



Violence Against Women in Urban Areas

**An Analysis of the Problem
from a Gender Perspective**



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Executive Summary

Although women's contribution in today's societies is essential and indisputable, nowhere is their status on a par with men's. Women are a vulnerable group in all areas. With respect to violence, the evidence is revealing and irrevocable: not only are women particularly affected by many forms of violence, but most often these happen inside what should be the most secure of environments; their own homes. As the United Nations Development Programme's annual Human Development Report (1995) commented: "In no society are women secure or treated as equal to men. Personal insecurity shadows them from cradle to grave... From childhood through adulthood, they are abused because of their gender".

Moreover, the social context would generally appear to encourage violence against women. Images which devalue and undermine women are widespread, and legitimise violence against them. Cultural practices and the patriarchal system governing modern societies, define women's needs in accordance to men's and are subordinate to them.

So, how does one define violence directed against women? Are we only to consider physical violence, that being the most obvious but perhaps the most restrictive manifestation of violence, ignoring as it does the psychological effects, which go hand in hand with it? In 1992, The Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women submitted a draft declaration on violence against women that was approved by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1993. It was recognised that violence against women is an obstacle to equality, development and peace and that the opportunities for women to attain legal, social economic and political equality are constantly being limited by violence. Violence against women is defined 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" (art 1)".¹

It is because violence against women is deeply rooted into social and cultural practices and has been regarded as strictly a private affair that it is difficult to analyse the depth of the problem. However, although the task is a difficult one, it must be done: the cities of tomorrow cannot be developed harmoniously if they are unable to respond to the needs and aspirations of half of their inhabitants.

This paper on violence against women in urban areas attempts to review the situation in which thousands of women are living every day, all over the world. It concerns, for these

¹ In Hanna Binstock, *Violence Within Couples, Legal Treatment. Review of Progress and Results*. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Women and Development Unit, United Nations, Santiago, Chile, September 1998.



purposes, the most revealing kinds of violence perpetrated against women; acts of violence linked to the structural constraints of modern life, domestic violence, violence against the most vulnerable of groups. Indeed, the aim of this study is not to create an exhaustive list of all types of violence affecting women. For example, violence such as excision or sexual mutilation which women in certain traditional cultures are subjected to, will not be covered here. Sexual harassment in the workplace will be implicitly considered in the section covering violence against women in urban areas. Domestic violence will mainly focus on violent men who beat and abuse their partners.

The aim of this paper is rather to shed some light on this huge problem, in the hope of assessing the size of the phenomenon, analysing the underlying causes and trying to develop appropriate strategies to respond to and fight against it. The aim of this paper is also to show that we will not be able to reduce urban violence if domestic violence continues to be categorised as a private matter. We need to understand that urban violence can be properly addressed if we establish the correlation between domestic violence and street violence. This is because the impacts of domestic violence go beyond the family and affect society as a whole and not only the victims.

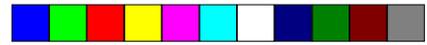
Firstly, it would be useful to reassess the debate on the issue by including into the critical study different sociological and criminological theories developed on this theme, inspired by anglo-american research. The second part covers domestic violence, in the hope of highlighting forms of violence in the home and their very close links with violence outside the home. The last part attempts to review this violence whilst trying to formulate concrete proposals and prevention programmes to fight against it.





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