



A relative shows the photo of a woman who was shot and killed by an unidentified man on her way to work at an assembly plant in San Salvador, July 2013.

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In War and Peace

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

INTRODUCTION

While the use of violence against women and girls (VAWG) as a ‘weapon of war’ has received widespread international attention, researchers have only recently begun to assess its prevalence in peacetime and transitioning societies. The World Health Organization (WHO) finds that 36 per cent of women aged 15–69 worldwide have experienced either non-partner sexual violence or physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner, or both (WHO, 2013, p. 20). Analysts have also increasingly documented the role of guns in the context of intimate partner violence against women.¹

VAWG is a global phenomenon, but its prevalence varies depending on a range of individual, family, community, and social factors whose interaction is not well understood. Among the broadest set of influences on VAWG are social norms that inform how men and women regard and interact with one another. Widely held attitudes about the roles of women in the home and community, the acceptability of punishing women who deviate from expected behaviour, and norms surrounding the use of guns and violence as a means of resolving conflict are among the many factors that influence VAWG.

After a brief global survey, this chapter reviews available VAWG rates (including gun-related VAWG), relevant social norms, and programming responses in Liberia and Nepal, two countries emerging from the long shadow of conflict. The devastating civil war in Liberia killed an estimated 250,000 people; the collective activism of women was an important element in its ultimate resolution (Foster et al., 2009, pp. 3, 19). The Maoist insurgency in Nepal (1996–2006), in which women were prominent participants, left some 13,000 dead (INSEC, n.d.). This chapter presents the following findings:

- In Liberia, women are twice as likely as men to find that a husband is sometimes justified in beating his wife, suggesting that many women have been socialized to accept domestic violence.
- Research suggests that guns are present in only a small proportion of VAWG incidents in Liberia, although surveys tend to underestimate the full role of guns in VAWG.
- In Nepal, the caste system, ethnic and economic cleavages, and the profile of the victim appear to influence the type and prevalence of VAWG. For example, women from marginalized groups are at a notably elevated risk of experiencing some type of victimization in their lifetimes.
- Lingering pre-conflict and conflict-era dynamics surrounding VAWG influence the prevalence and types of VAWG in post-conflict environments.
- At the global level, development sector practitioners seek to change social norms that influence VAWG; these efforts are seen as an indispensable step towards improving the security of women and girls over the long term.
- More research is needed to shed light on how guns are used in VAWG and what norms surround them, including in post-conflict and low-income environments, where research has been limited to date.

This chapter begins with a brief review of the key aspects of VAWG at the global level, paying particular attention to the influence of social norms. It then describes findings from recent research in Liberia and Nepal, presenting data on the prevalence of VAWG and relevant norms. The following discussion touches on some of the challenges in responding to VAWG and reshaping underlying social norms in post-conflict environments. The chapter concludes with a recap of the main arguments and findings.

VAWG IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Key terms and concepts

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines *violence against women and girls* as:

any act of gender-based violence² 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 (UNGA, 1993, art. 1).

This definition encompasses physical, sexual, and psychological violence that occurs in the family or community or is perpetrated or condoned by the state.

VAWG has emerged as a focus area for research and policy-making in recognition that gender-based victimization of women is widespread, follows some identifiable patterns, and is deeply rooted—in the sense that it may be condoned or acceptable according to prevailing social norms. These gendered and normative considerations are built into the term *violence against women and girls*.



The photo of a victim of a double homicide, targeting her and a second woman, is displayed at the reception of her former workplace.
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This study focuses on two prevalent types of VAWG. For the purposes of this chapter, *domestic violence* is violence committed against a woman by her current or former intimate male partner, with whom she need not be cohabiting; it includes acts of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, as well as controlling behaviour that constrains her mobility or her access to friends or relatives (WHO, 2005, p. 13). *Sexual violence* is:

any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work (WHO, 2007, p. 5).

A third type of VAWG, *femicide*—the murder of women and girls because of their gender³—is also considered.

While much of the research on VAWG has focused on intimate partner violence (domestic and sexual), the full spectrum of VAWG is much broader. Among many other forms, it includes violence committed as a result of dowry disputes and under the banner of 'honour', as well as female infanticide, genital mutilation, and selective foeticide.

A global phenomenon

Although violence against women is a global phenomenon, official data shows sizable national and regional variations and often suffers from under-reporting. Because significant social stigma and fear of retaliation are associated with the reporting of domestic and sexual violence in many countries, anonymous surveys often provide a better indication than data derived from health responders and police records (Krug et al., 2002, p. 150). In a compilation of national surveys from around the world, UN WOMEN reveals that 60 per cent of women in the Pacific island state of Kiribati reported experiencing domestic violence in their lifetimes, and 41 per cent of Costa Rican women reported having experienced sexual violence in their lifetimes, the highest rates in each category (UN WOMEN, 2011).

While a valuable starting point for examining the national prevalence of VAWG, compilations such as these suffer from the fact that definitions and survey methodologies vary from country to country, undermining cross-national comparisons (Ellsberg and Heise, 2005, p. 27). A more recent WHO report on representative, population-based studies with estimates for intimate partner violence in a selection of states finds that 36 per cent of women aged 15–69 worldwide have experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence (WHO, 2013; see Figure 1.1). The findings challenge the notion that only developing countries have high rates of violence against women. Indeed, a higher percentage of women reported having experienced physical and/or sexual violence in the high-income countries under review than in low- and middle-income countries in Europe and the Western Pacific.

International studies that apply common methodologies across countries provide a firmer basis for comparisons of VAWG. WHO's *Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women* (2005) compares interviews conducted with 24,000 women in 15 sites in 10 (non-conflict) countries around the world.⁴ The report finds that domestic and sexual violence against women is common around the world. In every research site except one—Japan—'more than a quarter of women in the study had been physically or sexually assaulted at least once since the age of fifteen' (WHO, 2005, p. 83). At least half of all women in the rural communities of Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Peru said that they had been physically or sexually assaulted by an intimate partner since turning 15 (p. 28; see Figure 1.2).

Similarly, the International Violence against Women Survey, which covers 11 countries and territories,⁵ finds that 35–60 per cent of respondents said they had experienced violence at the hands of a man during their lifetime, and that fewer than one-third of them reported their experience to the police. The survey also shows that women victims were more likely to report to the authorities violence committed by strangers than intimate partner violence (Johnson,

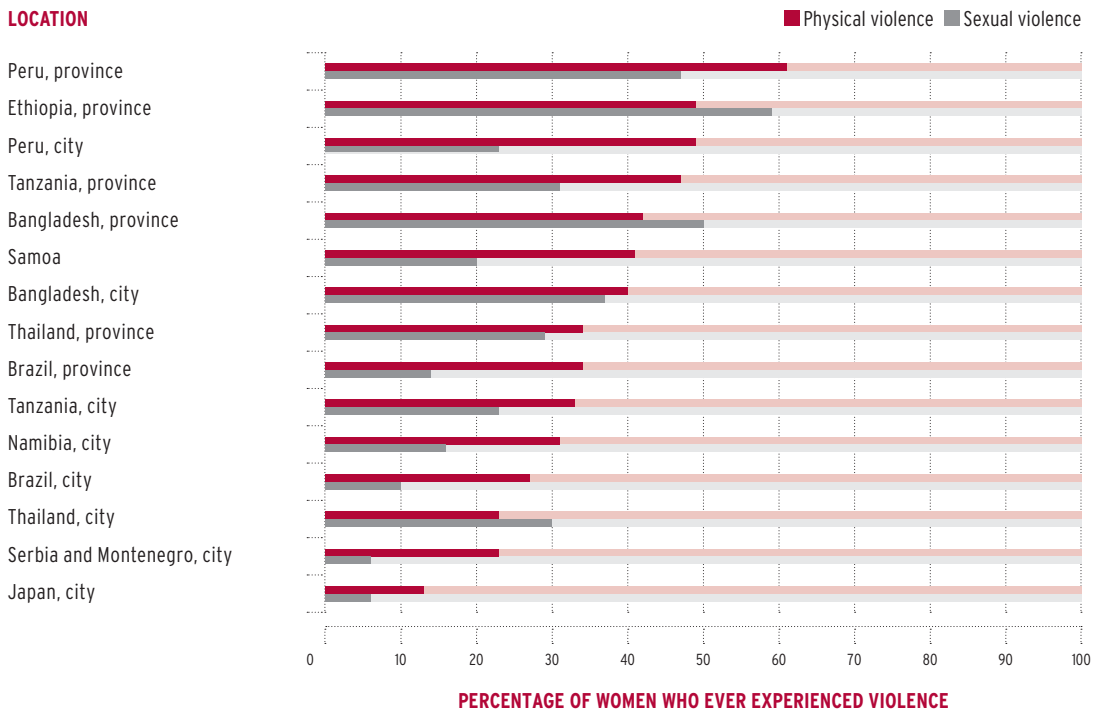
Violence against women often suffers from under-reporting.

Figure 1.1 **Percentage of 15–69-year-old women who report having experienced intimate partner violence and/or non-partner sexual violence, worldwide and by WHO income region, 2010**



Source: WHO (2013, p. 20)

Figure 1.2 **Percentage of ever-partnered women who report having experienced physical violence or sexual violence by an intimate partner, by location**



Source: WHO (2005, p. 29)

Ollus, and Nevala, 2007, pp. 34–9, 137–9). The survey does not ask about guns, and the relationship between weapons and different forms of VAWG remains an emerging area of study (see Box 1.1).

The role of social norms

As is the case with other complex social phenomena, the risk and protective factors underlying VAWG remain difficult to understand. The ecological—or social-ecological—model identifies multiple levels of influence on violent behaviour. At the *individual* level, perpetrators may suffer from biological or psychological factors, such as depression, which influence their use of violence. *Relationship*-level factors may include a history of violence within the family or intimate relationships. The *community* level encompasses influences from within the neighbourhood, workplace, and social networks. Finally, at the *societal* level, norms—embodied in and emerging from historical, social, political, and economic dynamics, as well as laws— influence behaviour (Krug et al., 2002, pp. 12–13).⁶ The ecological model has proven useful in generating typologies of risk and protection factors, yet the relative importance of each ‘level’ and the interaction among levels remain poorly understood.

Social norms have been described as ‘expectations about action—one’s own action, that of others, or both—which express what action is right or wrong’ within a particular social group (Coleman, 1987, p. 135). Norms are accompanied by social rewards, such as approval and prestige, or social sanctions, such as disapproval or exclusion. In the context of VAWG, social norms determine whether domestic or sexual violence may be regarded as normal—or justifiable—in certain situations. Social norms also define the ways in which violent behaviour may be incentivized through social approval or deterred through stigmatization. Based on international case studies, Box 1.2 identifies norms that influence the likelihood of VAWG. Many examples of such norms relate to notions of masculinity that project violence as the prerogative of men.

Box 1.1 Guns and VAWG

Data on gun use is limited for most forms of VAWG other than femicide. Victimization surveys may ask about the use of weapons, for example, but the reported frequency of gun use is typically low, and most surveys do not document the specific types of weapon. Instead, analyses that focus on guns used in VAWG tend to rely on health data on firearm injuries. This approach undoubtedly underestimates the role of guns in VAWG more broadly, as the available health data on female victimization is likely to suffer from systematic underreporting. In countries where the collection of health data is not prioritized, including in many post-conflict environments, these data problems are likely to be compounded.

Recent work on femicide worldwide has generated some general observations on the connections between lethal violence and VAWG. It is now understood, for example, that national homicide levels are correlated with higher national rates of lethal violence against women, and in countries with the highest levels of lethal violence, women are at higher risk of being attacked in the public sphere, including by gangs and organized criminal groups (Alvazzi del Frate, 2011, pp. 114, 130). Moreover, countries with high femicide rates show high percentages of femicides committed with firearms (p. 131).

Guns are almost certainly used in only a small fraction of non-fatal incidents of VAWG globally, but their high lethality makes them a special focus of concern, especially in countries where guns proliferate. One important question that researchers have tried to answer is: Are women at a higher risk of gun-related killings where rates of civilian firearm ownership are higher? Two studies suggest that in 25 high-income countries, women are indeed at a higher risk. In one of these 25 countries, the United States—where civilian gun ownership is high—women were 12 times more likely to be killed with a gun than in the other 24 countries taken as a whole: 1.2 vs. 0.1 per 100,000 (Richardson and Hemenway, 2011). A previous cross-national survey shows similar results (Hemenway, Shinoda-Tagawa, and Miller, 2002).

In lower-income countries and post-conflict contexts, gender-disaggregated data is scarce on both violence and civilian ownership of firearms. Further research is thus required to determine whether similar correlations exist between gun availability and women’s victimization. Indeed, researchers and advocates have pointed to a ‘pressing need’ for gun-related data collection on VAWG (Small Arms Survey, 2013, p. 39; ACUNS VLO, 2013, p. 101).

Box 1.2 Examples of social norms

Social norms that influence the likelihood of VAWG

Domestic violence

- A man is socially superior and it is his right to assert power over a woman.
- A man has the right to restrict a woman's freedom.
- Divorce is shameful, and a woman is responsible for keeping a marriage together.
- A man has the right to 'correct' or punish female behaviour that he feels deviates from social norms.
- Physical violence is a justifiable way for men to resolve conflicts in an intimate relationship.
- Domestic violence is taboo and reporting it is disrespectful.
- A man's honour is linked to a woman's sexual behaviour; transgressions of sexual norms disgrace the entire family, which can justify honour killings.

Sexual violence

- Sex is a man's right within a marriage.
- Sexual violence is an acceptable way of punishing women or putting them in their place.
- Women are responsible for controlling a man's sexual urges.
- Sexual activity—including rape—is an indication of masculinity.
- Sex and sexuality are taboo subjects.

Social norms that support militarized masculinities

- Owning and using guns are rites of passage for manhood.
- Men are the protectors of their partners and families, and this role automatically gives them the right to control them.
- Guns are markers of courage and warrior status.
- Guns are a source of security.
- Guns are status symbols for other men, women, and the community more broadly.
- Men should be tough, strong, and brave.

Sources: Myrtilinen (2003, pp. 1-2); RWAMREC (2010, p. 50); Small Arms Survey (2003, p. 179; 2005, p. 205); Theidon (2009, p. 21); Wepundi et al. (2012, p. 42); WHO (2009, p. 5)

The interpretation of guns as signifiers of masculinity is common to many societies, from the United States to Kosovo and from Brazil to Kenya and Yemen.⁷ The presence of conflict can trigger what some scholars have termed 'hyper-masculinities' revolving around physical strength, control, and aggressiveness, often tied to participation in military or paramilitary activities (Ní Aoláin, Cahn, and Haynes, 2012, pp. 234–35). These forms of violent, militarized masculinities associate manhood with guns and do not disappear with the end of conflict (Theidon, 2009, p. 17; Eriksson Baaz and Stern, 2009, p. 4). A qualitative study on Colombian paramilitaries argues that the line between the 'combat zone' and the 'home' has become progressively blurred, which can translate into increased rates of domestic violence in the post-conflict period (Theidon, 2009, pp. 17, 21).

The average rate of domestic violence in countries where it is highly accepted—that is, where it is normative—is more than double the average of countries where its acceptance is low (OECD, 2013a, p. 7). This correlation remains strong, even when controlling for country income levels or for the presence and quality of legislation that prohibits domestic violence. These findings signal that economic development and changes to laws alone will not reduce VAWG without parallel changes to social norms.

Where domestic or sexual violence is not considered transgressive, armed or non-armed VAWG has become 'normalized' (Moser, 2004, p. 6). A 2013 survey of six Asia-Pacific countries shows a widespread acceptance—including by women—of social norms legitimizing domestic or sexual violence within and outside the home (Fulu et al., 2013, p. 98). A recent cross-national study finds that around half of all women believe that domestic violence is justified in at least one of the following situations: if a wife goes out without telling her husband, if she neglects the children, if she argues with her husband, if she refuses sex, or if she burns the food (OECD, 2013a, p. 7).⁸ The same study shows that women's attitudes vary across geographical regions.

At the national level, men and women's attitudes are broadly predictive of domestic violence, yet the extent to which they are predictive can vary, as revealed by a 2008 review of ten Demographic and Health Surveys (Hindin, Kishor, and Ansara, 2008, p. 56). Even within countries, the acceptability of domestic violence may vary significantly in terms of both the perceived gravity of the transgression

and the appropriateness of the abuse or punishment. As one analyst notes: ‘Violence that is viewed as “without just cause” or is perceived as excessive is more likely to be condemned by women themselves and by others’ (Heise, 2011, p. 13).

LIBERIA

Background

Sexual violence was a key feature of Liberia’s civil conflict, during which rape was widely used as a ‘weapon of war’ (Omanyondo, 2005, p. 11). As a result, the conflict is often presented as the starting point of VAWG in Liberia. Yet VAWG was already routine prior to the outbreak of hostilities and, while many women and girls acted as soldiers during the war or provided support in other ways, the conflict only served to entrench pre-existing patriarchal structures and patterns of violence (Dziewanski, 2012, p. 1). Indeed, pre-war gender inequalities and the marginalization of women, together with the wartime militarization of masculinities, have led to widespread VAWG in contemporary Liberia.

Prior to the war, gender inequality in Liberia already permeated all aspects of social and economic life, with boys being taught hunting and security provision, while girls’ upbringing focused on their domestic and family roles. A rural woman was often treated as her husband’s property; in the event of the husband’s death, the next male relative would inherit her. Even within the marriage, the wife’s status was determined largely by the number of sons she bore (Liberia, 2011b, p. 24). Focus group discussions with women in Margibi County provide anecdotal evidence that pre-conflict VAWG was pervasive, although largely confined to domestic settings and occurring within intimate relationships. According to the focus groups, marital power relations were skewed in favour of men, with women often having very little control over their lives or bodies. As a result, marital rape and domestic violence were common, though often hidden within households (Dziewanski, 2011, pp. 3–4).

During the civil war period, the use of sexual violence spread beyond the domestic realm, gaining ground as a method of terrorizing and dehumanizing women and their communities (Specht, 2006, p. 32). As men were the primary fighters and holders of guns, they were also in a position to oppress and abuse women. Meanwhile, moral and legal standards faded during the conflict—especially with respect to the treatment of girls—and an upsurge in the use of rape ensued (p. 45). In instances of rape, the perpetrator may no longer be shamed by the community, which further exacerbates the vulnerability of women and girls (Sarkar, Syed, and Nzau, 2009, p. 5). The norms acquired during the conflict, along with pre-war gender inequalities, continue to influence post-conflict social norms about rape in Liberia (Liberia, 2008a, p. 54; Dziewanski, 2011, pp. 3–4).

The prevalence of VAWG

The Liberia National Police is the agency responsible for monitoring crime and violence in Liberia. Police arrest data shows that rape and sexual assault rank among the most common forms of violence reported nationwide (Liberia, 2012, pp. 17–18). The agency reported 405 and 324 incidents of rape⁹ and sexual assault in 2011 and 2012, respectively (p. 18). Police capacities to respond to and investigate crime and violence are still low, which contributes to under-reporting. For example, a lack of mobility due in large part to a shortage of vehicles and fuel means that survivors often have to pay for the police to come and investigate incidents (de Carvalho and Nagelhus Schia, 2009, p. 3). These expenses are beyond the means of many Liberians. Police also often lack both investigative resources and the

Marital rape and domestic violence were common in the pre-war era in Liberia.



A poster reading 'rape is a crime' forms part of a campaign to combat human rights abuses, Monrovia, July 2006. © Betty Press/Panos Pictures

capacity to provide adequate security for survivors. This can further contribute to under-reporting, as survivors may hesitate to come forward if their security cannot be assured.

Liberia's Ministry of Gender and Development also tracks data on cases that are reported to the police, the courts, health care and psychosocial services, safe houses, and legal aid providers. It produces monthly and annual reports on the incidence and characteristics of different types of domestic and sexual violence. As a UN fact sheet underscores:

In 2012, the Ministry of Gender and Development reported a total of 2,493 sexual and gender-based violence crimes across Liberia, up from 2,029 cases in 2010. A majority of these (58 per cent) were rape cases, of which 92 per cent or 1,348 involved rapes of children between the ages of three months to 17 years. In the first six months of 2013, four referral hospitals in Monrovia alone treated 814 rape cases, 95 per cent of which were children. In 2012, a total of five child deaths were recorded as a result of rape. So far this year [prior to mid-2013], ten children have died as a direct result of being raped (UNMIL, n.d.).

As noted above, VAWG surveys are generally less susceptible to under-reporting than national monitoring (Krug et al., 2002, p. 150). Two representative surveys that recently measured VAWG in Liberia are the Small Arms Survey's Liberia Armed Violence Assessment—conducted in 2010 and published in 2012—and the Liberia Demographic and Health Survey (LDHS) of 2007. Although there have been considerable advances over

the past decade in measuring VAWG through survey research, differences in methodologies make comparisons challenging, as evidenced by the divergent findings from the two studies reviewed here.

The study conducted by the Small Arms Survey finds that 13.5 per cent of all surveyed households (n=2,894) reported at least one incident of crime or violence, with women and men experiencing similar levels of victimization across all types of crime and violence. When asked specifically about sexual and domestic violence committed against women, 0.7 per cent of households reported an incident in the year preceding the survey—0.5 per cent reported an incident of sexual violence and 0.2 per cent reported an incident of domestic violence in which women were targeted (Small Arms Survey, 2010).

While the Small Arms Survey measures VAWG as a broad category in the context of other types of crime and violence, the LDHS devotes an entire section to measuring VAWG. The LDHS probes the issue using questions about the occurrence of specific types of violence—such as pushing, slapping, and burning. It finds that approximately 33 per cent (n=4,897) of women aged 15–49 who were ever married experienced physical violence at the hands of a husband or partner at some point in the year before the survey, and that 35 per cent experienced domestic violence at some point in their lives (Liberia, 2007, pp. 226–34). Moreover, it reveals that 17.6 per cent of Liberian women aged 15–49 have experienced sexual violence in their lifetimes.¹⁰ Despite its detailed investigation of VAWG, the LDHS warns that ‘the possibility of some underreporting of violence cannot be entirely ruled out in any survey’ (p. 227).

Unlike the LDHS, the Small Arms Survey household survey also measures weapon use in VAWG. It reveals that in approximately one-third (32.5 per cent) of all incidents of reported VAWG, some form of weapon was used. In only two of these instances was a firearm reportedly used; other weapons included homemade weapons, bladed weapons, and blunt objects. Overall, the survey finds that weapons use is less common in sexual and domestic violence than in other types of violent crime. In measuring perceptions of firearms among Liberian women and men (n=2,461), it shows that both groups overwhelmingly referred to guns as a threat to safety (85.5 per cent of women and 79.4 per cent of men) rather than as a source of security (12.0 per cent of women and 16.0 per cent of men) or normal to own (2.5 per cent of women and 4.7 per cent of men) (Small Arms Survey, 2010).

Many Liberian women say a husband is sometimes justified in beating his wife.

Social norms

The LDHS gathered information on men’s and women’s attitudes towards domestic violence. Almost six out of ten Liberian women said that a husband was justified in beating his wife under certain circumstances. Only about half as many men concurred (Liberia, 2007, pp. 213–15).¹¹ It appears that Liberian women, largely confined to performing household chores and childrearing duties from an early age, have been highly socialized into an acceptance of domestic abuse as a normal state of affairs (Lamere, 2012, p. 1). It is not unusual for women to be socialized and intimidated into accepting, tolerating, and rationalizing domestic violence (UNICEF, n.d.). It is not uncommon for women to respond to domestic violence with feelings of guilt and self-blame (Krug et al., 2002, p. 109). Such reactions may reflect patriarchal social attitudes that hold women—rather than men—responsible for abuse.

Survey data also suggests that Liberians will condone rape in certain situations, such as within intimate relationships. A 2008 study (n=1,000) conducted by the UN Mission in Liberia finds that 44 per cent of persons surveyed expressed the view that there was no such thing as ‘rape’ in marriage or other intimate relationships. The report notes that ‘those who believed that rape could not be committed within marriage based their opinion largely on traditional and religious understandings of marriage and dating relationships’, in which a woman is required to submit to her male partner (UNMIL, 2008, pp. 7–8).

The persistence of VAWG is often explained by a lack of capacity in the formal criminal justice system. In Liberia, harsh sentences under the rape law send the important message that rape is unacceptable in Liberian society. But this and other relevant laws are not effectively enforced, and many cases are settled out of court because police and courts often lack the capacity to respond to cases appropriately (Dziewanski, 2011, pp. 20–23). As a result, survivors may be reluctant to bring cases forward, opting instead for informal mechanisms of dispute resolution.

Even if the formal criminal justice system were able to deliver effective access to justice, it would not be the forum of choice for many rural Liberians. Especially in rural areas, the traditional (informal) justice system is perceived as better able to repair damaged social relations and produce reconciliation among the parties involved. Far from resolving the underlying dispute, the formal criminal justice system in Liberia may be perceived as aggravating adversarial relations—if the case reaches court at all (Isser, Lubkemann, and N'Tow, 2009, pp. 3–4). According to a survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of African Economies, of a total of 3,181 civil cases, only 3 per cent were taken to court. By comparison, 38 per cent were heard in an informal forum and 59 per cent in no forum at all. Of 1,877 criminal cases, only 2 per cent were taken to a formal court, 45 per cent to an informal forum, and 53 per cent to no forum at all (p. 4).

Despite its prohibition, the practice of forced marriage persists in Liberia.

In exploring differences between urban and rural VAWG, the LDHS shows that 47 per cent of 15–49-year-old women living in urban areas reported that they had experienced domestic violence at some point in their lives, compared to 41.7 per cent for the same age group in rural areas (Liberia, 2007, pp. 228–30). These figures may reflect differences in attitudes towards domestic violence between women living in urban and rural areas. The percentage of all women aged 15–49 who agreed that a husband was justified in hitting or beating his wife for at least one specified reason was 52.3 per cent among urban respondents, compared to 64.5 per cent among respondents from rural areas (p. 214). Slightly more rural women reported ever experiencing sexual violence—17.9 per cent compared to 17.1 per cent in urban areas (p. 230).

The practice of forced—or early—marriages persists in Liberia, despite being formally prohibited. While the official marriage age is 18 years for women, data from the LDHS shows that 8.7 per cent of girls 15–19 years of age were married, divorced, or widowed (Liberia, 2007, p. 77). Analysis of cases of gender-based violence reported to the Ministry of Gender and Development between January 2009 and May 2011 (n=309) indicates that the majority of victims of sexual violence were 15–19-year-old girls (Dziewanski, 2012, p. 8).

Forced or early marriage can have long-term ramifications as girls tend to take on childrearing and domestic duties at the expense of educational pursuits and, consequently, of opportunities to secure employment and attain independence (Liberia, 2011b, p. 58). Within a marriage, young girls may be subordinated to their older partners in family decisions, such as when to have children and how many children to have (Monekosso, 2001). Further, women who are married according to Liberian customary practices are considered men's property and, as a result, have a limited capacity to contribute to decision-making within the household and are bound to bearing and bringing up children and serving their husbands (CEDAW, 2008, p. 77). Those who break with the social norms dictated by customary authorities may experience violence intended to make them conform (Liberia, 2008a, p. 164).

Programming

The National Plan of Action for the Prevention and Management of Gender Based Violence in Liberia calls for approximately USD 15 million to be allocated to programmes aimed at reducing and preventing gender-based violence in Liberia (Liberia, 2006, p. 8). While funded interventions target both sexes, women comprise the vast majority

of victims of gender-based violence in Liberia. The plan calls for the funds to support psychosocial and economic empowerment; the provision of health, protection, security, and legal services; and coordination activities. The second phase of the Plan of Action (2011–15) increases the budget requirement for programming in these areas to more than USD 34 million (Liberia, 2011a, 6).

In response, significant international aid has been dedicated to programming aimed at preventing and responding to VAWG in Liberia. In a 2010 mapping of armed violence reduction and prevention programming, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates that some USD 16 million has been allocated annually on programmes in Liberia that have some self-identified sexual or domestic violence prevention component (OECD, 2010). International funds are designated for the enhancement of national capacities to prevent and respond to sexual and domestic violence in Liberia, through direct support to government ministries, departments, and agencies, as well as international and national non-governmental organizations working in the area of prevention and response.

One such project was entitled Men and Women in Partnership–Liberia. A four-month initiative funded by Irish Aid and implemented by the International Rescue Committee, it was designed to examine Liberian men’s knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about gender relations and VAWG and to encourage participants to practice gender-equitable behaviour in their homes and communities. The project urged participants to take concrete steps to equalize the balance of power between themselves and the women in their lives. Change was effected through a curriculum of workshops and training sessions aimed at altering social norms around VAWG (IRC, 2011, pp. 2–4, 13).



A community radio station in Sinoe County broadcasts programmes on key social issues, including those related to health, women, and children’s rights, Liberia, April 2012. © Shehzad Noorani/Associated Press

A recent evaluation of the International Rescue Committee project registered positive changes in terms of the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour of participants as well as of their spouses and partners. It found that, by the end of the programme, gender sensitivity had increased among men and that progress had been made towards improving attitudes about gender roles. Men were more likely to agree that couples should make joint household decisions, that women should participate in political discussions, that men should help with household work, that domestic violence was unacceptable in all situations, and that there was such a thing as rape in marriage (IRC, 2013, pp. iv, 2, 16–18). Spouses and partners of participants reported that the men in their lives were violent less often across all types of violence,¹² implying the general success of the programme in promoting gender-equitable social norms as a protective factor against VAWG. Measures of violence indicated a 10–80 per cent change between baseline and endline measures (p. 35).

Further anecdotal evidence suggests that the project has had a positive impact at the community level. Some programme participants reportedly served as advocates for gender-sensitive behaviour, raising awareness about gender issues among men and rebuking instances of domestic violence and sexual harassment in their communities (IRC, 2013, pp. iv, 12).

The International Rescue Committee project was found to increase gender sensitivity among Liberian men.

Despite the general success of the project, a small minority of participants maintained strong opinions against equal gender roles and some men continued to act violently. During follow-up interviews, 10–15 per cent of spouses and partners of the men who participated in the project reported that they had experienced at least one of four types of abuse in the previous month: burning, pushing or shaking, slapping, or punching (IRC, 2013, p. 25). The continued presence of these types of VAWG is an indication of the challenges projects face in changing social attitudes and norms.

The Norwegian Refugee Council's Women's Rights through Information, Sensitization and Education (WISE) project is another example of a prevention-focused intervention that focused on empowering women and men to counter VAWG in their communities. As part of this project, the Norwegian Refugee Council partnered with 28 community-based groups of men, women, and youths across Bong, Margibi, Montserrado, and Nimba counties to carry out activities aimed at preventing gender-based violence in their communities. Many of the participants were already active as leaders of civil society or religious organizations. As WISE Women and WISE Men, the participants were trained to identify risk factors and the effects of gender-based violence and to design and implement advocacy campaigns on these issues. They met on a monthly basis with other community members to conduct discussions about the causes and consequences of gender-based violence, encouraging and empowering others to develop their own strategies for community awareness, prevention, and reduction campaigns (NRC, n.d.).

NEPAL

Background

Though limited information is available on the situation of women in Nepal prior to 1990, it is clear that the civil codes of 1853 and 1963–64 undergirded a patriarchal society in which women's rights were secondary to those of the 'father' as the head of the family (Lohani-Chase, 2008, pp. 39–40; Sangroula, n.d., p. 1). The Panchayat system and 'nationalization' of Nepal, which began in 1962, homogenized class and gender relations to the detriment of more egalitarian indigenous subcultures. Although the democratic movement of the 1990s saw increased activism for the rights of women, VAWG re-emerged and escalated with the eruption of the civil war in 1996 (Lohani-Chase, 2008, pp. 41–44, 46–50, 97–99).



Nepalese activists perform a street drama during a protest against increasing violence against women, Kathmandu, January 2013. © Prakesh Mathema/AFP Photo

Sexual violence was widely used as a weapon of war by all sides during the ten-year civil conflict. In 2004 alone, the media reported on 367 cases of conflict-related rape. That same year, between 1,040 and 1,200 women were reportedly murdered, injured, raped, or abducted (UNFPA, 2007, p. 5). Sexual violence during the conflict was severely under-reported, due to fears of repercussions, repeat victimization, and social and cultural taboos (TRIAL and HimRights, 2013, pp. 5–6).

Besides direct victimization, the conflict also aggravated existing vulnerabilities of Nepali women. This period saw a rise in the number of war widows, single mothers, women heads of household, and ‘conflict wives’ (who married soldiers and were subsequently abandoned when garrisons relocated) (Arino, 2008, p. 7). The war also amplified trafficking of women and girls, particularly for prostitution in neighbouring countries (Hamal, 2007, p. 240). Women were also the primary victims of war-induced internal displacement. In 2007, women and children accounted for about 80 per cent of the estimated 100,000–200,000 internally displaced people in Nepal (UNFPA, 2007, p. 5).

The decade-long conflict also provided a degree of liberation for women. Of the 19,602 People’s Liberation Army combatants demobilized by the United Nations Mission in Nepal, 3,846 were women—almost 20 per cent of the forces. Their inclusion in armed combat challenged reigning stereotypes of women as objects of protection, while also providing an avenue for them to escape their unfavourable social and economic conditions (Arino, 2008, p. 8). The ‘emancipation’ of women was part of Maoist ideology during the war and in subsequent peace negotiations, as

evidenced by Maoist-led campaigns against alcohol and domestic violence, and by the inclusion of articles on women's equality in the peace negotiations agenda and Maoist programmes (ICG, 2005, pp. 15–6). Despite these advancements, scholars have pointed to the exploitation of this pro-women stance to boost recruitment during the war or to secure post-conflict votes; they also call attention to the persistence of discrimination in the post-conflict period (Tamang, 2009, p. 66; Arino, 2008, p. 9).

Girls and young women also actively participated in the conflict as combatants. According to some studies, the majority of female combatants from rural areas were 14–20 years old, suggesting that age played a large role in the selection of fighters (Arino, 2008, p. 9). By one account, nearly one-third of the 3,000 former child soldiers discharged by the Maoist forces in February 2010 were girls (IRIN, 2010). Once discharged, many female combatants (women and girls) faced new economic hardships, discrimination, and even violence for challenging widely accepted social norms (Colekessian, 2009).

Since 2009, Nepal has made efforts to remove legal discrimination against women, particularly through amend-
VAWG remains **prevalent in the** **post-conflict era** **in Nepal.** **ments to the country's civil code on marriage, parental authority, domestic violence, and inheritance rights (OECD,** 2013b, p. 21). Even though the social changes brought on by the war and the post-conflict legislative reforms have provided for a degree of emancipation and higher awareness of women's rights, they have not succeeded in uprooting established social norms that legitimize VAWG and the subordination of women.

The prevalence of VAWG

Although persistent under-reporting precludes a reliable quantification of VAWG in Nepal, studies suggest that it remains prevalent in the post-conflict era. For instance, WOREC Nepal reports a total of 1,473 cases of VAWG in 2012. This total comprises 768 domestic abuse cases and 215 rapes, the two most commonly reported categories of violence (WOREC Nepal, 2012, p. 14). Another surveillance mechanism registered 464 cases of rape and sexual abuse in 2011. Of these, 328 cases were rape and 136 were sexual abuse (INSEC, 2012a, p. 22). Official crime records of the Nepal Police indicate that 557 cases of rape were officially reported between August 2011 and July 2012 (Racovita, Murray, and Sharma, 2013, p. 46).

The 2011 Demographic and Health Survey reports that 21.5 per cent of women respondents aged 15–49 have experienced physical violence at least once since turning 15, and that 9.3 per cent experienced such violence within the 12 months prior to the survey. Moreover, 12.3 per cent of women in the same age category reported that they had experienced sexual violence at least once in their lifetime (Nepal, 2012, pp. 236–38). Another survey on the topic of VAWG demonstrates that more than one-third of Nepalese women interviewed experienced some form of VAWG in their homes (Paudel, 2007, p. 210). The study defines VAWG broadly, considering not only domestic violence and sexual violence, but also psychological and economic violence. Of the women who reported experiencing VAWG, 45.4 per cent said they had experienced domestic violence and 17.6 reported experiencing sexual violence at some point in their lives (p. 214).

Besides direct victimization, women and girls also report perceptions of insecurity. Although men are the primary victims of armed violence worldwide, respondents of a 2011 victimization survey stated that Nepali women were equally likely to fall victim to violence as Nepali men (Racovita, Murray, and Sharma, 2013, p. 42). Female respondents to the same survey reported feeling more insecure walking outside their home at night or in remote areas than did male respondents (IDA and Small Arms Survey, 2012).

Beyond these findings, activists and scholars have highlighted how the caste system, economic status, and personal characteristics can affect the type and magnitude of violence to which women and girls are subjected in Nepal. Women from marginalized groups—such as Muslims, the lower-caste Dalits, and the indigenous Janajati—experienced higher levels of spousal victimization in their lifetimes (Tuladhar et al., 2013, p. 24). According to a 2007 study, more than half (54 per cent) of the Dalit women had experienced VAWG in the home, a higher proportion than in any other group interviewed. In contrast, one-quarter (28 per cent) of Brahmin and Chhetri women and girls had experienced some form of VAWG (Paudel, 2007, p. 213).

Other characteristics, such as place of residence, number of living children, and education level also affect the distribution of VAWG. According to the Demographic and Health Survey conducted in Nepal in 2011, more women aged 15–49 in rural areas reported experiencing physical violence than the same age group in urban areas: 22.3 per cent vs. 19.3 per cent, respectively. In addition, a somewhat greater percentage of women living in rural settings reported experiencing sexual violence at some point in their lives after age 15 than did those living in urban areas (12.9 per cent vs. 10.7 per cent, respectively) (Nepal, 2012, pp. 236–38).

The same survey finds that the rate of victimization increases with the number of children born. Indeed, 39 per cent of women who had more than five living children reported experiencing some form of violence, compared to 25 per cent who had one or two living children. Violence appears to be inversely correlated with the level of education, with 36 per cent of women with no education and 24 per cent of those with just a primary education reporting victimization (Nepal, 2012, p. 244).

Data on sexual violence suggests that girls aged 10–14 are the primary victims of rape (INSEC, 2012a, p. 22). Girls are also at risk of other types of violence in Nepal, such as forced child marriage (CREHPA, 2007, p. 1; ICRW, 2013, p. 7).

Women from marginalized groups experienced higher levels of spousal victimization in their lifetimes.

Guns and gendered attitudes towards firearms

Much of the armed violence in Nepal tends to involve unsophisticated instruments, such as crude or bladed weapons (Racovita, Murray, and Sharma, 2013, p. 54). Nevertheless, gun violence targeting women and girls is also present and sometimes results in injury or death, although it generally takes the form of threats or intimidation within the family, which is seldom reported (Alvazzi del Frate, 2011, pp. 131, 133).¹³ The INSEC Small Armed Violence Surveillance System shows that in 2012 more than 100 cases of domestic violence involved the use of weapons (such as sticks, blunt objects, knives, and firearms). These incidents claimed 26 lives and injured 75 people (INSEC, 2012b, p. 13).

Gun ownership is closely tied to power and social status in Nepal. According to a 2011 study, firearms were perceived by some Nepalese as being the prerogative of powerful men, rather than of the ‘common people’ (IDA and Saferworld, 2011, p. 28). This perception is borne out by the low rate of civilian firearm ownership, which was reported at less than 2 per cent in 2011 (Racovita, Murray, and Sharma, 2013, p. 57).

Asked why they did not own firearms, Nepali women were marginally more likely than men to say they ‘do not like guns’ or that ‘guns represent a danger for the family’. Conversely, more women than men offered social or historical reasons for household firearm ownership: ‘weapons are part of tradition’ or ‘they were left over from the war’. Male respondents opted to stress the protective capacity of firearm ownership and cited ‘fear of the future’ as another rationale (IDA and Small Arms Survey, 2012).

Women’s attitudes towards weapons also shape the general discourse on guns, either by legitimizing their use, or by limiting it. In Nepal, women are generally perceived as opposing the use of firearms. According to a 2012 household

survey, more than 90 per cent of respondents (n=3,048) agreed that women were ‘not at all tolerant of firearm use or ownership’ in their community; in contrast, only about 73 per cent of respondents claimed the same was true of the general population (IDA and Small Arms Survey, 2012). This suggests a generally negative view of firearms in society, particularly among women.

Social norms

In 2012, Nepal ranked 36th out of 86 countries in the OECD’s Social Institutions and Gender Index, which evaluates discriminatory social institutions—such as early marriage, unfair inheritance practices, and VAWG—in more than 100 countries (OECD, n.d.). This ranking suggests a degree of institutionalization of discriminatory norms in Nepal. A 2011 survey of 1,000 Nepali men finds that close to half of the respondents agreed that violence against a woman was justifiable in some cases (see Table 1.1). Similarly, more than half of the respondents claimed that a wife should tolerate violence in order to keep the family together (Nanda, Gautam, and Verma, 2012, p. 27).

At the family level, an imbalanced power relation within a couple and the perception of violence as an acceptable corrective also serve to fuel VAWG. For instance, more than 77 per cent of male survey respondents agreed that the husband or partner had the right to discipline his wife or female partner if she did something he deemed wrong (Nanda, Gautam, and Verma, 2012, p. 27). Even among the police, lawyers, and public health providers, violence against one’s wife is considered acceptable in some situations, as revealed by an attitude survey conducted in 2007 (see Table 1.2). Almost 40 per cent of the survey respondents agreed that wife beating was justified if the woman was rude to the in-laws. Spousal disobedience was also considered as justification for violence by 40 per cent of police respondents, 33 per cent of family planning providers, and 22 per cent of government health service providers (Paudel, 2007, p. 221).

Notions of chastity, honour, and purity shape what is perceived as acceptable behaviour for women and girls; such social codes also prescribe punishment for certain transgressions. Premarital sex is still taboo for many in Nepal, as

Table 1.1 Men’s attitudes towards VAWG in 2011, in selected districts, by type of VAWG (n=1,000)

Type of VAWG	Attitudes that directly or indirectly support VAWG in Nepal	% of respondents who agree*
Domestic violence	There are times when a woman deserves to be beaten.	43.6
	If a woman does something wrong, her husband or partner has the right to punish her.	77.3
	A woman should tolerate violence in order to keep her family together.	50.8
Sexual violence	A woman cannot refuse to have sex with her husband.	52.1
	When a woman is raped, she is usually to blame for putting herself in that situation.	20.6
	If a woman does not physically fight back, it is not rape.	58.0
Son preference	Not having a son reflects bad karma and a lack of moral virtue.	9.5
	A woman’s most important role is to produce a son for her husband’s family.	21.6
	Fathering a male child shows you are a real man.	31.4

Note: * Out of 100 per cent; the remaining percentage disagreed with the statements. The survey interviewed men aged 18–49. The sample included 400 households from urban areas and 600 from rural ones in three districts in Nepal: Saptari, Gorkha, and Dang.

Source: Nanda, Gautam, and Verma (2012, pp. 27, 44)

Table 1.2 Attitudes of health workers, lawyers, and police to wife beating in Nepal (n=331)

Wife beating is justified if:	State health service providers (n=74)	Family Planning Association of Nepal (FPAN) (n=27)	FPAN community counsellors (n=144)	Police (n=38)	Government lawyers (n=23)	Nepal Bar Association (n=25)
Wife refuses sex	12%	7%	15%	11%	11%	10%
Wife disobeys her husband	22%	33%	20%	40%	28%	20%
Wife fails to do her domestic duties	12%	7%	16%	26%	11%	13%
Husband suspects his wife is unfaithful	19%	18%	25%	34%	22%	40%
Wife is unfaithful	32%	44%	33%	55%	44%	43%
Wife is rude to in-laws	27%	44%	32%	45%	50%	40%

Source: Paudel (2007, p. 221)

it is seen to contravene norms of chastity. In this vein, premarital sex is often thought to bring shame on the whole family (Adhikari and Tamang, 2009, p. 241; Samuels and Ghimire, 2013, p. 6). *Chhaupadi*, the now outlawed practice of segregating women during menstruation, draws on a belief that menstruating women are impure and that only isolation will prevent them from contaminating or bringing misfortune on the household (IRIN, 2011; Samuels and Ghimire, 2013, p. 7; Pradhan et al., 2011, p. 59). The behaviour of the wife or daughter is often tied to the honour of the head of household, or the family as a whole.

Social norms that establish the man as the titular head of household can also inscribe a relationship of domination, with marriage granting a husband sexual rights over his wife. Indeed, more than 50 per cent of survey respondents in three Nepali districts said that a woman may not refuse to have sexual relations with her husband (Nanda, Gautam, and Verma, 2012, p. 27). Respondents to a smaller study went so far as to declare that violence was justified if the wife refused sex (Paudel, 2007, p. 221). According to one interviewee, even 'if a [married] woman does not feel like having sex, she has to do it anyhow if [her husband] feels like it' (Waszak, Thapa, and Davey, 2003, p. 83). A recent study reports that about three in five women have experienced some type of sexual coercion by their husband (Adhikari and Tamang, 2010, p. 1). The Nepali government reformulated the definition of rape to include forced sexual acts within marriage, thus criminalizing the practice. However, scholars and activists argue that awareness and enforcement of this law remains limited (Nanda, Gautam, and Verma, 2012, p. 59).

Throughout Nepal, a social preference for boys still finds expression in sex-selective abortions. Some researchers argue that close to 20 per cent of all abortions are sex-selective, although precise information is difficult to obtain due to the criminalization of the practice (Bhandari and Mishra, 2012, p. 47). A 2007 household survey on the perceived value of sons reveals that respondents (n=2,474) almost unanimously agreed that sons were necessary in a family to support the parents in old age, to secure family lineage, and to provide financial support (CREHPA, 2007, p. 12). The same study suggests that women who do not produce sons are often subjected to social opprobrium.

Girls in Nepal remain at risk of being married off as children, as many families continue to view them as an economic liability because of the informal requirement of a dowry provision, and because they leave their home upon



A lawyer counsels two women at a shelter for victims of domestic violence in Chitwan province, Nepal, January 2013. © Traci White

marriage and thus cannot provide for their parents in old age (Nanda, Gautam, and Verma, 2012, p. 7). Though the practice has reportedly decreased, according to Nepal's 2011 Demographic and Health Survey nearly 41 per cent of Nepalese women aged 20 to 24 were married before they turned 18 (Nepal, 2012, p. 68).

Programming

Public authorities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) alike have campaigned for an end to VAWG in Nepal. Only a small number have taken targeted approaches by focusing on particular risk or aggravating factors, such as gun ownership or social norms that condone VAWG. The Government of Nepal declared 2010 the 'Year to End Gender-Based Violence' and formulated a national strategy for the prevention of gender-based violence with a special focus on VAWG (Nepal, 2009, p. 1). In 2011, Nepal was among the first countries to develop a five-year national action plan on the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 (Nepal MHP, New ERA, and ICF International, 2011, p. iv).

A mapping of 36 Kathmandu-based NGOs involved in VAWG prevention and reduction identified awareness and advocacy, prevention, and support services as key areas of work (Asia Foundation, 2010, pp. 8–11). The mapping found that, among other factors, the failure to target perpetrators of VAWG and to address social and cultural taboos that perpetuate VAWG in Nepal was limiting the effectiveness of the agenda. Targeting the different facets of VAWG and their links to social norms holds promising potential for programming in Nepal.

CHANGING NORMS

The previous sections highlight survey findings on VAWG in Liberia and Nepal and on norms that appear to influence the types and prevalence of VAWG in the two countries. While the recent conflicts have influenced patterns of violence in post-conflict Liberia and Nepal—whether by aggravating women’s socioeconomic vulnerabilities or by amplifying trafficking or sexual violence—norms that affect the use of VAWG pre-date the conflicts and continue to evolve. This section discusses general approaches and challenges to changing the social norms that underpin VAWG.

Promoting new attitudes

The importance of changing norms concerning the use of VAWG has become a recurring theme in discussions of femicide and other types of violence against women (ACUNS VLO, 2013, p. 181). At the global level, interventions are challenging the social norms that support VAWG (WHO, 2009, pp. 6–11); these can be integrated into other approaches, such as improved data collection, legal reform, economic empowerment, and increased provision of VAWG response services. Such interventions are indicative of a growing awareness that the reduction and prevention of VAWG depends on changing discriminatory social norms at both the individual and social levels (Population Council, 2008, p. 36).

At the global level, interventions are challenging the social norms that support VAWG.

Efforts to alter norms have been categorized based on their target groups: universal, selective, or indicated. Universal prevention campaigns focus on large-scale awareness-raising and sensitization, while selective and indicated campaigns are both targeted. The selective approach focuses on members of a particular group within a population—such as those who are considered at risk of engaging in violent behaviour—while the indicated approach is directed at individuals who already have a problem (Berkowitz, 2010). The two most common of these strategies are universal prevention through awareness-raising campaigns and selective prevention through small group workshops (Heise, 2011, pp. 14–16).

Awareness-raising and advocacy campaigns, such as South Africa’s One in Nine Campaign,¹⁴ often take the form of decentralized coalitions of individuals and organizations that distribute materials and technical resources (Bennett, 2008, pp. 6–9). Universal awareness-raising campaigns have been employed to address a wide range of health issues, such as nutrition, exercise, smoking, safe sex, alcohol consumption, and drunk driving (WHO, 2009, p. 9).

While awareness-raising initiatives can change behaviour, the effects are often modest. One meta-analysis, which examined results from more than 400 health campaigns, found an average behavioural change of about 5 percentage points in the intervention communities (Snyder, 2007, p. S33). Nevertheless, small changes can have a substantial effect across the entire affected population through a multiplication effect, as when men who change their attitudes influence other men (Evans, 2006, pp. 1207–10).

For group-focused interventions, such as the International Rescue Committee’s Men and Women in Partnership—Liberia and the Norwegian Refugee Council’s WISE project, the mode of delivery, the populations targeted, and the length of engagement vary greatly. At their best, such initiatives are based on evidence, informed by theory, and embedded in a broader programme of sustained intervention and engagement. The example of focus group-based interventions from Liberia provides evidence that interventions directed at particular groups can have a positive impact on changing discriminatory social norms. As shown in Liberia and Nepal, differences in attitudes and behaviour—for example, between urban and rural and among different ethnic and religious groups—often exist within the same country. Interventions provide the opportunity for normative messaging to be tailored to specific groups and presented in extended and interactive formats, unlike broader awareness-raising campaigns (Berkowitz, 2010). Yet if workshops

are one-off events, follow-up or support is limited, and peer educators or staff are poorly trained, the impact on deeply embedded social norms will be minimal (Heise, 2011, p. 16).

Reaching men and their guns

Like conflict-era attitudes, guns remain present after the end of a conflict, and some of them are used in acts of VAWG. The surveys in Liberia and Nepal offer only the tip of the iceberg in terms of data on the roles of guns in VAWG; further research on the connections is needed at the local, national, and global levels. It is clear, however, that highly militarized societies present particular risks for victimization to both men and women.

Thanks primarily to the advocacy of women's groups, the international normative frameworks on small arms control and women, peace, and security have become linked (WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY). This development has gone hand in hand with an increase in awareness among donors, multilateral agencies, policy-makers, and researchers that a gendered perspective to gun violence is necessary. This perspective must recognize 'the different situations, needs, and resources of men and women, boys, and girls' (Geneva Declaration, 2006, p. 2). At the advocacy level, the VAWG component is becoming more prominent in arms control campaigns that try to achieve greater security for both men and women (WHO, 2005, p. 3).

There is also growing awareness of the need for interventions that target men and address notions of men's use of violence and guns as manly or heroic. In a range of countries, research and campaigns have sprung up to address the masculinities component of VAWG. Men are also needed as spokespersons to speak out to other men about the unacceptability of violence (WHO, 2005, p. 93). In addition to countering notions that it is socially acceptable for men to condone violence, these kinds of efforts provide alternative role models of masculine behaviour.

To be most effective, initiatives aimed at changing social norms around the use of violence need to be accompanied by broader development efforts. In Liberia, for instance, despite progress made since the end of the civil war, gender still plays a decisive role in determining access to economic opportunities, intensifying what the government calls the 'feminization of poverty' (Liberia, 2008a, p. 163). In Liberia and elsewhere, women who are economically vulnerable can be forced into work situations where they are likely to fall victim to sexual or physical violence. Further, women continue to have limited access to education, health care, and legal and judicial services, which further inhibits their equal participation in society.

CONCLUSION

The prevention of VAWG depends in part on altering social norms that influence men and women's attitudes to sexual and physical violence inside and outside marriage, as well as socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity. A 'gendered' perspective to VAWG and its prevention is fundamental.

Societies emerging from conflict face particular challenges with respect to VAWG. The society may continue to be militarized in the post-war period and, where fighters used sexual violence as a tool of war, the effects are likely to be felt for some time. Guns may be more prevalent in the post-conflict environment as well and thus readily available for use in gender-based violence.

Research in Liberia some ten years after the official cessation of hostilities documents a society in which women, even more than men, accept physical abuse in some circumstances as normal within a marriage. In both Liberia and Nepal,

young girls are the most vulnerable to sexual violence. In both countries, a wide range of norms persist that condone such behaviour. While such attitudes were reinforced during the wars, widespread VAWG also pre-dates the conflicts.

Efforts to alter attitudes that support VAWG take time. They are at their initial stages in both of the countries reviewed, although programmes such as the Men’s Dialogue Groups and the WISE project in Liberia represent perhaps the leading edge of this type of work. VAWG interventions are likely to be most effective when they are part of a wider multi-dimensional approach that includes legal reform—such as the criminalization of marital rape—and accountability for perpetrators.

The surveys in Liberia and Nepal also highlight some of the challenges of collecting accurate data on VAWG in post-conflict environments and of obtaining better information about the roles that guns may play. Under-reporting remains a key problem, with rates of national prevalence of VAWG varying with—and showing sensitivity to—the methodology used. The further evolution and dissemination of good practices for collecting data and conducting surveys on VAWG in challenging environments could improve not only the quality of data but its comparability across regions. The success of interventions to prevent VAWG ultimately depends in part on the soundness and accuracy of the underlying evidence base. ■

ABBREVIATIONS

FPAN	Family Planning Association of Nepal
LDHS	Liberia Demographic and Health Survey
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
WHO	World Health Organization
WISE	Women’s Rights through Information, Sensitization and Education

ENDNOTES

- 1 Small Arms Survey (2013, ch. 1) provides a survey of the literature on gun-related intimate partner violence.
- 2 In reference to women, the term *gender-based violence* is often used interchangeably with *violence against women*. Both reflect the normative component of violence, that is, the influence of social expectations about gender roles.
- 3 For statistical purposes, this definition is often expanded to the killing of all women, regardless of motivation.
- 4 The study countries included Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Japan, Namibia, Peru, Samoa, Serbia and Montenegro, Tanzania, and Thailand (WHO, 2005).
- 5 The International Violence against Women Survey was an international comparative project with a focus on criminal justice aspects of violence against women. It was carried out in Australia, Costa Rica, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Hong Kong, Italy, Mozambique, the Philippines, Poland, and Switzerland (Johnson, Ollus, and Nevala, 2007).
- 6 A distinction is made between ‘formal’ norms, as embodied in laws and statutes, for example, and ‘informal’ norms, which are unlegislated (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004, p. 727). The former are often the focus of international development assistance on the assumption that legal changes are the first step to changing deeper attitudes and beliefs. Nevertheless, violence against women remains widespread in many places where formal laws may prohibit it, pointing not only to implementation challenges, but also to the difficulty of modifying underlying informal norms.
- 7 Small Arms Survey (2003, p. 179; 2005, p. 211; 2006, p. 302); Wepundi et al. (2012, p. 42).
- 8 The study includes more data for women than men; sex-disaggregated data on attitudes would provide a more complete picture (OECD, 2013b, p. 7).
- 9 Rape includes rape, gang rape, and statutory rape.

- 10 The LDHS does not estimate rates of sexual violence for the year preceding the survey.
- 11 A higher proportion of Liberian women than men stated that a husband was justified in beating his wife when she: burns the food (14 per cent of women vs. 5.1 per cent of men), argues with him (42.7 per cent vs. 20.0 per cent), goes out without telling him (41.9 per cent vs. 16.2 per cent), neglects the children (44.6 per cent vs. 16.9 per cent), or refuses to have sex with him (21.7 per cent vs. 5.8 per cent) (Liberia, 2007, pp. 214–15). The percentage of women who agreed with at least one specified reason was 59.3 per cent, as compared to 30.2 per cent of men.
- 12 Each respondent was asked whether, in the month preceding the survey, her husband: physically forced her to have sex with him (39.4 per cent decrease); threatened or attacked her with a weapon (81.7 per cent decrease); burned her on purpose (20.1 per cent decrease); punched her with his fist (55.3 per cent decrease); slapped her (53.5 per cent decrease); pushed her or shook her (29.4 per cent decrease); insulted her or made her feel bad about herself (37.7 per cent decrease); or became angry with her (9.9 per cent decrease) (IRC, 2013, p. 35).
- 13 In Nepal, firearms comprise pistols, revolvers, rifles, and shotguns, including the craft rifle commonly referred to as *katuwa* (Racovita, Murray and Sharma, 2013, pp. 55–56).
- 14 South Africa's One in Nine Campaign uses a variety of strategies to 'harness the power of print and electronic media to educate and inform key institutions and the public about legal and social dimensions of sexual violence' (Bennett, 2008, p. 6). The campaign's name references a study conducted on sexual violence whose findings show that only one in nine rape survivors reports the attack to the police. Since 2006, the One in Nine Campaign has engaged in ongoing public and media activism (Bennett, 2008, p. 6). Though the campaign serves as a prominent example of awareness raising in the area of VAWG, its activities have yet to be evaluated. The lack of evaluation of these types of programmes is a common problem.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Principal authors

Dariusz Dziewanski, Emile LeBrun, and Mihaela Racovita