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Violence against Women and Children.

A Distant and Domestic Hell.

Oscar Fernández Álvarez^a Kouadio Alexis, Lally^b *

^aUniversity of León, León, 24007, Spain.

^bThe Péléforo Gbon Coulibaly University (UPGC) of Korhogo, Ivory Coast

Abstract

This paper reviews the situation to be found in various parts of the world in respect of violence exercised against women and children. Firstly, data provided by international organizations dealing with this problem will be used to examine the most recent bloody cases from India, followed by Afghanistan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Indonesia, Colombia, Mexico, South Africa and Yemen. However, secondly, it will be seen that the situation is no less worrying in closer cultural environments, where problems of gender violence are adapting to progress and social changes, so that the Internet has become a place where women, and especially younger females, meet with harassment. The conclusion will be that in both instances the underlying situation is similar: domestic violence, sexual abuse against children and girls, harassment at work or rape, whether by a partner or a stranger, regardless of culture, religion or economy.

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1. Introduction

Gender violence is the most widespread violation of human rights, taking multiple forms: domestic violence, sexual abuse of girls, harassment at work, human trafficking, and rape by husbands or by strangers, in refugee camps, or as a tactic in war, and others. The list is long and not confined to one culture, religion or country. Thus, for instance, in

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +34 987 291 416.

E-mail address: Oscar.fernandez@unileon.es

the United States, 83% of girls between 12 and 16 years are sexually harassed at school; in Denmark, non-consensual sex with somebody unable to resist by reason of sleep, drugs or illness is deemed abuse, not rape; in Russia, more than 57,000 women are victims of trading in people each year; in Spain 646 women have been murdered by their partners or ex-partners since 2003. The roots of this must be sought in discrimination which has persisted into the twenty-first century, although in some countries it is much more dangerous to be born female than in others.

According to ONU Women (unwomen.org) up to today 186 countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, a positive advance achieved after years of protests, mobilizations and activism. However, much would seem still to remain to be done. Over the years there have been achievements: 173 countries guarantee paid maternity leave; 39 constitutions incorporate the equality of the sexes; 125 countries have laws against domestic violence; 115 countries ensure the same property-owning rights for men and women, but even today 127 governments do not explicitly condemn rape within marriage; 53% of women work in conditions of vulnerability; 50 countries have a lower legal age for marriage for women than for males. In the majority of these countries, women earn between 10% and 30% less than men.

2. Some Examples around the World

India is the biggest democratic country in the world but being a woman there is risky. Oxfam (oxfamintermon.org) calculate that 50 millions girls were never born there because of selective abortion during the last century. Furthermore, 44.5% of females are married before they are ten; in 2011 there were 24,206 rapes, but 231,000 women die each year as victims of sexual aggression. The ONG thus reckons that the real figures for rape are very different from the official statistics.

For instance, on 16 December 2012 the whole world was shocked by the brutal attack on Jyoti Singh Pandey, a twenty-three-year-old student raped by six men in a bus in New Delhi. Days later, she died in a hospital in Singapore from her injuries and the streets were full of people calling for justice and safety. Ms. Phumzile Mlambo - Ngcuka, executive director of ONU Women stated that her death ought to encourage people to do all they could to bring an end to senseless violence against women just because they are women.

India is only one case. In that country there is a sexual aggression every ten minutes, but only one out of every four rapists is sentenced, making this one of the most dangerous countries for women, although not the only instance. The problem reaches pandemic proportions. The figures speak for themselves. Worldwide, as many as 70% of women suffer some form of physical or sexual violence from males at some stage in their lives, mostly from husbands, partners or people they know. For women between 15 and 44 years of age, violence causes more deaths and disabilities than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents and war taken together.

In Afghanistan, 80% of women are forced to accept arranged marriages. One out of every eleven women has a high risk of dying in childbirth because of lack of access to doctors or other health services, whilst 87% are illiterate and have no access to education. Eight out of ten suffer domestic violence, while a raped woman may be accused of adultery by her family. According to the United Nations, although the country has approved a law on the ending of violence, there is still much to be done

Somalia is a country where after twenty years of war many Somali women have been left in sole charge of their children. For them, refugee camps have become authentic traps, where they are victims of attacks and rapes when food is distributed or during the night. It should be added that 95% are subjected to genital mutilation, while no more than 9% receive any medical assistance when giving birth.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo suffered a war which left five million dead at the beginning of the century. Since 1996 the east of the country has been the scene of at least 200,000 cases of sexual violence, mostly against women and girls, with reports from campaigns run by Congolese activists mentioning 1,150 rapes per day; that is 48 per hour. Moreover, 57% of pregnant women suffer from anaemia, with few resources available to treat it.

In Pakistan, women suffer abuses almost before they are born, as there is infanticide of female babies, followed by harmful ritual customs, including acid attacks, forced marriages, even at a very young age, punishments by stoning and other physical abuse. According to the Commission for Human Rights (un.org/right) for this country, every year more than a thousand women and girls are the victims of so-called "honour killings". Domestic violence affects 90% of women, while at work they are paid 82% less than men. In 2011, more than 700 women committed suicide.

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