

A World Health Organization study reports domestic violence is widespread, and has serious implications for women's health. This study, for the first time, compares data gathered in developing, as well as developed countries. It finds violence operates similarly in rich and poor countries alike. Surveys were carried out in 10 countries: Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Japan, Peru, Namibia, Samoa, Serbia-Montenegro, Thailand and Tanzania.

The World Health Organization says the home is not a safe place for many women in this world. WHO surveyed 24,000 women of reproductive age in 10 countries. It concludes partner violence is the most common form of violence in women's lives. It says domestic violence is far greater than assaults or rape by strangers, acquaintances or any other perpetrators.

The study says women who suffer physical violence experience serious health consequences. Henriette Jansen, the epidemiologist on the report, says health problems include injury, emotional distress, suicidal thoughts and attempts and physical symptoms of illness.

"And, another finding that was very important, that pregnancy is also not a protected time in a woman's life," said Dr. Jansen. "Many women were also beaten in pregnancy, and up to a quarter to a half of those women got blows and kicks in their abdomen. So, miscarriages and abortions were a real consequence of violence."

The study says violence operates similarly in both the industrial and developing worlds. It is more prevalent in rural than in urban areas. The study says domestic violence is greatly underreported. It remains hidden, because women feel ashamed, and find it difficult to speak openly.

Dr. Jansen says it is very common for women who are beaten to believe they deserve it.

"Women in developing countries were, in general, more inclined to think that men had reasons that justified beating their wives. But, then, across all settings, developed and developing countries, we did find that women who were abused, had more of these normative beliefs that men were justified to beat women, than the women who did not report abuse," she added.

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