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"Violence against women: a statistical overview, challenges and gaps in data collection and methodology and approaches for overcoming them"

Expert Group Meeting

Organized by: UN Division for the Advancement of Women  
in collaboration with:  
Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and World Health Organization (WHO)  
11 – 14 April, 2005  
Geneva, Switzerland

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**Violence against women in France:  
The context, findings and impact of the Enveff survey**

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In France, feminists have been actively denouncing forms of violence against women since the beginning of the 1970's. There have been three main themes to the struggle - 25 0 TD(g)TD(i)Tj 12 0 TD(o)Tj



## **The questionnaire**

Lasting on average 45 minutes, the questionnaire<sup>4</sup> was almost exclusively composed of closed questions. In order to establish a relationship of trust with the interviewee, questions related to acts of violence came after a first section gathering contextual information (family, economic, social and residential information...), and details concerning the woman's life history, her state of health and that of her partner (if she had one).

The questions related to acts of violence were formulated in different ways. Violence was never named as such, only facts – not qualified as violent – were mentioned. Designed to gradually reveal the scenes in which violence took place, this structure to the questioning helped the interviewees to recall past facts and enabled them to talk about painful episodes which sometimes took place a long time ago.

Six sections dealt with the violence experienced in the twelve months leading up to the interview: in public places, at work or at school/

Continuing our work, analogous surveys were carried out in Polynesia (face to face) and in Reunion (by telephone) in 2002 and in New Caledonia (by telephone) in 2003.

Physical abuse	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.5	0.6
Sexual harassment and assault	4.3	2.8	1.9	0.8	2.0
Violence within a relationship ***	<i>n = 464</i>	<i>n = 1,707</i>	<i>n = 1,872</i>	<i>n = 1,865</i>	<i>n = 5,908</i>
Verbal abuse	6.1	4.1	4.3	3.9	4.2
Emotional blackmail	2.7	1.4	2.3	1.6	1.8
Repeated psychological pressure	37.6	26.1	23.0	21.0	24.3
- including psychological harassment (b)	12.1	8.3	7.7	6.7	7.9
Physical abuse	3.9	2.5	2.5	2.2	2.5
Rape and other forced sexual acts	1.2	0.9	1.0	0.6	0.9
(a) Among the three components of this indicator (victimisation, denigration, exclusion) at least one is a frequent occurrence.					
(b) Having suffered more than three constitutive types of psychological pressure, one of which occurring frequently.					
Population concerned: * all women aged 20 to 59; ** women aged 20 to 59 who worked in the 12 months preceding the survey;					
*** women aged 20 to 59 who were in a relationship in the 12 months preceding the survey.					
Source: ENVEFF survey, 2000					

The public space is considered here in opposition to the private spaces of the family or the working environment and includes the street, public transport, sports clubs, restaurants, nightclubs, public gardens and parks etc. The most frequent forms of violence were insults (13.2% of women had experienced such violence in the twelve months preceding the survey), being followed (5.2%), indecent exposure (2.9%) or sexual harassment (being subjected to unwanted physical contact, 1.9%). Physical assault (theft accompanied by violence, physical assault including slaps and blows, armed threat or assault) affected 1.7% of women during the year. Sexual abuse (unwanted petting, attempted rape, rape) were much rarer in the timescale of a year; nonetheless, 0.1% of the respondents had been victims of such abuse.

Within the public space women are not most at risk from the direct bodily harm that is the result of physical violence. Rather it is the different kinds of bullying (insults, being followed, groped, flashed at) that present a real threat and restrict their freedom of movement. All these kinds of rudeness and sexual harassment occur more often in large towns and cities: large towns and cities appear to be unfair and sexist, rather than ultra-violent places. Serious acts of violence – though they occur less frequently – are seen as a constant risk in public places, whether they consist in physical or sexual assault.

At work, psychological pressure and verbal abuse are generally denounced. While insults often come from clients and customers, psychological pressure is more likely to come from colleagues or superiors, and female colleagues are also perpetrators. Indeed, of the respondents who could indicate the number of employees of each sex in their workplace, the majority worked in a largely female environment (55%) and less than a third in a company where there was more or less the same number of men as women. An equal balance of men and women reduced the proportion of all abuse while an over-representation of men increased the manifestations of violence. Physical violence was very infrequent in the workplace (0,6%). Sexual assault (touching, attempts to force sexual acts, forced sexual acts) were rare in the timescale of a year. On the other hand, 2% of women had suffered sexual harassment: they had to cope with unwanted sexual advances, an exhibitionist or a voyeur, they had been groped, forcefully kissed or forced to look at pornographic images.

## Interpersonal violence

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they had been subjected to three or four times more violence at the hand of their former partners than the others.

From the very first analyses it was clear that all kinds of violence were being perpetrated behind the closed doors of a relationship. While blows, other forms of brutality or murder attempts tend to be perpetrated by the male partner, the term “battered woman” as it is usually used does not take into account the full spectrum of violence in relationships. Psychological pressure plays a big part. Such psychological violence includes attempts to control the other person’s actions (demanding to knch





Professional instability and withdrawal from the labour market seem to favour situations of cumulative violence. Male professional instability has an even greater impact on domestic violence. This is very obvious in the case of unemployed women not claiming benefits (16%, of which 8% are “very serious” violent situations) or other non-working women no doubt excluded from the job market. He

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speak out. Giving women a voice is the first condition of the struggle against violence; hence the slogan: “Break the silence” or “The less we speak about it, the more it hurts”. Thus the data from the *Enveff* survey have helped to raise awareness and train a number of social workers.

At the same time, the way in which victims are received has clearly changed. Specific training for the people who the women go to (the police or the *gendarmerie*, people working in health care) has been developed. The notion of “battered women”, like that of women as victims as been at least partially replaced by a political drive which seeks equal access to the law for women and is committed to reducing the denials too often noted when it comes to criminal offences or crimes against women, the reason being that the aggressor is known to the victim – that is, he is her husband or partner. Indeed, organisations that help women who are the victims of violence, public authorities and particularly the *Service des Droits de femmes*, certain magistrates, and policemen bear witness and expose the distance between the legislation against such violence and the still wide dei