

PRESS RELEASE

Five Years After the Beijing Conference on Women, Violence at Home Against Women and Girls still a global epidemic, says UNICEF

Geneva/New York - 31 May 2000 - Five years after the Beijing conference on Women called for global action to end violence against women, a UNICEF study states that not enough progress has been made in addressing the most common form of such violence, domestic violence. Domestic violence continues to negate the rights of women and girls in all countries and it undermines the lives of one out of every two women in some nations.

The report states that such violence continues to cut across cultures, class, education, incomes, ethnicity and age in every country. An estimated 60 million women are missing from population statistics globally; they are victims of their own families, killed deliberately or through neglect, simply because they are female.

The study on domestic violence, released by UNICEF's Innocenti Research Centre (IRC) in Florence, Italy, states that to date 44 countries have adopted specific legislation on domestic violence, of which 12 are in Latin America.

The 1993 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines violence against women as encompassing, but not limited to three areas: violence occurring in the family, within the general community and violence perpetrated or condoned by the State.

The UNICEF report, prepared in advance of the Beijing + 5 Review Meeting to be held in New York from 5 June, looks specifically at domestic violence which many countries and cultures tend to view as largely insoluble because it occurs within the family and is deeply entrenched.

In the report, UNICEF states that domestic violence is one of the most pernicious denials of human rights because it is perpetrated not by strangers but by family members, people in positions of trust. It is widespread globally, impacting on the physical and

emotional health of women and children, threatening their financial security, and undermining self-esteem and the prospects of growing normally. In the worst situations, it is life threatening when women are killed or commit suicide in desperation.

The UNICEF report proposes a strategy that addresses the causes of violence against women while providing immediate services to victims. It calls for integrated approaches and involvement from many sections of civil society including community and religious leaders, as well as boosting women and girls' "security" through legal literacy, education and employment opportunities.

In a signed article in the report, Radhika Coomaraswamy, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women points to the special responsibilities of the State in addressing the issue of domestic violence. She says that: "Governments should ensure that there is no impunity for the perpetrators of domestic violence and that incidents of family violence are investigated and punished."

The report calls for a series of measures to reduce this "appalling toll", including legal reform and an end to impunity for perpetrators. The Latin America countries, which have enacted legislation, are Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Puerto Rico and Uruguay. While some countries have begun to legislate against marital rape, including Mexico, Namibia, South Africa, and the USA, the report notes that sexual abuse and rape by an intimate partner is not considered a crime in most countries.

The 1998 South African Domestic Violence Act contains a particularly innovative feature - granting of a temporary Protection Order in cases where the court is satisfied that the actions of the aggressor post 'imminent harm' to the complainant. This ruling allows protection of the health, safety, and well being of the applicant and includes provision for the aggressor to be evicted from the matrimonial home while continuing to provide monetary relief to the applicant.

The UNICEF study on Domestic Violence lists a horrifying catalogue of types of violence

perpetrated against women throughout the life cycle by family members. This can begin with a sex-selection abortion and includes, aside from physical beatings and other more "visible" forms of violence like acid throwing and honour killings, forced malnutrition, lack of access to medical care and school, forced prostitution and bonded labour.

The report notes the relationship between domestic violence and the spread of HIV/AIDS.

It also highlights the link between domestic violence and the increasing availability of weapons.

—

In addition to enacting legislation, the UNICEF report gives other examples of where efforts have been made to tackle the problem including:

- training the judiciary to be gender-sensitive - training of Supreme Court justices, public defenders, prosecutors, social workers and support personnel, has been successfully carried out in Cost Rica, India and the USA; Women Police Stations;
- the first women's' police station, staffed with multi-disciplinary female teams equipped to respond to the different needs of victims, was set up in Sao Paolo, Brazil in 1985 in response to women's' complaints that they could not report violations because they were treated with disrespect and disbelief. Brazil's success encouraged Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela to set up their own versions.

For more information and a list of interviewees, please contact
Patrick McCormick,

IRC Communication Officer. tel: 39-055-2033354 email: pmccormick@unicef.org

or Patrizia Faustini, IRC Communication Assistant, tel. 0039 055 2033 253 email:
pfaustini@unicef.org