

Violence against Women and Girls

Lessons from South Asia

Jennifer L. Solotaroff and Rohini Prabha Pande



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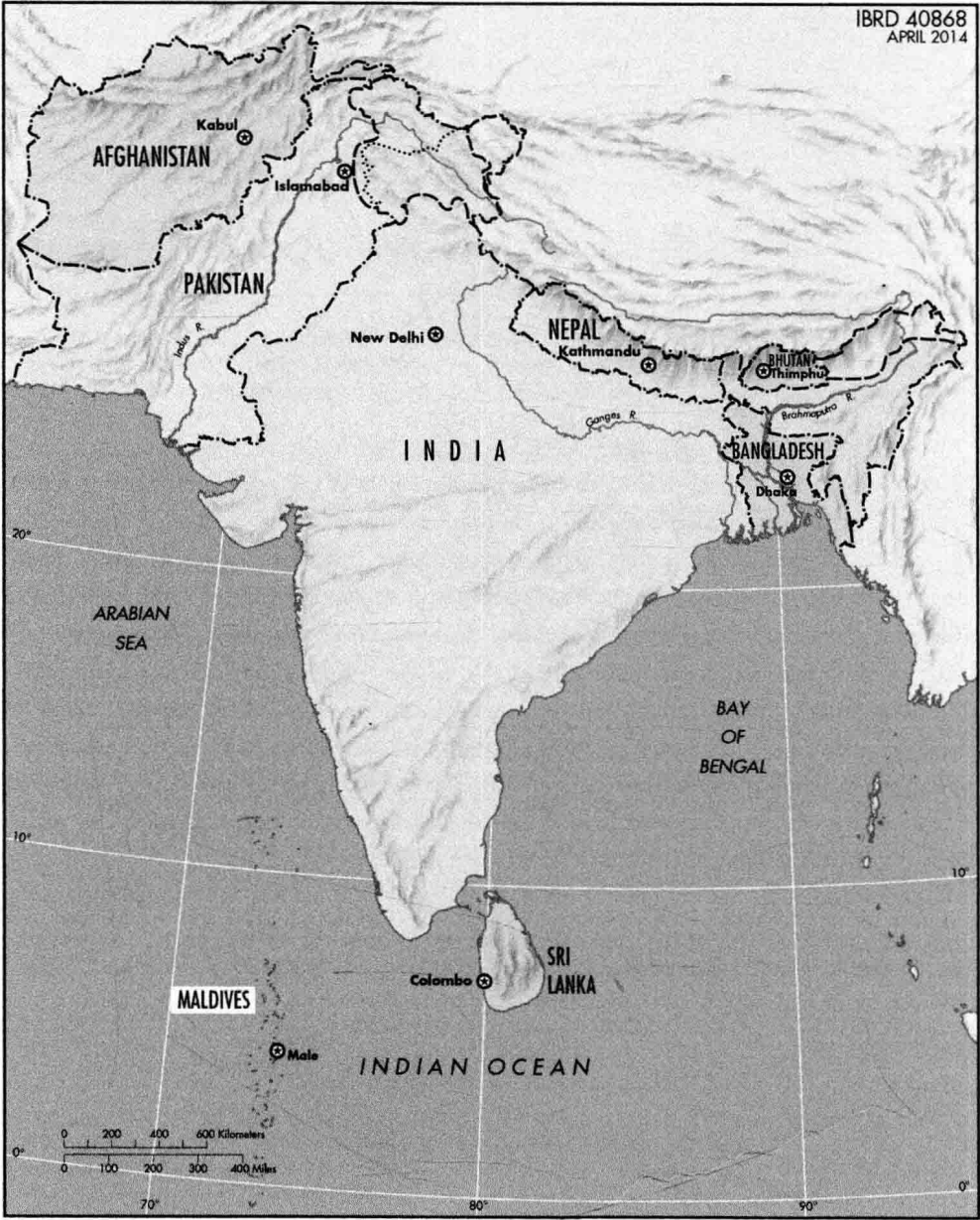
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Violence against Women and Girls

South Asia Development Forum

Home to a fifth of mankind, and to almost half of the people living in poverty, South Asia is also a region of marked contrasts: from conflict-affected areas to vibrant democracies, from demographic bulges to aging societies, from energy crises to global companies. This series explores the challenges faced by a region whose fate is critical to the success of global development in the early 21st century, and that can also make a difference for global peace. The volumes in it convey in an accessible way findings from recent research and lessons of experience, across a range of development topics. The series is intended to present new ideas and to stimulate debate among practitioners, researchers, and all those interested in public policies. In doing so, it exposes the options faced by decision makers in the region and highlights the enormous potential of this fast-changing part of the world.

South Asia Region, The World Bank



Source: World Bank (IBRD 40868, April 2014).

Foreword

For years and even decades, dedicated women and men in South Asian countries have been working to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls, often putting their own lives at risk. Their efforts in the field—together with those of researchers who seek to better understand the drivers of this violence and improve interventions—are the heart and foundation of this study. Its analysis, synthesis of lessons, and recommendations for stakeholders stand on the shoulders of these committed practitioners, many of whom are survivors of violence themselves. Their motivation is to improve the opportunities, rights, and lives of women and girls.

Such violence has economic and fiscal consequences for South Asian countries. The costs are enormous, and they are crippling to economies and societies. As detailed in the pages that follow, the human, social, and financial costs of violence against women and girls severely hamper countries' ability to achieve six of the eight Millennium Development Goals. These costs will continue to accrue unless government, the private sector, media and entertainment, and other stakeholders can coordinate and launch large-scale efforts that complement ongoing interventions in the region to address such violence and legislation to combat it, to varying degrees, in each country. By summarizing these costs and consequences, capturing ongoing efforts to address violence against South Asian women and girls in the field, and collating findings from research on risk factors and evaluations of interventions, this book is intended to serve as a reference and a policy tool. Hopefully it can help those already working on these issues in South Asia to learn more about each other's work and take advantage of synergies across actors, stakeholders, sectors, and even countries. Hopefully the recommendations it has distilled from findings of legal, government, research and other experts in the region can help guide policy makers as they prioritize and fund intervention programs.

Philippe Le Houérou
Vice President
South Asia Region
The World Bank

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This book is the product of the dedicated teamwork of a core team, bolstered by the generous advice and sharing of expertise by a host of individuals working on violence against women and girls across South Asia.

The core team, in Washington DC, India, Nepal, and Thailand, was led by Jennifer L. Solotaroff (South Asia Social Development Unit, World Bank—SASDS), who also managed and prepared this report with Rohini Prabha Pande (SASDS). Tanya D'Lima (SASDS) conducted extensive field research in India and Pakistan and developed case studies and chapter drafts. Piotr Pawlak (SASDS) led field research in Bangladesh, Maldives, and Sri Lanka and developed case studies. Erisha Suwal (SASDS) led field research in Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Nepal and developed case studies. These three field-based staff members were instrumental in identifying and analyzing the interventions discussed in this study. Syed Usman Javaid (SASDS) conducted all data analysis and contributed to chapter drafts. Hiska Noemi Reyes (SASDS) developed chapters, reviewed impact evaluations, and led communications and outreach efforts. Dustin Andrew Smith (SASDS) conducted desktop research, contributed to chapter drafts, and oversaw concept note consultations in Delhi, Dhaka, Kathmandu, and Washington, DC, September 30–October 4, 2013. Gladys Lopez-Acevedo of the South Asia Chief Economist's Office (SARCE) conducted desktop research, contributed to chapter drafts, and provided strategic guidance. Muqaddisa Mehreen (SASDS) supported field research and overall communications in Pakistan. Bilgehan Gokcan (SARCE), Amir Sadeghi (SARCE), and Ayesha Raheem (SARCE) provided research support, and Indira (Mona) Edwards (SASDS) provided technical support. Neelam Chowdhry, Janet Bably Halder, Kirin Gautam, Zahin Takrim Hussein, Maya Krishnan, Sulochana Nepali, Wahida Obaidy, Abdul Qadir, Dechen Tshering, and Binny Verma provided administrative support and technical assistance on communications and event organizing. John (JD) Dawson provided editorial support.

The study also draws on a background paper, “Violence against Women in South Asia and the Limits of Law,” written for this book by Ratna Kapur (2013).

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Executive Summary

This report examines the prevalence and the factors associated with various types of violence against women and girls in South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka). The report also highlights the gaps where intensive research or interventions might be undertaken. Its focus, themes, and organization, as well as its content and analyses, have benefited greatly from consultation, guidance, and direct inputs from experts in the public, nongovernmental organization (NGO), private, donor, and research sectors of South Asia. This report is one component of the World Bank's regional program, launched in January 2013, to attend to issues of gender-based violence in its operations, analytics, and collaborative work with other practitioners in South Asia.

Organizing Frameworks

The report's organizing framework and analysis, described in chapter 1, draw from Heise's (1998) ecological model of abuse. The ecological model posits that violence is a function of multiple factors that interact at various levels of the "social ecology," not only the level of the individual but also the levels of her household, community, and society. We combine the ecological model with a life-cycle approach to capture the fact that women and girls in South Asia face the risk of multiple forms of violence throughout their lives, from birth through old age. We examine violence faced by girls in infancy and early childhood (excess female child mortality and physical and sexual abuse), in adolescence before marriage (sexual harassment by nonmarital intimate partners), and in adolescence and adulthood once married (dowry-related violence and intimate partner and domestic violence). We also examine forms of violence that cut across life stages—namely, sexual harassment of adolescent and adult women, trafficking of women and girls, honor killings, and custodial violence.

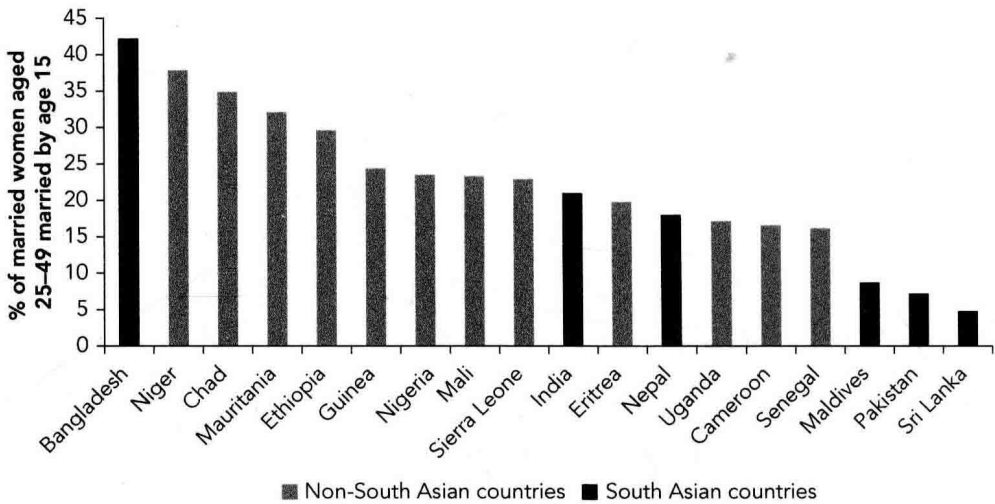
We draw from the fields of feminist research, economics, sociology, anthropology, public health, demography, and law to review the large body of literature on all the forms of violence against women and girls in the region. We analyze data from multiple sources to provide additional information on trends over time and comparisons of South Asia with other world regions. Finally, we map the landscape of interventions to address different forms of violence across the eight South Asian countries and draw promising lessons from their evaluations.

Why Is Violence against Girls and Women in South Asia Critical to Address?

The violence that women and girls are subjected to throughout their lives prevents them from realizing their rights as human beings and as equal citizens. This fact in itself provides an imperative to act. A large literature also investigates the human, social, and economic costs and consequences of this violence. Available data and measurements capture a tiny fraction of the totality of these costs, and yet even this fraction can be a massive drain on individuals, families, communities, and societies. Women suffer direct consequences to their physical, sexual, and emotional health. Violence in childhood and later can also affect girls' and women's abilities to fully benefit from and participate in schooling and employment, thus constraining their lifetime opportunities for an education and a career. Violence not only affects the girls and women experiencing it and their families, but also can spiral across generations. Monetizing the costs of these consequences has proved challenging, and estimates of costs to individuals and households vary tremendously across studies. Still, it is clear that monetary costs are borne because of days lost to work, treatment costs of injuries, or police and judicial arrangements. Finally, violence against girls and women undermines countries' achievements of at least six of the eight United Nations Millennium Development Goals. Chapter 1 further elaborates on these points.

What Does Violence against Women and Girls in South Asia Look Like?

South Asian women and girls face a range of types of violence throughout their lives, as detailed in chapter 2. Starting with the beginning of the life cycle—that is, in childhood—South Asia has the highest levels of excess female child mortality among world regions. Within South Asia, India has the greatest excess female child mortality of all countries for which data are available; Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan also show high levels. Since the early 1990s, however, excess female child mortality has declined in Nepal and Sri Lanka and dramatically in Bangladesh. Excess female child mortality in India, however, has remained firmly and largely unchanged.

FIGURE ES.1 Child Marriage Prevalence: Countries with Highest Proportion Married by Age 15

Source: DHS, multiple years.

Note: Sample size = more than 1,000 in each country. DHS data are not available for Afghanistan and Bhutan.

South Asia also has the highest rate of child marriage in the world, with 46 percent of girls married by age 18. In Bangladesh, more than 40 percent of girls are married by age 15 (figure ES.1). Analysis of data from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) suggests that rates of child marriage are slowing in the region. Qualitative data provide cautious optimism that attitudes toward child marriage may also be changing. Still, a divide persists between individual desires on the one hand and perceived cultural norms and compulsions for early marriage on the other, thus contributing to the persistence of child marriage in the region.

Large surveys may inaccurately estimate prevalence of intimate partner violence. Regardless, such violence is unacceptably high: DHS data from countries whose surveys include questions about physical domestic violence show that almost one-half of surveyed married women in Bangladesh, one-third in India, and one-quarter or more in Nepal and Pakistan report physical spousal violence. A growing body of research also documents that the violence experienced by South Asian women at the hands of their husbands is frequent, severe, and of multiple forms. Married adolescents may be particularly vulnerable. Much of the marital abuse that women suffer likely occurs in the first few years of marriage. Given the early average age at marriage in much of South Asia, this finding means that a great deal of this violence is experienced by married adolescents, who may be more powerless than older married women to defend themselves. Significant proportions of men and women accept or condone spousal violence against women for many behaviors; however, some research suggests that attitudes toward domestic marital violence are not unequivocally supportive of violence, but vary by the reason and the extent of violence.

Data remain limited for several aspects of intimate partner violence in South Asia, including forms of violence other than physical and sexual—such as economic violence or controlling behavior—and intimate partner violence faced by never-married women or older women. Research on domestic violence perpetrated by other household members is limited for women at all ages and for divorced or widowed women. Reliable data are also lacking to estimate prevalence or trends in (a) physical and sexual abuse against girls, (b) sexual harassment, (c) trafficking, (d) honor killings, and (e) custodial violence. Several small-scale quantitative and qualitative studies suggest, however, that these forms of violence are persistent across many parts of South Asia and require further research.

Why Is Violence against Women and Girls in South Asia So Persistent?

Violence against women and girls in South Asia plays out in a historical, social, and political context where structures and functioning of government, social institutions, and the law all may contribute to its persistence, as analyzed in detail in chapter 3. In recent years, governments have been increasingly active in implementing policies that may contribute to preventing violence and that strengthen support services for those who experience violence. Yet, many policies and services continue to reflect a gender bias. Religious institutions and norms across the region also continue to reinforce unequal gender relations.

All eight countries in South Asia have specific constitutional provisions addressing gender equality and have signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, albeit some with reservations. All countries also have some legal protection against several forms of violence, including female infanticide, child marriage, and intimate partner violence. Yet, legal systems contend with significant barriers to reform as well as with structural deficiencies that inhibit women's access to justice: implementation is poor, and legal awareness is limited.

A major barrier to needed legal and social reform is the continued lack of recognition that women and girls are first and foremost citizens, individuals who should be accorded the same rights and privileges as men and boys. A perception of women as victims or subjects—rather than as individuals with rights to their own identities, sexualities, and other forms of self-expression—has circumscribed the social and legal provisions for women's safety. This perception perpetuates the patriarchal belief that female household members must be protected by men and in ways that ensure female conformity to roles defined by traditional, patriarchal norms.

Patriarchy in South Asia also creates other circumstances that perpetuate social norms conducive to continuing violence against women and girls. Most critically, both women and men are prescribed numerous attributes that are tied directly to feminine and masculine social identities and enforced not only by men but also by women—for example, by mothers and mothers-in-law. The result is a cycle of violence against women and girls.