

Violence against women is mostly domestic

Elisabet le Roux

A WAR zone is less dangerous for a woman than her home. Nearly a third (30%) of women worldwide experience violence at the hands of their partners, according to the World Health Organisation, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the South African Medical Research Council.

Globally, about 38% of all women murdered die at the hands of their intimate partners. South Africa is a case in point. According to a 2016 health and demographic survey, a fifth (21%) of women over 18 years old in intimate relationships have experienced physical violence from a partner; 6% experienced sexual violence from a partner.

And a retrospective national study published in 2009 put the South African mortality rate from intimate partner violence at 6.8 per 100 000 women – twice as high as the US.

Shocking new findings show that even in conflict-affected countries infamous for the high rates of sexual violence where soldiers and rebel fighters are a daily danger to women, their husbands and boyfriends are the bigger threat.

A baseline household survey done in the north-east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) showed that women reported very high levels of intimate partner violence – much higher than the rate of sexual violence perpetrated by militias.

The baseline household survey was done in 15 communities in the Ituri province of the DRC and 769 people were interviewed.

It was conducted by Tearfund and Heal Africa as part of a project called "Engaging with Faith Groups to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls in Conflict-affected Communities".

The project is funded by UK aid from the UK government, via the What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls Global Programme. The funds are managed by the South African Medical Research Council.

Attacks

The eastern DRC is racked by violence from different rebel groups. This has been going on for decades, and the eastern DRC is known for high rates of violent sexual attacks by soldiers and rebels.

The survey showed that non-partner sexual violence – which would include sexual violence by soldiers and rebels – was very high. More than 29% of women reported non-partner sexual violence within the last year.

This is much higher than the global figure of 7%.

This outcome of the survey was expected. What wasn't was the shocking finding that more than two thirds (68.7%) of the women who reported non-partner sexual violence in the last 12 months, said the perpetrator was a known person or a family member.

Only in 6% of the cases was the perpetrator unknown.

As shocking was the very high levels of intimate partner violence: 68.8% of women in relationships who took part in the survey reported having experienced some form of intimate partner violence in the previous 12 months, and 38.4% had been sexually violated by an intimate partner in the past year.

More than 68.2% of men in relationships reported perpetrating intimate partner violence.

While still under-researched, there is evidence suggesting that intimate partner violence increases during times of armed conflict.

What this underscores is that for many women all over the world, their homes are the battlefield. Feminist theories explain that such violence is a result of male power within patriarchal society.

Addressing this imbalance is difficult. One possible avenue is through religion.

This is able to influence behaviour and facilitate social change.

While research has shown that religious institutions are usually patriarchal, the opposite can also be true.

Tearfund and Heal Africa, are focusing on religious leaders to prevent violence against women and girls in Ituri province, and are banking on this. – The Conversation

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