet of life. The following table illustrates the harmful affects in the spheres of:

### **Societal Costs of Violence**

- *Health Care Sector*
  - Costs of medical treatment
  - Medication
  
- *Social Sector (if available)*
  - Shelters for battered/abused women and girls
  - Crisis services
  - Couple and family therapy
  - Individual therapy
  
- *Criminal Justice System*
  - Police intervention
  - Trial
  - Court-provided legal representation
  - Imprisonment of perpetrators
  
- *Economic Sector*
  - Lower productivity while at work
  - Sick leave
  - Climate of fear and insecurity
  - Interrupted professional development
  - Unemployment
  
- *Children*
  - Transmission of violence from one generation to the next
  - Youth violence
  - Unemployment
  - Juvenile crime
  - Truancy
  - Interrupted schooling
  - Shame
  - Nightmares
  - Drug and alcohol abuse<sup>19</sup>

In particular, domestic violence has a very strong impact on children who witness it. They tend to have more health and behavioral problems, and can exhibit any of the same signs as the abused. Additionally, witnessing violence during childhood can form the idea in the child's mind that violence is an acceptable way of resolving conflicts both within and outside the family. Children who witness or are themselves the target of violence more frequently than not, become perpetrators, thereby creating a cycle of violence.

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<sup>19</sup> The previous information was taken from Stefan de Vylder's "Ending Gender-Based Violence: A Call for Global Action to Involve Men –Costs of Male Violence," as well as the WHO *Violence Against Women Factsheet*.

## 5. How and Why is Violence Against Women and Girls Perpetuated?

The causes themselves are complex and intricately intertwined throughout all levels of society. It is imperative, therefore, to study the contributing factors of violence against women and girls not only individually, but holistically as well. Only then can the true complexities of the issue begin to be understood – and remedied.

On a societal level, the factors contributing to violence against women and girls have helped to exacerbate, over time, the “historically unequal power relations”<sup>20</sup> between women and men, which, in turn, have fostered an environment conducive to the abuse and oppression of millions of women and girls across the world. These perpetuating factors, divided into cultural, economic, legal, and political categories, are illustrated in the following amended chart, provided by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)<sup>21</sup>:

Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender-specific socialization</li> <li>• Cultural definitions of appropriate sex roles</li> <li>• Expectations of roles within relationships</li> <li>• Belief in the inherent superiority of males</li> <li>• Values that give men proprietary rights over women and girls</li> <li>• Notion of the family as the private sphere and under male control</li> <li>• Customs of marriage (bride price/dowry)</li> <li>• Acceptability of violence as a means to resolve conflict</li> </ul>
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women and girl’s economic dependence on men</li> <li>• Limited access to cash and credit</li> <li>• Discriminatory laws regarding inheritance, property rights, use of communal lands, and maintenance after divorce or widowhood</li> <li>• Limited access to employment in formal and informal sectors</li> <li>• Limited access to education and training for women and girls</li> </ul>
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lesser legal status of women and girls either by written law and/or by practice</li> <li>• Laws regarding divorce, child custody, maintenance and inheritance</li> <li>• Legal definitions of rape and domestic abuse</li> <li>• Low levels of legal literacy among women and girls</li> <li>• Insensitive treatment of women and girls by police and judiciary</li> </ul>
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Under-representation of women in power, politics, the media and in the legal and medical professions</li> <li>• Domestic violence not taken seriously</li> <li>• Notions of family being private and beyond control of the state</li> <li>• Risk of challenge to status quo/religious laws</li> <li>• Limited organization of women and girls as a political force</li> <li>• Limited participation of women and girls in organized political system</li> </ul>

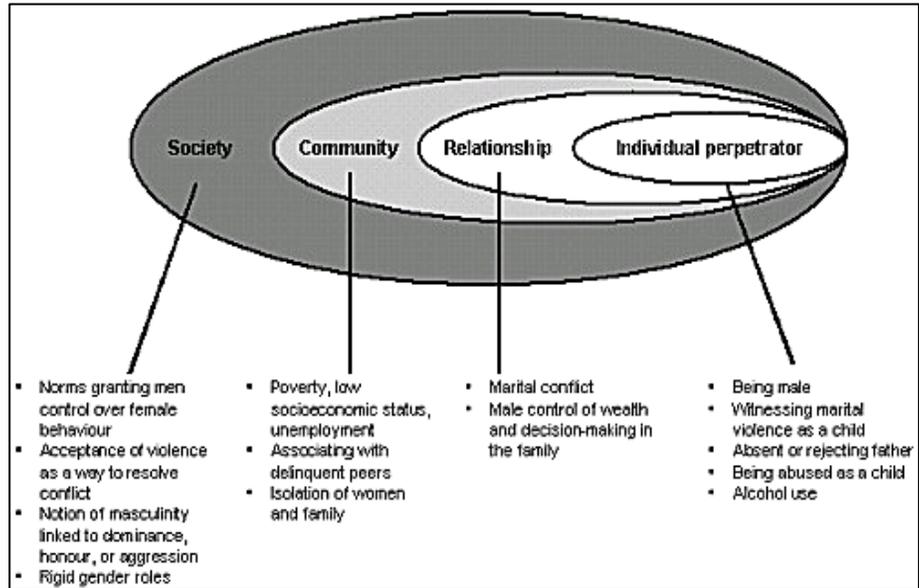
These are vast examples of just how societal institutions, cultural norms and traditional practices have sanctioned violence against women and girls by making violence and male domination an accepted part of family and community life.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/48/104, *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women*, 20 December 1993.

<sup>21</sup> UNICEF Innocenti Digest. “Domestic Violence Against Women and Girls”. No. 6 June 2000. Innocenti Research Center Florence, Italy. Pg. 7.

<sup>22</sup> UNIFEM Facts and Figures on VAW, pg. 2

The United Nations places special emphasis on the role of society in perpetrating violence against women and girls, and places upon society the heavy responsibility of remedying the situation. This broad assignment of violence against women and girls to culture is helpful in understanding the nature of the factors that perpetuate violence against women and girls as well as the source for curing the global epidemic. As previously stated by the Bahá'í International Community in 1993,



Source: Population Reports. 2001. *Violence Against Women*. Issues in World Health. Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, [available at <<http://www.jhuccp.org>>].

*Equally as important, however, are the interactions and practices on the level of the family and local community, which tend to directly affect women in a closely personal way.*<sup>23</sup> (***Beyond Legal Reforms, Para. 6-15***)

## 6. Creating a Culture to Enable Women and Girls' Security and Prosperity.

Violence against women and girls is not an issue that can be resolved easily, or with anything less than deliberate, persistent and collaborative effort. The complexities surrounding it are such that intensive study and sincere resolve are needed before actions taken to remedy this sickness, that is, manifestations of violence against women and girls, can have a truly lasting, concrete effect.

To be sure, initiatives around the world have helped begin to stem the tide against violence targeting women and girls. Various approaches from legal reforms, to moral education

<sup>23</sup> Bahá'í International Community Statement to the United Nations World Conference on Human Rights. Vienna, Austria, 14-25 June 1993.

projects<sup>24</sup>, to development initiatives, have all had at least some success in helping remedy the problem of violence. Such projects must address the individual. However, family life, community life, governments, and the international community (**Beyond Legal Reforms, Para. 4**) are often focused on:

- Empowering women and girls by encouraging economic development, such as microfinance;<sup>25</sup>
- Promoting the education of girls by providing incentives for families to send their daughters to school;<sup>26</sup>
- Educating men and boys on the consequences of committing/endorsing violence against women and girls;<sup>27</sup>
- Creating the legal language necessary to bring perpetrators of violence to justice;<sup>28</sup>
- Outlawing harmful traditional practices that target women and girls, such as honor killing, female genital mutilation, and bride burning;
- Providing sanctuaries or “safe houses” for victims of gender-based violence to go to.<sup>29</sup>

While these endeavors have had various levels of success around the world, they have been listed merely to show what kinds of efforts are currently being made to assist victims of violence and to prevent the occurrence of violence.

The equality of women and men, which directly involves the elimination of violence against women and girls, is essential for this day and age. In a 1985 letter, the administrative body of the Bahá'í Faith, the Universal House of Justice, stated that:

***The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged pre-requisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from***

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<sup>24</sup> For more information, please see *Overcoming Violence Against Women and Girls*, by Michael Penn and Rahel Nardos.

<sup>25</sup> Please see *Empowering Women Through Microfinance*, a draft paper by Susy Cheston and Lisa Kuhn, commissioned by the Microcredit Summit Campaign.

<sup>26</sup> Anne Bernard, *Lessons and Implications From Girls' Education Activities: A Synthesis From Evaluations*, UNICEF 2002.

<sup>27</sup> Ferguson, Hearn, Holter, Jalmert, Kimmel, Lang, and Morrell, *Ending Gender-Based Violence: A Call For Global Action to Involve Men*.

<sup>28</sup> World Health Organization, “What is Gender Mainstreaming?”  
<<http://www.who.int/gender/mainstreaming/en/>>.

<sup>29</sup> More information can be found at the United Nations *UN Works for Women* website,  
<<http://www.un.org/works/women/women5.html>>.

*the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavor will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge.*

Violence against women and girls is a concrete result of discrimination and inequality that has pervaded human thought and institutions for far too long.

It is time to stand up for our mothers, sisters, daughters, aunts, and grandmothers around the world and seek knowledge, form partnerships, and take actions that include but also step beyond legal reforms.

## **7. For Discussion**

*Discuss the following statements.*

1. “Domestic violence occurs behind closed doors, and should therefore be left to the partners to sort out themselves.”
2. “Violence is a reality of life. There is nothing we can do to eliminate violence against women and girls.”
3. “Domestic violence is not acceptable under any circumstances.”
4. “Incidents of domestic violence can be forgiven.”

## 8. Glossary of Terms

### **Domestic Violence:**

*“Physical, psychological and/or economic abuse of a woman by her partner or ex-partner(s) or by another person within the home or family.”<sup>30</sup>*

### **Physical violence:**

Punching, mutilation, burns, use of arms, domestic incarceration, etc.

### **Emotional/psychological violence:**

Encompasses a broad range of manifestations such as humiliation, exploitation, intimidation, psychological degradation, verbal aggression, deprivation of freedom and rights, etc.

### **Economic violence:**

Economic blackmail, taking away the money the woman earns so that the male partner has an absolute control over the income of the family, etc. Perpetrators can include: partner, ex-partner, father, another family member, or another person at home.

### **Sexual Violence/Sexual abuse:**

Physically forcing a woman or girl child to have sexual intercourse against her will, under threat of violence. Forcing a woman or girl child to do something sexual she finds degrading or humiliating.<sup>31</sup>

### **Emotional/Psychological Abuse:**

A more subtle kind of violence but many women and girls consider it to be even more devastating than physical violence. The most frequent cases include humiliation, insults and belittling. The woman, as a result, feels mentally destabilized and powerless.

### **Female Infanticide:**

The systematic killing of female babies at or soon after birth, often by starvation and neglect, perpetrated as a result of the preference for sons in many cultures, takes place primarily in South Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East. Another form involves sex-selective abortion,

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<sup>30</sup> International Planned Parenthood Foundation, Western Hemisphere Region, “What Is Gender Based Violence?” iBasta! Spring 2000, pg. 2

<[http://www.ippfwhr.org/publications/serial\\_article\\_e.asp?PubID=10&SerialIssuesID=2&ArticleID=2](http://www.ippfwhr.org/publications/serial_article_e.asp?PubID=10&SerialIssuesID=2&ArticleID=2)>.

<sup>31</sup> WHO multi-country study on women’s health and domestic violence against women, September 2005.

in which mothers, after finding out via ultrasound that their baby is a girl, decide to terminate the pregnancy.

### **Bride Burning/Dowry Murders:**

Occur predominantly in South Asia where women and girls are killed/mutilated by their husbands or their in-laws because the woman's family cannot pay her dowry, or bride price. Methods include the throwing of acid at the woman's face, or setting up a kitchen stove to explode (so that it looks like an accident), causing death or disfigurement.

### **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM):**

Also known as female circumcision or female genital cutting, FGM involves the cutting or removal of part of all of a woman's genitals. This practice is considered as a right of passage in some cultures, and extreme forms (where the vagina is sewn shut) are used to ensure a girl's virginity. FGM is performed usually on girls between the ages of four and ten, usually without anesthetic and in unsanitary conditions. FGM is still a deeply rooted practice in over 28 African and Asian countries, and among the diaspora of these countries.

### **Honor Killings:**

Where a woman is viewed as being representative of the family honor, and her chastity is directly linked to that honor. If a woman has a sexual encounter with a man outside the frame of marriage (even if she is raped), she alone is targeted and is murdered in order to protect her family's honor. The killing is often done by the woman's brother, father, or other close relative.

### **Early Marriage:**

Girls as young as 10, or as soon as they have begun menstruation, are forced into marriage and immediate sexual relations with their new husband, who is usually much older. This is known to have adverse affects on the girls, who are subsequently denied any further education, and are subject to early and frequent pregnancies, which often lead to health problems. Abuse is also common in early marriage. The legal minimum age of marriage is often lower for girls, and more than 50 countries allow marriage of girls under the age of 16 with parental consent.