5 Violence against Women

Violence against women and the threat of violence are main barriers to women's empowerment and equal participation in society. However, they often go unnoticed and undocumented and therefore unresolved. When stress and violence increase in society in general, as they have in the transition region, women's safety in the home, workplace and community is often seriously affected.

The UN Declaration on Violence against Women, adopted in 1993, defines violence against women as encompassing "any act of gender-based violence 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 deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life". Violence against women has particular characteristics and therefore requires particular responses. The gender dimensions of violence are explicit; for example, women are at risk more in their own homes than on the street, and often violence against women takes the form of sexual assault.

Violence is a serious violation of the human rights of women and girls, and it takes a heavy toll on physical and mental health. The World Bank estimates that rape and domestic violence account for 19 percent of the total disease burden among women aged 15-44 in industrialized countries. This means that, for women, one of every five years of healthy life lost because of injury, disease or premature death is attributable to violence.

Despite the official rhetoric of gender equality, there was a notable silence about violence against women under communism. Because of the lack of public discourse, autonomous media and civilian associations, there was little independent space in which to raise the issue. During the transition period, violence against women also appears to have gone largely undocumented as a specific issue, though evidence points to a high incidence in all countries for which some information is available. The changes triggered during the transition can be expected to increase violence of all forms in these societies, including violence against women. Change, however, also offers an historic opportunity to raise the issue and tackle the problem at its roots. The opening up of these countries to democratic practices will allow previously taboo subjects, such as violence against women, to be addressed.

One of the challenges in analysing data on violence in general and on violence against women in particular is the difficulty of measuring the level and degree of violence. Some concepts, such as those of emotional abuse and sexual harassment, are difficult to define and therefore lead to measurement problems. Even when a clear definition is available, some forms of violence frequently go unreported, as is the case with domestic violence. Analysis, therefore, has to combine administrative data with a variety of other information. This supplemental information is often based on small and unrepresentative surveys and should be considered with caution. The quantitative analysis in this chapter combines different types of information and less rigorous data than those provided in other chapters, and the data limitations should be borne in mind.

However, data limitations should not block initiatives to deal with violence against women. Rather, they should prompt a concerted effort to define and identify the forms of violence against women, especially within criminal law, and to improve the collection of data related to violence, especially gender-disaggregated evidence. The Platform for Action signed at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, declared the importance of developing statistical measurements of women's lives as a tool for promoting women's equality. Certainly, in many Western countries where the issue of violence against women has a higher profile, the greatly enhanced collection of data on violence in women's lives has been an essential step in describing the scope and nature of this serious problem and in helping to shape the allocation of efforts and resources to eliminate this social disease.

In this chapter, Section 5.1 reviews the different types of violence women around the world face and the wide-ranging consequences. Section 5.2 presents evidence on the major types of violence women in the region covered by this Report experience in their daily environments. Section 5.3 focuses on new types of violence against women that have arisen during the transition period in some countries – violence against women in war and trafficking of women for sexual exploitation. Section 5.4 looks at the opportunities for addressing violence against women in the region. The Conclusions review the findings of the chapter and the prospects for reducing and preventing violence.

■

5.1 Violence has Many Faces and Many Consequences

Table 5.1

Types of violence against women: a life-cycle approach

Infancy	Female infanticide; emotional, sexual and physical abuse; differential access to food and medical care.
Girlhood	Child marriage; female genital mutilation; sexual and psychological abuse by relatives or strangers; differential access to food and medical care; child prostitution and pornography.
Adolescence	Dating and courtship violence; economically coerced sex; incest; sexual abuse in the workplace; sexual harassment; rape, marital rape; forced prostitution and pornography; trafficking; forced pregnancy.
Reproductive age	Abuse by intimate male partners, marital rape; dowry abuse and murder; partner homicide; psychological abuse; sexual abuse in the workplace; sexual harassment; rape; forced prostitution and pornography; trafficking; abuse of women with disabilities.
Elderly	Sexual, psychological and physical abuse.

Source: Adapted from Heise, Pitanguy and Germain (1994).

Table 5.2

Prevalence of violence against women in the world

Africa	
Tanzania	60% physically abused by partners
Zambia	40% beaten by partners, and another 40% mentally abused
Continent-wide	About two million girls genitally mutilated each year
South Asia	
Sri Lanka	60% beaten
India	More than 5,000 women killed each year over dowries
East Asia and Pacific	
Republic of Korea	38% beaten by partners
Malaysia	39% beaten by partners
Latin America and Caribbean	
Mexico	57% victims of violence in urban areas (44% in rural areas)
Guatemala	49% abused
Colombia	20% physically abused, 33% psychologically abused, 10% raped by their husbands
Industrial countries	
Japan	59% physically abused by partners
United States	40% abused, 31% physically abused
New Zealand	20% physically abused by partners
Canada	25% physically abused by partners
World	An estimated 60 million women are missing from world population statistics due to premature deaths linked to various forms of abuse and violence

Source: Adapted from Heise, Pitanguy and Germain (1994).

Violence against women has many faces around the world. These range from female infanticide and the custom of genital mutilation at puberty to domestic violence in marriage and elder abuse. Table 5.1 presents the different types of violence experienced by women from infancy to old age. Violence against women is distinguished by the fact that, as in domestic abuse and forced prostitution, it is often chronic and prolonged.

A recent international review of evidence offers a chilling picture of high levels of gender violence in many countries. Table 5.2 provides selected data from the survey, illustrating that violence against women is widespread and crosses all cultural, social, economic, class, religious, and regional boundaries. For example, in countries as different as Zambia and Guatemala, Sri Lanka and Japan, the percentage of women abused by their partners is similarly high.

In every country where domestic violence has been studied, it has been found to be a massive problem, with between one-quarter and more than half of women reporting physical abuse by current or former partners. Surveys estimate that 50-60 percent of women who experience physical violence by their partners are also sexually abused by them. An even larger percentage has been subjected to ongoing emotional and psychological abuse.

Certain forms of violence that have cultural and economic roots are not so common in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. For instance, sex-selective abortion, female infanticide and systematic differential access to food or medical care (whereby girls are fed and medically treated less than boys) seem to be non-existent in the region. Available data also indicate there is no significant female "deficit" in population numbers – the "missing millions" phenomenon observed in parts of South and West Asia, China and North Africa, as described in Box 5.1. There are, however, other factors present in much of the transition region that can aggravate already high levels of violence against women, such as alcohol abuse, which is frequently associated with violence. New forms of violence against women in the region include violence against women during and after armed conflicts, which have been numerous since the beginning of transition.

All violence has a lasting impact, but some forms of violence are especially likely to have long-term implications that predispose women to

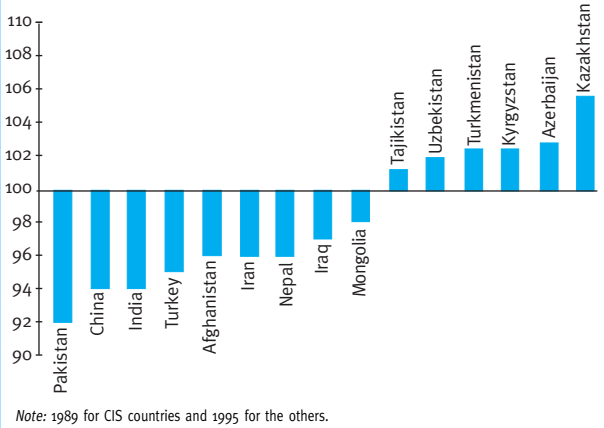
Box 5.1

The phenomenon of the "missing millions"

The level of violence against women is so extreme in some parts of the world that millions of women are reported to be "missing" from overall population numbers. In the world, an estimated 60 million women are missing from population statistics, that is, there are 60 million fewer women alive than can be expected on the basis of the ratio of females and males at birth and their respective health risks. (See Table 5.2.) This "deficit" phenomenon is observed in several countries on the rim of the Central Asian part of the transition region, including India, Afghanistan, Iran, China, or Pakistan. However, it does not seem to be showing up in the Central Asian countries formerly part of the Soviet Union. Figure 5.1 shows that women in this sub-region outnumber men, the opposite of the situation in neighbouring countries to the south.

Tracking the welfare of children after birth shows no evidence that girls are given less access to food or medical care. Large health surveys of children aged 0-3 in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan reveal that neonatal, post-neonatal and child mortality rates are lower for girls than for boys. (This is a standard result due to the biological edge in survival that females have over males.) The surveys also show that girls' anthropometric status and anæmia status are better than those of boys.

It is, however, important to note that other forms of violence may be on the rise in Central Asia. Some traditions, revived since independence, may be used to excuse and justify violence against women. The practice of "bride stealing" is reportedly increasing in Kyrgyzstan – 64 bride abductions were recorded in the justice system over 1994-96, and some estimates suggest one in five marriages among ethnic Kyrgyz involves bride stealing, though it is not always involuntary. Young women sometimes have little to say in the choice of a husband and face strong pressure to bear children. If a women does not have a child shortly after marriage, she may feel forced to dissolve the marriage. There also appears to be substantial inconsistency between the legal rights of women in marriage and the de facto enforcement of such rights.



Note: 1989 for CIS countries and 1995 for the others.

Figure 5.1

The number of women as a percent of the number of men

Sources: CIS from Statistical Annex, Tables 1.1 and 1.2; others from World Bank (1997a).

secondary health risks. For example, sexual abuse during childhood can lead to complications during later pregnancies, and violence during childhood or adolescence can increase the risk of suicide, depression, or substance abuse during adulthood. Table 5.3 presents the range of physical and mental health consequences of violence against women, a grim spectrum that runs from chronic depression to immediate death. Many of the mental and physical injuries caused by violence are enduring and impose a heavy burden on women throughout their lives.

The health consequences of violence against women create a ripple effect of losses that acts not only on the victims, but also on their families and children and society at large. Surveys have shown that women victims of violence have lower educational attainment and lower earning capacity and are more likely to become isolated and develop symptoms of depression.

The consequences for children start early. Victims of violence tend to deliver babies with lower birthweights and higher risks of prematurity and complications. Children who are exposed to abuse between their parents are also at risk of being assaulted and of developing emotional and behavioural problems. It is important to note that patterns of violence and abuse pass from one generation to the next, with children who witness or who experience violence more likely to become perpetrators or victims of violence as adults. Also, by negatively affecting

Table 5.3

Health consequences of violence against women

Mental health	Depression
	Fear
	Anxiety
	Low self-esteem
	Sexual dysfunction
	Eating and sleeping disorders
	Obsessive-compulsive disorder
	Post-traumatic stress disorder
	Suicide
Physical health	Death
	Partial or permanent disabilities
	Injury
	Headaches
	Asthma
	Irritable bowel syndrome
	Alcohol or drug abuse
	Destructive health behaviours (smoking, unprotected sex)
Reproductive health	Unwanted pregnancy
	Gynæcological problems
	Sexually transmitted diseases
	Miscarriage
	Low birthweight
	Pelvic inflammatory disease
	Chronic pelvic pain
	Maternal mortality
	Maternal morbidity

the capabilities of its victims, violence against women lowers the economic and psychosocial resources available for the care of children and other household members, including violent partners.

The economic cost to society is also substantial. Violence places a high cost burden on the health care system for the treatment of the physical and mental health consequences. It reduces the contribution of women at work through lower productivity or more frequent absence from jobs. Violence against women is thus a major barrier to the economic and social development of women. ■

5.2 Violence in the Daily Lives of Women

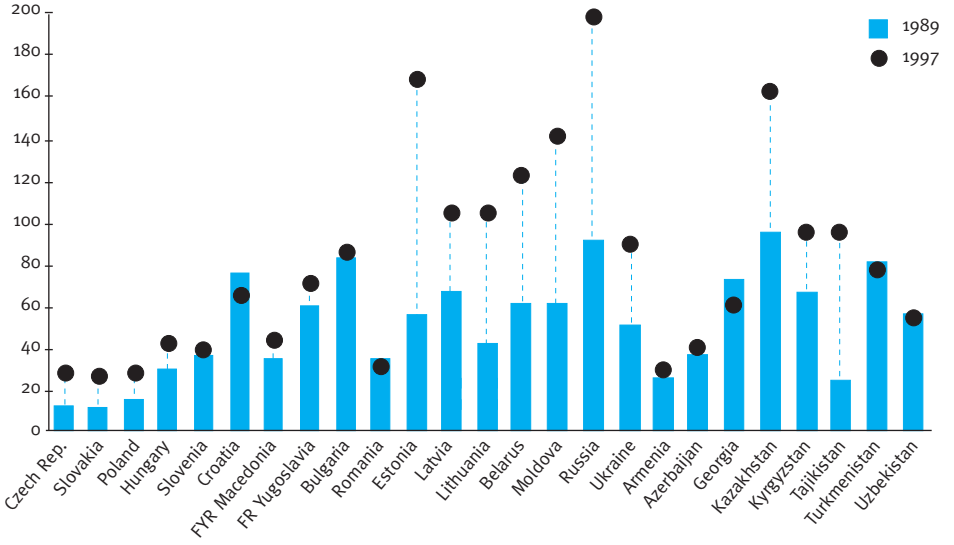
The transition period has been characterized by many factors that may influence the level of violence against women. The increase in poverty, unemployment, hardship, income inequality, stress, and adult mortality and morbidity that is documented in previous chapters suggests that there is a rise in violence in society, including violence against women. These factors can also indirectly raise women's vulnerability by encouraging more risk-taking behaviour, more alcohol and drug abuse, the breakdown of social support networks, and the economic dependence of women on their partners.

The general level of violence appears to have grown significantly during the transition in most of the countries surveyed. This is in part due to the collapse of regimes that imposed tight controls on any activity or association outside the home. Weakened public-sector control may contribute to a rise in crime rates, including offences such as property crime or violence in the street. The total reported crime rate has more than doubled in seven countries and has soared by more than 50 percent in another six countries of the region during the transition. (See Statistical Annex, Table 9.1.) The sharpest increases have taken place in Central and Southeastern Europe, the Baltics and western CIS. Part of the rise is attributable to the growing prevalence of economic and property crimes. However, a similar trend is observed in violent crimes, particularly in western CIS and the Baltics. (The fourth Regional Monitoring Report pointed out the significant increase in crimes committed by and against young persons.)

Definitions of crimes and capacities to capture data vary greatly from one country to the next. Figure 5.2 therefore presents data on homicides, a form of violence that is commonly recognized as a crime, easily defined and usually reported. The evidence shows that the homicide rate has risen in most of the region during the transition. (It has remained stable in Slovenia, Bulgaria and Uzbekistan and fallen in Croatia, Romania and Turkmenistan.) The homicide rate is much higher and has grown dramatically in the Baltics, western CIS and three Central Asian countries. The sharpest increases have taken place in Tajikistan (almost fourfold) and Estonia (threefold), but the highest level of homicides is found in Russia, with 200 homicides per million inhabitants in 1997, a total of almost 30,000 murders that year. The prevalence of homicides is much higher in the region, especially in the former Soviet Union, than in Western Europe. In 1995, the standardized death rate from homicide was about 12 deaths per million inhabitants in the European Union, compared to an average of 30 in Central and Eastern Europe and 219 in the former Soviet Union. The death rate from murders in the former Soviet Union was more than twice the rate in the United States in the mid-1990s, although both were at similar levels in the late 1980s.

The rise in reported crime and homicide, the pinnacle of violent behaviour, strongly suggests that all kinds of violence have increased in these societies, including violence against women. Strikingly, however, the number of rapes reported has fallen over the period of transition in all countries for which information is available, with the exception of Estonia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In the context of higher

Figure 5.2



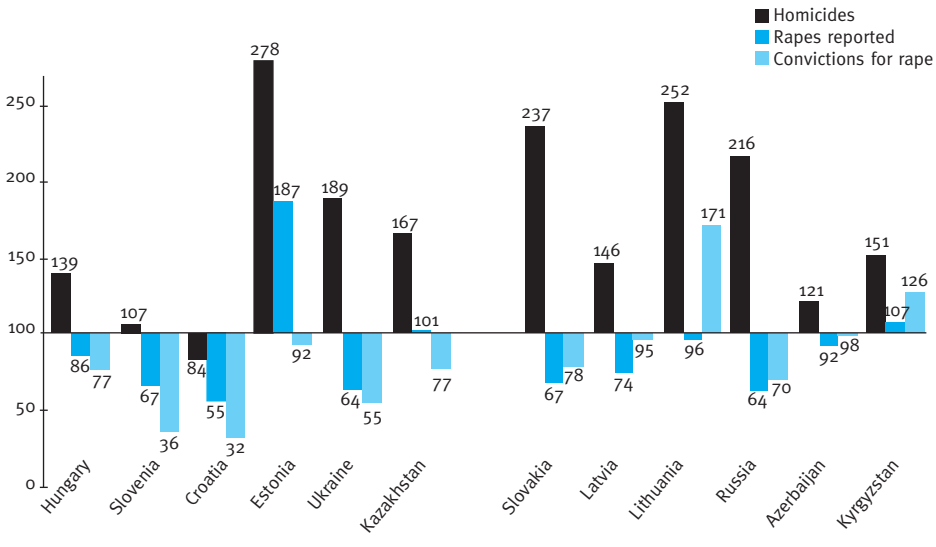
Recorded homicide rates, 1989 and 1997 (per million individuals)

Sources: MONEE project database; CIS Stat (1998a) for Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Note: Alternative sources show an increase in Georgia (CIS Stat, 1998a). Starting year is 1991 for FYR Macedonia and Bulgaria and 1990 for Georgia and Romania. End year is 1996 for Armenia.

crime rates, particularly rates of violent crime, this decline is conspicuous. It likely reflects a reduced reporting of rape rather than a decrease in the actual number of rapes. This trend therefore merits concern and further investigation.

Comparing the number of rape cases reported and the number of convictions provides another measure of the capacity of law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute crimes successfully. Figure 5.3 shows changes since 1989 in the number of recorded homicides, reported rapes and rape convictions in selected transition countries. In all countries, the number of rapes reported rose less or declined more than the number of homicides reported. Comparing the number of rapes reported with the number of convictions, the graph presents two different patterns. In the six countries on the left, the number of convictions for rape fell more than the number of cases reported. (Convictions also decreased in Estonia and Kazakhstan, while the rapes reported increased.) In the case of Hungary, there were 39 percent more homicides, but 14 percent fewer rapes reported and 23 percent fewer rape convictions. For the six countries on the right, in contrast, the number of rape convictions rose more or declined less than the number of rapes reported, indicating the greater success of the authorities in concluding cases.



Note: End year is 1996 for Ukraine.

Figure 5.3

Change in the number of recorded homicides, reported rapes and convictions for rape, 1989-97
(1989=100)
Sources: MONEE project database; CIS Stat (1998a).

The under-reporting of sexual assault is not uncommon in most countries of the world. It is generally estimated that the number of rapes (including rapes within marriage) is 5-10 times higher than the number reported. Reported crimes therefore represent only the tip of the iceberg of crime. Low reporting can reflect fear of publicity and fear of damage to the woman's reputation, fear of reprisal, reluctance to repeat and psychologically re-experience the incident, and lack of confidence in the abilities of law enforcement authorities. Various surveys suggest that trust in the ability and capacity of police forces to solve cases is often low.

A survey on crime in Russia shows that cases of crime reported to police are not always processed. It estimated that 15 percent of reported rapes were concealed by law enforcement authorities who did not file or follow up on complaints. Authorities tended to explain such omissions as the result of insufficient manpower or attempts to give the impression of police effectiveness.

The growth in violence – compounded by the general increase in the workload of law enforcement agencies and, often, a decline in the number, quality and motivation of police staff – raises serious concerns about the capacity of the state to tackle the issue of violence against women. When violence against women that is committed outside the home is not addressed, it can be expected that domestic violence – a complex and largely hidden issue – is even less of a concern for authorities.

Domestic violence revealed

Domestic violence is violence that takes place at home or within the family. It presumes a close relationship between the victim and the offender. It includes emotional abuse and neglect, as well as sexual and physical violence. Although domestic violence can involve both women and men as perpetrators or victims, the focus here is on violence against women.

Domestic violence is not a new phenomenon in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. However, the issue was largely ignored until recent years. Reports surveying human rights conditions in the region characterize the problem of domestic violence as widespread. Authoritative data on domestic violence are, however, generally non-existent. Available crime statistics from official sources are unlikely to capture the extent of this "invisible" form of violence. Ad hoc surveys are often the only reliable sources of information available, but they frequently provide only a snapshot of one place at one time and rely on different concepts and measures. Hence, they cannot be used to draw comparisons across countries or over time. However, survey results in transition countries in most of the sub-regions clearly suggest the problem is not limited to certain areas of the region.

A representative survey of pregnant women carried out in some Western European countries, the Czech Republic and Russia in 1990-92 provides estimates of the levels of violence experienced by pregnant women. Pregnancy appears to be a period of particular vulnerability for women, as their partners react, sometimes violently,

to the changes it brings. Figure 5.4 presents survey results for three areas – Avon, United Kingdom, Yaroslavl, Russia, and Brno and Znojmo, the Czech Republic. It shows that 6-7 percent of pregnant women in all three areas reported suffering emotional cruelty by their partners or spouses. Physical abuse was higher in the case of the two transition countries, with almost one in 10 women reporting physical abuse during pregnancy in the Czech centres, and one in 25 in Yaroslavl.

A survey carried out among 2,990 women aged 15-45 in Latvia in 1997 provides evidence on the prevalence of violence against women in the Baltics. Figure 5.5 shows that 7 percent of respondents reported having been victims of sexual violence, 9 percent, of physical violence, and 19 percent, of psychological violence. It is important to note that most of these victims did not seek professional help. Only 10 percent visited a psychotherapist, and only 8 percent went to a doctor or the police. This underlines the lack of trust in, and perhaps accessibility of, institutional and social supports.

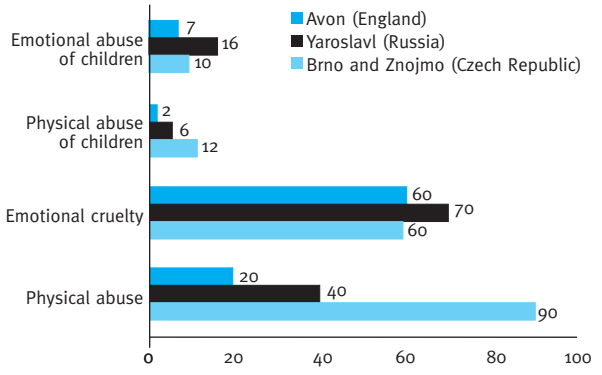
A 1996 survey of 970 women in Moscow offers a detailed picture of domestic violence in the Russian capital. Figure 5.6 shows that 11 percent of married women and 13 percent of divorced women reported having been sexually abused by their husbands. Divorced women reported a much higher incidence of other forms of abuse. For example, more than 30 percent of divorced women reported having been beaten by their former husbands, while 7 percent of married women reported having been beaten by their spouses. More than half the cases of physical abuse were said to be triggered by the husband's excessive alcohol consumption. The different pattern observed for divorced women suggests that divorces may be motivated by violence in a significant number of cases. This connection has also been noted in Romania, where judges estimated that 60 percent of the cases of divorce in Bucharest involved physical violence and where 23 percent of divorces were filed on the grounds of violence in 1997. Similarly, alcoholism and poor treatment in the family were the reason for more than half the divorces affecting women aged 30-50 in Poland.

In Russia, the number of recorded criminal acts involving women who were victims of jealousy or family conflict increased from around 40,000 in 1994 to 79,000 in 1996. According to the Russian President's Advisor on Women's Issues, 14,000 women are killed by their partners in that country every year. If the figure is reliable, it would mean that about one in six of all deaths of women aged 20-50 and about half of all homicides in Russia in 1997 were caused by domestic violence. (The number of cases of beatings of women by their partners was said to be 36,000 per day.) A comparative analysis of spousal homicide, based on data for 1991, concluded that Russian women are 2.5 times more likely to be murdered by their partners than are American women, who are already two times more likely to be killed by their partners than are women in Western European countries. The analysis also found that the likelihood of murder by an intimate partner is six times higher for women than for men in Russia.

A 1995 survey of 1,500 adolescent girls and boys in Ukraine reveals the scope of physical and sexual abuse of children. Figure 5.7 shows that, among children in mainstream education institutions, the prevalence of rape ranges from 4 percent among students of secondary schools to 9 percent among those attending vocational schools. Other forms of sexual violence are more pervasive, with 11-21 percent of children reporting being subjected to unwanted sexual contact, and 17-27 percent experiencing sexual harassment. (Rates include both girls and boys.) The situation for those adolescents who live in the institutions of the Ministry of the Interior is particularly worrying, with 50

Figure 5.4

Domestic violence reported by pregnant women in districts of England, Russia and the Czech Republic, 1990-92
(per 1,000 women)
Source: Dragonas et al. (1996).



Note: Survey carried out in 1990-92 among 3,830 mothers from Brno and the rural area of Znojmo, the Czech Republic, 5,336 mothers from Yaroslav, Russia, and 12,287 mothers from Avon, England. The samples consisted of all pregnant women who were resident in the survey areas and who were anticipated to deliver within pre-specified dates.

Figure 5.5

Prevalence of violence against women in Latvia, 1997
Source: MOW and UNDP/UNFPA (1998).

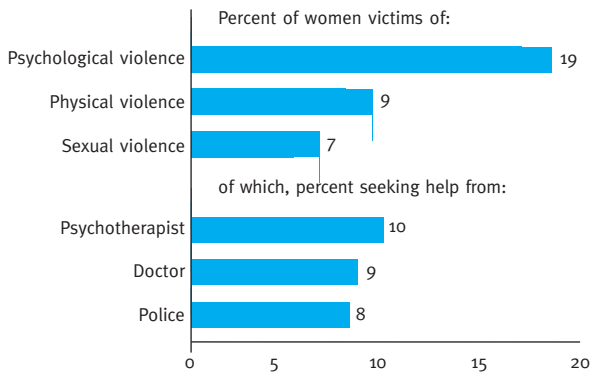
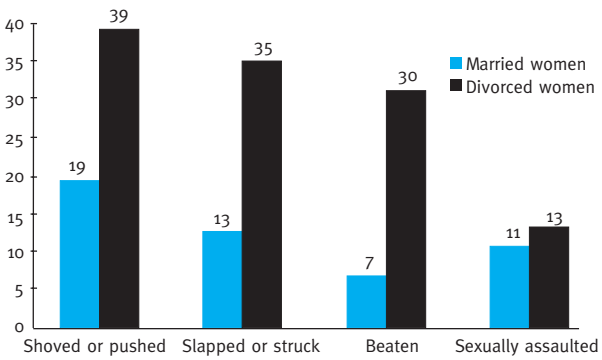


Figure 5.6

Women reporting various forms of domestic violence in Moscow, by marital status, 1996
(percent)
Source: Vannoy et al. (1999), Table 7.2.



Note: Sociological survey of 973 women (746 married women and 227 divorced women) living in Moscow carried out in 1996 by the University of Cincinnati and the Institute for Socio-economic Problems of Population of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

percent of adolescents reporting unwanted sexual contact and as many as 30 percent reporting having been raped.

In Kazakhstan, a sample of 159 women from Almaty, the surrounding region and the region of Jambyl was surveyed in 1997. The sample was small, and the results, presented in Table 5.4, must therefore be seen as merely illustrative. The survey showed that around 3 percent of the women had suffered physical or sexual violence. One woman in eight reported suffering emotional abuse from partners. One-fifth of the women were forbidden by their husbands to see their best friends, and 7 percent were not allowed to see their relatives. Domestic violence by parents and other relatives is also relatively frequent (8 and 6 percent, respectively). Survey respondents said that they were much less likely to report violence to the police if the violence was committed by relatives than if it was committed by strangers (19 percent in the first case versus 37 percent in the second), confirming that there are feelings of shame associated with domestic violence and that there is a desire to keep such violence within the privacy of families. The survey respondents viewed the domestic sphere as the area where discrimination against women is most prominent, followed by the labour market.

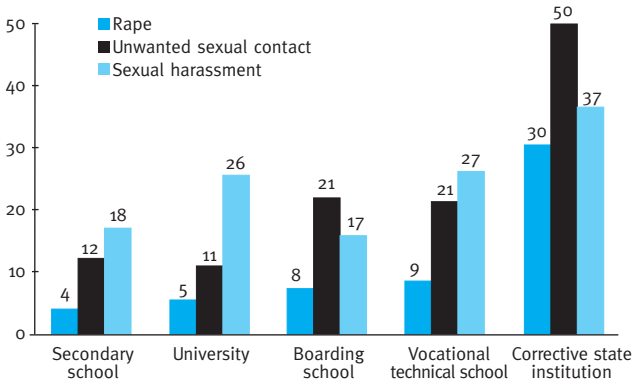
Another survey in Central Asia, conducted among 200 women in the Leninabad and Khujand regions of Tajikistan in 1997, suggests that young women are especially at risk of violence. One-fifth of the respondents reported being subjected to physical violence in their families. The situation in Tajikistan appears to be particularly acute due to the low social position of young women.

Sometimes, women in this sub-region resort to violence against themselves, including suicide by self-immolation. In Tajikistan, about 30 women per month are admitted to hospital with severe burns. Suicides of young women have been increasing, mainly among recently married women. In the single district of Khujand, 54 suicide attempts were registered between January 1996 and September 1997. Evidence shows that no action was taken by the local authorities responsible for investigating suicides and attempted suicides. In Uzbekistan, 788 cases of self-immolation were reported to the courts in 1989-91, many of them in the southern regions of Surkhandarya and Kashkadarya.

Other surveys providing evidence on the pervasiveness of domestic violence are summarized in Table 5.5. Again, the results should be considered with care, since the surveys are often not representative of the entire country or population. However, they tend to confirm a high prevalence of domestic violence in all countries of the region, regardless of level of economic development, cultural and religious background, ethnic composition, or geographic location.

The evidence presented here points to a wider problem of violence against women outside the home. Certainly, violence also occurs in other areas and institutions that are part of the daily environment of women.

Figure 5.7



Boys and girls reporting sexual abuse in Ukraine, by type of educational institution attended, 1995 (percent)

Note: Survey of 1,486 boys and girls in Ukraine in 1995.

Source: Vornik (1997).

Table 5.4

Women reporting various types of violence in districts of Kazakhstan, 1997

Type of violence	Absolute number	% of total
Sexual violence by partner	4	3
Physical violence by partner	5	3
Emotional violence by partner	21	13
Violence by parents	12	8
Violence by other relatives	9	6
Sexual harassment at work	20	13
Sexual harassment in education	10	6
Total number of women sampled	159	100

Source: Feminist League and UNDP (1997).

Note: Survey carried out among 159 women in Almaty and the regions of Almaty and Jambyl by the Feminist League in 1997. The sample was representative of the population in terms of age, marital status, place of residence, occupation, and number of children.

Vulnerability in the workplace

Violence against women also finds expression in sexual abuse and harassment in the workplace. Chapter 2 reviews the trends and circumstances in the labour markets of the transition region that make women vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Women are more likely to work in lower status positions, increasing the potential for abuse by male supervisors. In the weakened economy, women are vulnerable to sexual threats related to getting or losing a job. The burgeoning grey or illegal economy also exposes women to greater risk of abuse, since working conditions are unregulated, unmonitored and therefore potentially unsafe.

Evidence on sexual abuse in the workplace is piecemeal, but strongly points to a high prevalence throughout the region, from Central Europe to Central Asia. In the former Czechoslovakia, 10 percent of women surveyed in 1991 had personal experience with male superiors who attempted to or did coerce them to engage in sexual acts. More recent evidence in the Czech Republic suggests that about 19 percent of women are victims of sexual harassment. In Russia, 7 percent of the women participating in

Table 5.5

Further evidence on the extent of domestic violence

Central Europe	
Czech Republic	• 8% of women clients of consultation centres for family, matrimony and human relations (a non-representative sample of women) reported being exposed to violence. (a)
	• 8% of 966 women surveyed by the Universitas agency in 1996 reported having been victims of sexual crimes during the previous five years. (b)
Poland	• 17% of women are estimated by the Public Research Centre to have been beaten by their partners (half of them repeatedly). (c)
	• 60% of divorced women surveyed in 1993 by the Centre for the Examination of Public Opinion reported having been hit at least once by their ex-husbands; an additional 25% reported repeated violence. (d)
Former Yugoslavia	
Slovenia	• One woman in seven has been a victim of rape, and one family in five experiences domestic violence, according to estimates in a study by the SOS Helpline for Battered Women and Children. (e)
Southeastern Europe	
Albania	• 63% of 850 women reported physical or psychological domestic violence, and 20% reported physical domestic violence, according to a survey in 1995. (f)
Romania	• 29% of women treated between March 1993 and March 1994 had been beaten by an intimate partner, according to statistics of the Forensic Hospital, Bucharest. (g)
Baltics	
Estonia	• 29% of women aged 18-24 fear domestic violence, and the share rises with age, affecting 52% of women 65 or older, according to a 1994 survey of 2,315 women. (h)
Latvia	• 4% of 853 women reported having been threatened or assaulted, and 3% reported having been sexually abused, according to a 1996 survey by the Criminological Research Centre. (i)
Lithuania	• 20% of women reported having experienced an attempted rape, and 33% reported having been beaten at least once, according to a sociological survey. (j)
Western CIS	
Belarus	• 29% of women (and 3% of men) are subject to physical violence by their partners or spouses, research suggests. (k)
Russia (St Petersburg)	• 25% of girls (and 11% of boys) reported unwanted sexual contact, according to a survey of 174 boys and 172 girls in grade 10 (aged 14-17). (l)
Ukraine	• 10-15% of 600 women reported having been raped, and more than 25% reported having been physically abused, according to a survey in Kharkiv. (m)
Caucasus	
Azerbaijan	• 26% of women are exposed to domestic violence, and one woman in four reported regular beatings and a ban on leaving the house alone, according to estimates of a UNDP needs assessment survey. (n)
Central Asia	
Kyrgyzstan	• Hospital admissions of women who have been injured by family members are on the rise, according to medical records. (o)
Tajikistan	• 23% of 550 women aged 18-40 reported physical abuse, according to a survey. (p)

Sources: a. Foundation ROSA (1997) cited in Hendrichova and Kucharova (1998). b. Hendrichova and Kucharova (1998). c. US Department of State (1998a). d. Daszynska et al. (1998). e. Shircel (1998). f. UNDP (1996a). g. Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights (1995) cited in UN (1996a). h. Sillaste and Purga (1995) cited in Papp (1998). i. CSBL (1998). j. US Department of State (1998b). k. UNDP (1997b). l. Lunin et al. (1995). m. US Department of State (1998c). n. UNDP (1997c). o. US Department of State (1998d). p. UNDP (1997d), chapter 3.

a 1994 survey reported facing discrimination after rebuffing sexual advances by their bosses. A small survey in Kazakhstan (Table 5.4) showed that 13 percent of the women reported being sexually harassed at work.

A large survey carried out in 1996 by the UN Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) in 34 countries provides estimates on victimization at work for various Central and Eastern European countries and the former Soviet Union. Figure 5.8 presents estimates of the prevalence of assaults (defined broadly) and the prevalence of sexual incidents involving female workers in 11 countries. (The rates cannot be directly compared between countries because different cultures may perceive the same behaviour differently and because reporting depends on levels of awareness.) The survey shows that, on average, about 3 percent of women were

victims of sexual incidents, with rates ranging from less than 1 percent in Russia, Hungary and Albania to more than 10 percent in Romania. A rate of 3 percent may seem low, but it represents hundreds of thousands of individual women whose mental and physical health is at stake and whose basic human rights are violated.

The survey of women in Kazakhstan (Table 5.4) also pointed to the significant problem of sexual abuse in educational institutions: 6 percent of women surveyed reported having been subjected to sexual harassment on application and acceptance into an educational institution. In the case of Ukraine (Figure 5.7), the percentage of abused adolescents was found to be much higher among those living in corrective institutions. Unlike their counterparts in mainstream education facilities, the violence experienced by these children often took place within the confines of the state institutions, a most disturbing situation. UNICEF has called attention to sexual abuses, including organized sexual exploitation, of children placed in state institutions in Romania. There are also reports of severe emotional, physical and sexual abuses of children in orphanages in Russia.

■

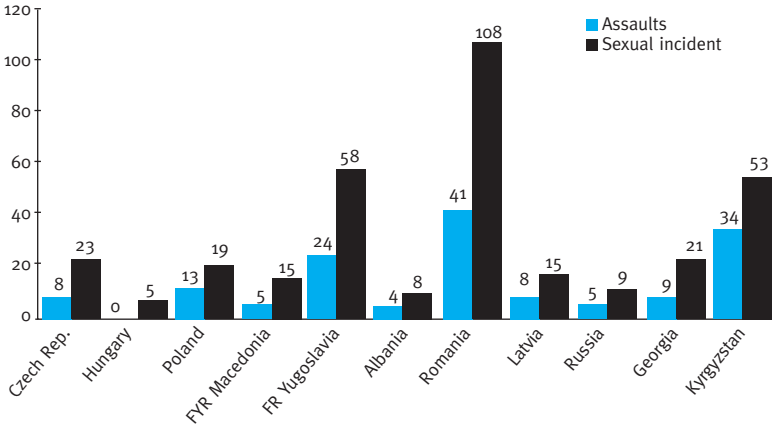


Figure 5.8

Prevalence of assaults and sexual incidents involving women at work, 1996 (per 1,000 women)

Note: Information from the 1996 International Crime (Victim) Survey carried out by UNICRI in 34 countries, with samples of 1,000 to 2,000 adults in each country.

Source: Chappell and Di Martino (1998).

5.3 New Patterns of Violence against Women

In the unsettled environment of the transition, additional forms of violence have arisen in the region. Armed conflicts in the Balkans, the Caucasus, Russia (Chechnya), Albania, Tajikistan, and Moldova have brought further violence against women both during and after the periods of fighting. Another pernicious phenomenon that has developed is the trafficking of women for the purpose of forced prostitution both within and outside the region.

Armed conflicts and violence against women

In some instances, physical, sexual and psychological violence against women is perpetrated or condoned by the state. In particular, women and children become vulnerable to violence during wars and armed conflicts. Violence against women during conflict and displacement appears to be exacerbated by the general growth in violence and the collapse of order. In addition, during conflict, the concept of masculinity often involves aggressive and misogynist behaviour, whereby women and their bodies are seen as territory to be conquered and possessed in order to increase some men's humiliation or to reward others. Violence against women that takes place during and after armed conflict has chilling characteristics that distinguish it from violence in civilian societies in peacetime.

In a number of conflicts around the world, including some in the transition region, rape has changed from a side-effect of war to an offensive weapon. Rape as an instrument of war is used as a strategy to defeat a whole people, not just their active combatants. Rape is employed as a tactic to force people to flee their homes and lands; to weaken resistance to aggression by establishing an atmosphere of terror, destroying dignity and pride and undermining community bonds; to promote campaigns of ethnic cleansing by impregnating women of rival groups and holding them until it is too late to safely abort, and, simply, to reward soldiers.

Estimates of the number of women raped as part of a deliberate pattern of abuse during the 1992-95 conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in the former Yugoslavia, vary from 20,000 to 50,000, representing 1-2 percent of the total pre-war female population. Rape as a weapon of war has been internationally condemned, and evidence gathered from the Bosnia-Herzegovina conflict led the UN Commission on Human Rights to pass a resolution placing rape, for the first time, clearly within the framework of war crimes and to call for an international tribunal to prosecute these crimes.

The trauma of wartime rape, both physical and psychological, does not stop with the end of the conflict. Women who have been raped have difficulty returning to "normal" life and are often rejected by their own communities as tainted, for "consorting with the enemy". In addition to the direct gynæcological problems and mental health disorders these rapes generate, the rapes also often result in abortions and the attendant risks to physical and mental health.

On top of the direct threats of violence in a war zone, women face increased risk of violence when fleeing the area of conflict and seeking refuge in other regions or

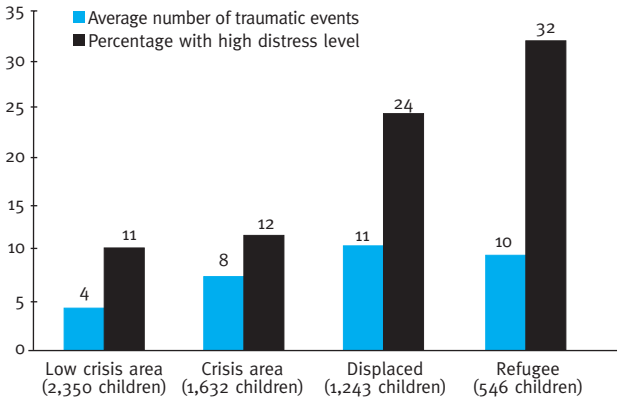
countries. According to estimates by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, women and children account for more than 75 percent of refugees and displaced persons in the world. In addition to the loss of their homes, property and breadwinning spouses and to the material difficulties generated by their flight, displaced and refugee women encounter sexual violence both during their flight and in the place of asylum from other displaced persons, from members of the local population and from security forces whose task it is to protect them. These women often are forced to trade sex for survival, exchanging sex for food, shelter or "protection". This is especially true for women who head households or who are unaccompanied.

The experience of displacement alone also involves substantial trauma. Information on women's experience in this regard is not available, but a survey of children – the other main demographic group in refugee and displaced populations – can provide an indication of the trauma generated by displacement. Figure 5.9 presents the results of a 1992 survey in Croatia that looked at the average number of traumatic events experienced by each child and the percentage of children with high distress levels among children in four different populations – those mildly exposed to war, those living in a high-risk zone, those displaced within Croatia, and those who had fled Croatia. It shows that, on average, the displaced and refugee children experienced more traumatic events than did the others, even more than the children living in high-risk zones. The displaced and refugee children also suffered a much higher incidence of distress, with one in four displaced children and one in three refugee children classified as exhibiting a high distress level.

Figure 5.9

War and children: number of traumatic events and percent with high distress level, by residence, Croatia, 1992

Source: Jagodic and Bunjevac (1995).



Note: Survey of 5,825 children aged 6-15, November-December 1992. Children in mild crisis areas directly experienced few war activities. Children in crisis areas witnessed extensive warfare and were in the war zone during the survey. Displaced children had fled elsewhere in Croatia. Refugee children had fled to other parts of former Yugoslavia.

Table 5.6 presents UNHCR estimates on the number of refugees and displaced persons in the Caucasus and former Yugoslavia at the end of 1997. Refugees and other populations of concern represented over 8 percent of the total population in the Caucasus and 9 percent in the former Yugoslavia. The current conflict in Kosovo is further swelling the ranks of the refugee and displaced population – by an estimated 600,000 additional refugees and 500,000 additional internally displaced persons by the end of April 1999 – in a region torn by horrendous ethnic hostilities since 1991. Women and children account for 8 of 10 civilians caught up in what has become the single greatest human catastrophe in Europe since the Second World War. The violence and the physical and psychological trauma inflicted especially on women and children in this flagrant violation of human rights are devastating.

Finally, in the long run, even after the end of a conflict and their return to their original places of residence, women and children face additional dire consequences from the environment of violence they have endured. For example, in Croatia, it appears that the weapons made available for the war have not all been recovered and are sometimes now used to perpetrate domestic violence. Calls to hotlines refer to the increasing use of weapons to threaten, control or harm women and children both inside and outside the home. The number of suicides among children and young adults has also risen since the conflict started, with greater resort to firearms. The higher number of suicides is linked to the stress and violence caused by the conflict and to feelings of hopelessness and helplessness during or following the conflict.

Further consequences are likely to emerge even decades after the end of an armed conflict. The trauma experienced by children and

Table 5.6

Caucasus and former Yugoslavia: refugees, internally displaced persons and other populations of concern to UNHCR, end-1997

	Refugees	IDPs	Returned refugees	Returned IDPs	Asylum-seekers	Total population of concern
Caucasus						1,418,600
Armenia	219,000	72,000	–	–	–	291,000
Azerbaijan	233,700	551,100	–	69,000	200	854,000
Georgia	200	273,400	–	–	–	273,600
Former Yugoslavia						1,996,400
Slovenia	5,100	–	–	–	–	5,100
Croatia	68,900	79,400	–	2,000	–	150,300
FYR Macedonia	3,500	–	–	–	–	3,500
Bosnia-Herzegovina	40,000	816,000	208,400	223,000	–	1,287,400
FR Yugoslavia	550,100	–	–	–	–	550,100

Source: UNHCR (1998).

Note: IDPs = internally displaced persons. Figures do not take the most recent conflict in FR Yugoslavia into account (for which the number of refugees was estimated at almost 600,000 as of the end of April 1999).

adults will likely give rise to significant mental health problems. This, in turn, will result in destructive behaviours, including violence committed by boys and men. Analysis of the impact of war on children in Croatia helps provide evidence of the extent of the consequences of the conflict. Surveys consistently show that the children are affected in several areas: capacity to study (lack of interest, motivation, concentration, and organization), emotional health (anxiety, fears, passivity, depression, lack of confidence in the future, and withdrawal from peer groups), physical conditioning (sleeping and eating disorders), and behaviour (aggressiveness, negativism, irritability, destructive behaviour, violence, substance abuse, and early sexual activity).

From comparisons of girls and boys, it appears that the experience of girls is more intense in terms of post-traumatic adjustment. They have significantly higher levels of anxiety, depression, sorrow, and psychosomatic symptoms than boys. On the other hand, boys present higher levels of aggressiveness. This aggressiveness is likely to have long-term manifestations, such as violence, including violence against women, years after the actual traumatic event has taken place.

Trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation

The upheaval of transition has led to a rapid growth in the numbers of women from transition countries involved in the sex industry. It is important to emphasize the potential scale of this particular social problem. Estimates from the Latvian Labour Force Survey and Latvian police suggest that slightly less than 2 percent of employed women were participating in the sex industry in Latvia in the mid-1990s. The negative impact of growing prostitution on the status of women in the transition countries cannot be understated. Prostitution affects perceptions about the role of women in society, places women in positions of economic and physical vulnerability and increases their risk of health problems and violence.

The provision of sex services by women from the transition region is not restricted to the political boundaries of their countries. There is evidence that the share of women from Central and Eastern Europe involved in street prostitution in many of the major cities of Western Europe is growing rapidly. Not infrequently, these women are forced migrants who have been coerced into prostitution through deception, kidnapping, trafficking, and intimidation.

Trafficking in women for the purpose of forced prostitution has reportedly been increasing in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. There is evidence that women from the region have been involved in a new wave of trafficking to Western Europe, the Middle and Far East, and the United States, supplanting, to a great extent, women from Asia and Latin America. Some Central European countries, like the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary, are countries both of origin and of destination for this illicit trade.

The International Organization for Migration defines trafficking in women as:

> "any illicit transporting of migrant women and/or trade in them for economic or other personal gain. This may include the following elements: facilitating the illegal movement of migrant women to other countries, with or without their consent or knowledge; deceiving migrant women about the purpose of the migration, legal or illegal; physically or sexually abusing migrant women for the purpose of trafficking them; selling women into, or trading in women for the purpose of employment, marriage, prostitution or other forms of profit-making abuse."

Therefore, trafficking in women includes helping women migrate and then directing them into the sex industry.

Little evidence is available on the extent of trafficking in women. However, a few key trends have been well established by experts dealing with the problem. The number of women moving out of Eastern Europe has been rising over the past nine years. Table 5.7 presents some of the available data on the scale and nature of the trafficking in women from Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The evidence is fragmentary, but does provide insight into the issue.

Most of the women from the region affected by trafficking for the purpose of forced prostitution appear to be relatively young and well educated, compared to local and other foreign prostitutes. In Italy, for instance, the majority of the Albanian migrant women are aged 14-18. In the Netherlands, more than 80 percent of the migrant women from Central and Eastern Europe seeking assistance are under the age of 25, and 22 percent are under age 18. In Belgium, it appears that one in five migrant women is under age 19.

The main reasons for the growing prevalence of trafficking from the region are rooted in the adverse economic conditions and lack of opportunities in the countries of origin. Poverty is endemic even in countries carrying out successful market reforms, and women often suffer disproportionately from low income and status in the labour market, as Chapter 2 presents. A survey of prostitutes in Riga in 1995 found that more than 60 percent felt that unemployment had caused them to enter the sex trade. Young persons, especially young women, are at particular disadvantage in the new economic realities of the region; at the same time, they are perhaps most dazzled by the prospects of Western lifestyles, and may be more readily lured into the sex industry. It must be remembered, however, that trafficking in women is also generated by demand from consumer countries.

In the fertile ground of poverty and blunted oppor-

Table 5.7

Evidence on trafficking in women from the region, by country of destination

Austria	• According to the Austrian police, about 3,000 Eastern European prostitutes compete with 600 local prostitutes in Vienna. • Victims of trafficking were identified in Austria over the period January 1994-June 1995. The majority, 552 women, came from Central and Eastern Europe, especially from Austria's neighbours (Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic).
Belgium	• The Payoke association reports that the number of migrant women from Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union involved in the sex industry and seeking assistance more than doubled over 1992-94. Most were from Hungary and Poland.
Israel	• In 1995-97, the authorities deported nearly 1,500 Russian and Ukrainian women.
Italy	• Officials estimate at least 30,000 Ukrainian women are illegally employed in Italy. • The number of persons charged with encouraging, exploiting, and aiding and abetting prostitution in Italy rose from 285 in 1990 to 737 in 1994. Among these, 21% came from the transition region (mainly Albania and the former Yugoslavia).
Japan	• According to the Japanese Ministry of Justice, the number of persons from the Soviet Union who entered Japan with an "entertainer" visa was only 378, out of a total of 17,513 visas, in 1989. By 1995, 4,763 Russians had entered Japan as "entertainers" – 22% of the total of 22,060.
Netherlands	• STV, a Dutch association, reports that the number of migrant women from Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union seeking its assistance related to trafficking tripled over 1992-94. Most were from Ukraine, Russia, the Czech Republic, and Poland.
Switzerland	• The number of visas issued to Russian "dancers" rose from 0 in 1990 to 300 in 1994 and 303 during the last five months of 1995. The number of visas for "dancers" issued to women from Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union was 616 in 1994.

Sources: IOM (1995), (1996a), (1996b), (1998); Caldwell, Galster and Steinzor (1997); IOM and BMFA (1996); Specter (1998).

Table 5.8

Victims of trafficking: type of work promised and the go-between in recruitment, 1994

Type of work promised		Go-between in recruitment	
Prostitute	27	Family or friends	34
Waitress	21	Street or discothèque	14
Domestic worker	4	Acquaintances	12
Dancer	2	Advertisement	4
Other	19	Travel agency	1
Unknown	35	Unknown	43
Total	108	Total	108

Source: IOM (1995).

Note: Sample of 108 women from Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union who visited the Foundation against Trafficking in Women (STV) in the Netherlands in 1994.

tunities, trafficking in women prospers mainly because migrants are misinformed or deceived. Evidence suggests that, in many cases, trafficking is organized in response to a demand for migration, under the guise of recruitment for fashion, tourism, or housekeeping agencies. Based on a small sample of 108 women who contacted an NGO in the Netherlands, Table 5.8 shows that only one-fourth understood they would be expected to perform sexual services. The majority had been lured into migration with promises of legitimate jobs, for example as domestic workers or waitresses. It is important to note that women are often directed to intermediaries in this process by relatives, friends, or acquaintances and that the methods of recruiting are much more informal than is commonly thought. Table 5.8 shows that over 30 percent of the women were recruited through family or friends, and another 11 percent through acquaintances.

While most women decide on their own to migrate, many discover too late that they are destined to prostitution. Even those who knew the real purpose of their recruitment are often deceived about working conditions, which sometimes are tantamount to slavery. Whether they end up in prostitution knowingly or unwittingly, these women are at risk of and subjected to physical and emotional violence. They are raped, forced to work long hours in dreadful circumstances, beaten, and threatened. In some cases, they are not even allowed to protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases, and medical services are rarely available for them.

Women subjected to trafficking are also often deprived of their passports, burdened with heavy debts and victimized by other techniques used to control them. The "irregular" status of these women – without documents, with legal documents that have expired, or with forged documents (to hide the age of young girls, for instance) – means they have little recourse to the authorities of the country of residence. They are therefore vulnerable to violence not only because of the type of work they are forced to do, but also because of their illegal status. When discovered by authorities, migrant women are frequently treated as criminals and illegal immigrants and are eventually deported. They often suffer from detention and harassment by police, with no protection against reprisals

from the traffickers if they agree to give evidence in court. This insensitive approach does not encourage victims to cooperate with the police, but, rather, leaves them in the hands of their traffickers, who continue their unsavoury business.

Trafficking is a multifaceted problem that requires a response coordinated among justice, immigration, health, and social service policies and approaches. It calls not only for an integrated approach, but also for international cooperation. ■

5.4 New Opportunities to Prevent Violence

In the transition region, as in the rest of the world, the problem of violence against women, particularly domestic violence, is to a large degree "invisible" – unrecognized, unmeasured and unaddressed. Women around the world face similar barriers to protection from and the prevention of violence. Most violence against women is committed by someone the victim knows – a boyfriend, a partner, a parent, a relative, or a colleague. Often, the violence is considered a private or family affair: the gravity of the offence is minimized, and the victim shamed. Often, the victim is blamed by both relatives and authorities for provoking or bringing the violence upon herself. Often, there is a lack of awareness, sensitivity and support for victims of violence and a lack of alternatives to an abusive environment.

The countries of the transition region have an historic opportunity during this period of reform to implement a broad-based strategy in society to eliminate violence against women. While the law enforcement and justice systems are reformed, there is the opportunity to raise awareness, sensitize processes and change laws. With the opening up of public opinion, there is the opportunity to promote understanding and discussion through education campaigns and the media. With the emergence of new work environments, there is the opportunity to address sexual harassment and abuse in the workplace. The reform of educational curricula affords transition countries the opportunity to promote a sense of responsibility for eliminating and preventing violence, a campaign that can reach everyone, from children to university students. This curriculum reform could be reinforced through youth and outreach programmes and life skills education in conflict resolution, negotiation and decision making.

Recognizing violence against women as a crime

While the recognition of the criminal nature of violence against women is certainly not sufficient to reduce the endemic incidence of this phenomenon, it is important to make such violence a punishable offence. Lack of recognition of specific forms of violence against women as crimes symptomizes a lack of commitment on the part of the state to tackle the problem. For example, domestic violence against women is not specifically prohibited by law in Armenia, Bulgaria, or Georgia. Marital rape is not recognized as a crime in Albania, Azerbaijan (where no form of spousal abuse is recognized as criminal), Croatia, FYR Macedonia, Romania, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and FR Yugoslavia. In Slovenia, domestic physical violence is not considered criminal in cases of "light" injury – a definition that includes "fractured nose, rib, light contusions and punched-out teeth". In Russia, the new 1997 criminal code does not distinguish domestic violence from other forms of violence.

The lack of recognition of the criminal nature of violence against women is also of concern in terms of non-domestic violence. For example, in Hungary, Poland and Romania, the law does not specifically address sexual harassment in the workplace. In addition, the status of women subjected to trafficking is often unclear in national legislation, and these women are frequently treated as law-breakers rather than as victims. Even in some countries where specific forms of violence against women are recognized as crimes, the laws are rarely enforced. In Estonia, for example, the criminal code condemns the sexual abuse of a person who is materially dependent or a subordinate in the workplace, but no cases were prosecuted under this provision in 1996-97. In Russia, the *St Petersburg Times* reports, not a single case of sexual harassment went to court between 1993 and 1996.

Sometimes, legal process is effectively inaccessible for victims of violence. In Croatia, prosecution for "minor" sexual violence is at the woman's expense; in Bulgaria, women must pay for the prosecution unless the victim is permanently injured or killed; in Romania, witnesses are required for the prosecution of rape; in Russia, the victim's lawyer cannot take part in the trial, though the state provides a lawyer for the offender, and domestic violence tends to be prosecuted only in cases of murder, grave physical injury, suicide, or similar circumstances.

There are many steps that can be taken to make it easier for victims of violence to come forward and participate in the judicial process. Victims could receive free legal assistance and be provided protection from unnecessary publicity. The legal process, including questioning, could become more sensitive to the distress of the plaintiff, as well as to the service of justice. This may mean avoiding unwarranted confrontations between the victim and the accused and permitting or providing an advocate for the victim in the investigation process. Means of establishing facts should be developed, for example by allowing health workers to provide evidence.

The various forms of violence against women, including abuse by partners and psychological abuse, need to be clearly defined and explicitly covered in the criminal codes and civil laws of the countries in the region. All countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the international committee reviewing country reports on CEDAW implementation in the region has repeatedly called attention to the need for steps to recognize and eliminate gender violence. This recognition in law reflects and reinforces public values and gives authorities and victims an important tool for holding offenders responsible for their violent behaviour.

More support from authorities is needed

Placing violence against women in a legal framework needs to be followed by enforcement and active support from authorities. This is especially true in the complex case of domestic violence, which presents particular challenges to all parties involved. Agencies and groups active on the issue of violence against women have repeatedly called upon law enforcement authorities in the transition region to increase support for the victims of domestic violence. In some criminal justice systems, the bias against victims appears to be pervasive on the part of police officers, doctors, prosecutors, and judges. This bias translates into the rejection of complaints, mistreatment, delayed referrals, the inaccessibility of doctors, abusive examinations, reluctance to investigate, invasions of privacy, failure to protect the victims, and dismissal of cases prior to trial.

For example, in Albania, the group Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights found that more than 50 percent of the 70 cases of domestic violence appearing before the Tirana District Court in 1994 were set aside because women were persuaded to withdraw their complaints. The Russian crime survey referred to earlier revealed that police forces sometimes conceal crimes by refusing to file a complaint.

Health professionals can also take a more active role in supporting women victims of violence. It appears that women are often reluctant to use medical facilities because of the lack of compassion and understanding of medical staff and because of the shame frequently associated with domestic violence. For example, more than three-quarters of the young Tajik women interviewed in a 1997 survey in Leninabad said they would not approach medical institutions about violence under any circumstances. Evidence from Latvia (see Figure 5.5) shows that women are unlikely to ask health workers for help. In Hungary, a sociological survey revealed that ethnic Roma women face cultural barriers when contacting health professionals.

This lack of trust in and support by authorities is illustrated by surveys of the women who called a hotline in Belgrade during 1991-93 and in 1995. Women victims of violence were asked whether they had contacted various institutions and whether they were satisfied with the services offered. Their answers are reported in Figure 5.10, which shows that the share of women contacting institutions decreased over the period under study: 24 percent contacted police in 1991-93, but only 12 percent in 1995. The graph also shows that satisfaction levels with police, social workers and doctors were very low. Only 5 percent of the victims were satisfied with the police response in 1991-93, and 3 percent in 1995. Satisfaction with other institutions was even lower: 3 percent for social workers and 2 percent for doctors in both periods surveyed.

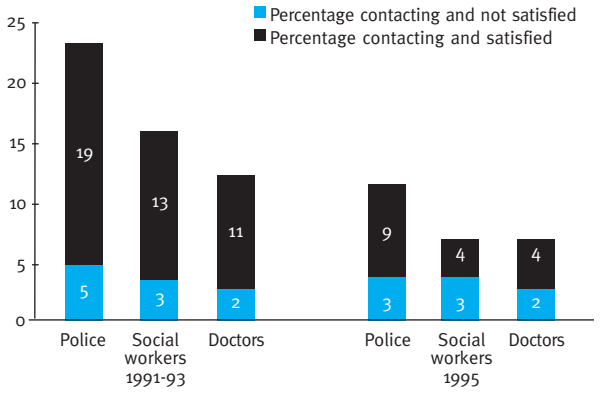
Part of the problem is that professionals dealing with women victims of violence often do not benefit from any special training. Police officers, doctors and social workers do not receive such training in most of the countries for which information is available, including the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Romania, Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan (with the exception of social workers in Romania and Russia, doctors in Russia, and police officers in the Czech Republic). The reform of curricula in institutions of higher education offers transition countries the possibility to include training programmes for recognizing and thwarting violence against women.

Professionals whose work brings them into contact with victims of violence – police officers, social workers and health care professionals, including doctors, community health workers and birth attendants – should be trained to recognize and acknowledge violence and to deal effectively with victims and perpetrators of violence. Police officers should be obligated to register the complaints and carry out the investigations without delay, and health workers should be required to collect accurate and complete documentation on the violence for use as legal evidence. Authorities should also be made responsible for respecting the victims' privacy, referring the victims to specialized services without delay, providing immediate support and protection for the victims as required (removal of the perpetrators from the home, help in finding alternative housing, medical and psychological assistance), and providing psychological assistance, treatment and rehabilitation for the offenders. In countries in conflict, additional

Figure 5.10

Women victims of violence: contact and satisfaction with institutions, Belgrade

Sources: 1991-93 data: Mrsevic and Hughes (1997); 1995 data: Posarac (1998).



Note: Survey of women who contacted the SOS Hotline for Women and Children Victims of Violence in Belgrade. Sample sizes were 770 women in 1991-93 and 2,035 women in 1995.

health workers, including women from refugee and host communities, should be trained to address the particular issues raised by war and displacement.

Developing escape routes from abusive environments

Women in the region face a lack of alternatives for escaping from a violent home environment or from abuse in the workplace. Particularly acute in the region is the shortage of housing and, during the transition, the growth in the economic dependence of women on their partners and the increase in the vulnerability of women in the labour market.

Alternative accommodation has been a key policy intervention for responding to domestic violence in many Western European countries, for example the 1977 and 1996 Housing Acts in the UK. In the transition region, shelters for victims of violence are rare and usually full and must turn women away. It is relatively common for couples to continue sharing the same home after their divorce due to the lack of housing, an arrangement which can lead to domestic violence. Analysis of the calls made to a hotline in Belgrade (Figure 5.10) showed that more than 28 percent of the women said lack of housing was one of the reasons they did not leave a violent partner. Another 25 percent of the women cited economic reasons, while 23 percent said they were afraid of the reaction of their partners.

There are many initiatives that can help victims of violence leave abusive environments: removing the partner from the shared home so the victim can stay in her home until a formal separation can be implemented, enforcing rights under family law, providing effective support in finding alternative housing, and helping women become financially independent.

A support network needs to be developed for victims of violence, including assistance through the legal system and assistance in finding ways to leave a violent situation. The fourth Regional Monitoring Report documented the poor legacy of the transition countries in terms of social and family support services, including counselling, support groups and temporary shelters. The transition societies simply lack this array of tools for prevention and intervention, leaving little choice between ignoring an emerging problem and responding with extreme measures at a later acute stage. As a result, shelters, hotlines, crisis centres, legal aid centres, and other support mechanisms for women victims of violence have been largely unavailable until recently. In addition, the breakdown of many formal associations to which women belonged before the transition, such as trade unions, women's organizations and local branches of the communist party, has reduced the protection and support social networks may provide. The drop in the participation of women in the labour force, highlighted in Chapter 2, could also increase their isolation.

It is important to provide avenues for women to address sexual harassment and abuse in the workplace. Again, this calls for a legal framework, workplace policies, training, awareness among human resource professionals, supervisors and managers, and mechanisms of recourse for victims and of discipline for offenders.

The emerging civil societies in the transition countries have a large part to play in overcoming the lack of support for women subjected to violence. The number of NGOs and associations established to address the issues of violence against women is on the rise. These organizations have started setting up hotlines, crisis centres, shelters, and legal aid centres in most countries of the region. They have also initiated campaigns to raise public awareness and to lobby authorities, as well as providing training for health workers, police officers and other law enforcement staff. In some Western European countries, NGOs have organized assistance for women from the transition region who have been victims of trafficking.

The efforts of individuals and grassroots groups to break the silence surrounding violence against women in the region have often been innovative and hard-fought. Frequently, this work involves a heavy investment of personal resources in a context of restricted access to materials and funding and, sometimes, strong opposition from both public authorities and criminal organizations.

Despite the important efforts of grassroots organizations, the impact of their achievements has been limited. For instance, support is direly lacking in some countries and some geographical regions, especially rural areas. Even in urban areas, where most initiatives have taken place, the scarce resources of most of these organizations do not allow them to meet the needs of all victims of violence. Their activities are also hampered by prevailing attitudes, which tend to overlook or to tolerate violence against women. ■

5.5 Conclusions

Violence against women is one of the broadest violations of human rights in the contemporary world and a substantial barrier to women's equality. Studies from different parts of the globe confirm that it is pervasive and persistent at all levels of society; yet gender-related violence remains largely invisible. Women do not speak about the violence out of shame and fear, and the public, often through a misbegotten sense of what is private, turns away its gaze. Even when the violence cannot be ignored, social attitudes tend to hold the victim at least partly to blame.

This chapter looks at the many forms of gender-related violence around the world and then attempts to

provide a portrait of the violence against women in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union both before and since the onset of transition. The analysis finds that, under communism, violence against women was largely ignored and undocumented. Data and evidence have remained fragmentary during the transition, although there are reasons to believe that violence against women in its many forms has increased. The unsettling changes of the transition have been accompanied by a spreading sense of lawlessness and an alarming growth in crime, including homicides, in most parts of the region. The expanding culture of violence in many countries must surely have exposed women to even greater risks during these years of profound social upheaval.

Analysis shows a high incidence of domestic violence – which presumes an intimate relationship between the victim and the offender and includes emotional abuse and neglect, as well as sexual and physical violence – in all countries for which information is available. Domestic violence is not limited to particular geographic sub-regions. It is therefore surprising to find that reported rapes have fallen (or increased less than homicides) in all transition countries for which information is available. It is reasonable to conclude that this trend indicates reduced reporting of rape rather than a drop in actual cases. It is not uncommon for sexual assaults to go unreported, but this particular trend in the transition region merits concern, if not alarm. This is especially disquieting because, if the reporting of cases of rape is down, it is even more unlikely that the criminal nature of domestic violence will be recognized. Indeed, evidence shows that violence against women is sometimes not treated seriously by the criminal justice system, and domestic violence is often not even considered a crime. Documentation also indicates that women victims of violence simply do not receive adequate support from health professionals, police officers, prosecutors, judicial authorities, and social service workers.

Particularly disturbing is the eruption of new forms of violence against women during the transition. The use of violence against women, rape and forced pregnancy as weapons of war in ethnic conflicts in the region is horrific. Women and children in war zones are facing the trauma of displacement, and women refugees are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse. This Report documents another tragic form of displacement, the heinous practice of trafficking in women for the purposes of sexual exploitation – one more aspect of a burgeoning sex industry which exposes more women to higher risks of violence.

What does the future hold and what is to be done? As Chapters 1 and 2 point out, though economic recovery is under way in many countries of the region, the employment prospects and real incomes of many people, especially women, remain strained, if not bleak. This is a source of stress on families and raises the chances that women and children will be assaulted and abused in their homes. At the same time, as earlier chapters describe, the government capacity for maintaining public services such as health care, housing, family benefits, and childcare has often significantly declined, thereby removing valuable means and avenues of support and intervention in favour of women victims of violence.

Experience around the world suggests that leadership in dealing with gender-related violence frequently comes from the grassroots – from women's groups, non-governmental organizations and, often, the ranks of the victims of violence themselves. The involvement of communities is an effective way to foster discussion and action to halt family violence. Responsibility and accountability can be promoted by participation in the design and establishment of support services for victims of violence. As Chapter 6 discusses, these frontline and on-the-ground efforts by women to become agents of social change are vital in establishing women's equality and in the development of societies where not only economic and political rights, but also the basic human right of security of person are promoted.

However, given the pervasive nature of violence against women and the attitudes and behaviours that sustain it, leadership and active participation at every level in every society are required to address this issue. The transition countries have an historic opportunity to break the silence by adapting the best practices from around the world for eliminating and preventing violence against women and by creating new approaches to contribute to this global effort. The state may have a reduced role in the transition societies, but it is still compelled under international agreements to act convincingly to confront the issue of violence against women.

In the transition countries, governments have substantial opportunities to effect change as they reform the major social institutions – the workplace, the justice system, education, health care, social services, as well as the cultivation of civil society and public discourse. They have the opportunity to outlaw violence against women, to establish processes of justice that respect the victims, to prosecute and punish offenders, to provide rehabilitation services, to develop early-warning systems and interventions related to domestic violence, to cultivate violence-free environments and attitudes in schools, to raise awareness and change attitudes through media campaigns, and to make violence against women a public health issue. In the rapidly growing private sector, business and labour interests both have a role to play in creating safe workplaces for women through policies and practices dealing with sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse on the job.

Violence against women takes many forms and calls for a range of measures – curative and preventive, immediate and long term. The pervasive and persistent nature of this violation of women's human rights requires an equally broad response aimed at changing the mindset of individuals and influencing the criminal justice system and the development of public policy. ■