

Men who have been convicted of domestic violence and stalking attend “diversion” sessions at a prison in the United States as part of efforts to help them change their behaviour. Many perpetrators of domestic violence never serve time in jail or have their crimes exposed or reported.

Image: Donna Ferrato/Network Photographers

perpetrators

“The ratio of male to female offenders for all types of crime has been narrowing steadily during the last few decades. But the fact remains that, today, about 80 percent of crimes against property are committed by men, as are 95 percent of crimes involving violence.”¹ By contrast, any reflection upon the level and nature of female crime is a salutary experience for men, who would be forced to conclude that if men behaved like women the courts and prisons would be virtually empty.

The prevalence of male perpetration

The overwhelming majority of violence against women and girls is committed every day and in every nation by men. Where sexual violence and exploitation takes place against men and/or boys, the perpetrators are, again, overwhelmingly male. In categories where violence is embedded in tradition, such as child marriage, female genital mutilation and “honour” crimes, women may also play an active role.

Despite the progress that has been made to introduce legal and social reforms to address gender inequality, violence against women and girls continues. Evidence suggests, in fact, that violations such as trafficking, rape, child abuse, child prostitution and pornography are on the rise.² The majority of studies of gender-based violence echo the findings of two psychologists whose research led them to conclude, “Most sexual offenders are men. Men commit most of the aberrant and deviant sexual

behaviours such as rape, child molestation and exhibitionism. ... ” Furthermore, and more relevantly, when females are involved in aberrant or illegal sexual behaviour, coercion and violence is less commonly employed.³

Even though most acts of violence are committed by men — and studies confirm that men have a higher propensity for violent behaviour than women — not all men behave violently. Are men genetically motivated, or hard-wired, in a significantly different way than women? Or does society teach the sexes to act the way they do?

The nature / nurture polarity

Most researchers reject the notion that biology can be blamed for violent behaviour. Male violence, they say, is not genetically based but

is instead perpetuated by a model of masculinity that permits and even encourages men to be aggressive. “Men’s monopoly of violence stems from lifelong training in sexist models of masculinity.”⁴ Anthropological research shows that domestic violence is virtually nonexistent in some societies, and therefore not an inevitable human condition.⁵

Generally, the “nurture” position rejects the idea that men have a natural propensity to violence or that men have “uncontrollable” violent and sexual urges. In the case of intimate-partner abuse, for example, observers point out that men are able to control themselves in settings where the social or professional cost of their behaviour would be too high, but are unwilling to exercise the same restraint when they are behind closed doors.

Those advancing this perspective challenge apologists for male violence, who use biological arguments or the “psychopathological model” for male sexual violence to explain men’s behaviour. Instead, they insist that these men are not “sick” or pathological and are responsible for their actions, behaving reprehensibly, with free, conscious choice.⁶

The counterargument to this opinion — which is regularly reinforced and perpetuated via popular culture and religious dogma — claims that men are captive to their libidos. This view maintains that the historic and global evidence of male’s natural aggression and the biological

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imperative cannot be ignored. While socialisation may play an important role in how people behave in different societies and at different points in history, the “nature” position argues that sexual violence is too widespread and too overwhelmingly perpetrated by males to suggest that men and women are not motivated and driven by different forces. These arguments appear to echo 19th-century pseudo-medical claims promoted by some scientists that men were a breed apart and slaves to uncontrollable testosterone, where male promiscuity is seen as a critical vestige of evolutionary forces conferring “selective advantage” on men who impregnate multiple partners.

Other theorists, however, are situated between the two poles of “nature” and “nurture”. They acknowledge a degree of “natural male inclination”, which in combination with repeated negative socialisation reinforces

violent characteristics.⁷ In patriarchal societies, a significant manifestation of male aggression is man’s perpetration of sexual coercion and violence against women.

Popular perceptions

Irrespective of this debate, there is a virtually universal *de facto* acceptance amongst people and communities worldwide that men and women have different natures and different roles to play. Whatever the origin of male violence, most people are caught up in their societies and the times they live, and are products of cultural influences. Women may internalise stereotypical models of male and female behaviour as much as men and, as a result, may play a strong part in the maintenance of these stereotypes.

In many countries, gender roles are deeply entrenched and reinforced by cultural norms, to such an extent that questioning the status quo involves risk.⁸ Even in countries that are seemingly less bound by tradition, where equal rights are codified in law and widely accepted, these stereotypes still dominate the popular mindset.

The United States and Australia are examples of industrialised countries where sexual stereotyping and violence-supporting attitudes remain entrenched among the majority. High incidents of rape, domestic abuse and child abuse in these countries are thought to be linked to a general acceptance of these stereotypes. One study recently estimated that during a 12-month period in the United States, more than 302,000 women and almost 93,000 men experienced a completed or attempted rape.⁹ In a 1995 study in Australia, 37 percent of the male participants disagreed with the statement that “Women rarely make false claims of rape.” One in six respondents to the survey agreed that “Women who are raped often ask for it.”¹⁰ Rape is, of course, only an indirect indicator of such beliefs or stereotypes.

Psychological research demonstrates strong evidence that violence is a learned behaviour that may be passed down the generations. “The highest risk marker for a man to use violence against his wife and child is early exposure to violence in his childhood home.”¹¹ A negative finding when one considers the current number of boys witnessing their fathers’ violent behaviour, but also one that offers hope, perhaps, that nonviolence can be similarly learned.

Belgian child killer and rapist Marc Dutroux throws himself to the ground while pretending to have a heart attack on the way to his first court appearance in October 2002. A doctor who was called to the scene proclaimed him fit for trial. Dutroux was arrested in August 1996 for the kidnapping and rape of six young girls and the murder of two of them. His highly publicised case and disturbing trial shook the Belgian establishment. Dutroux was given a life sentence.

Image: Jorgen Hildebrandt/Panos



Two brothers, aged 12 and 13, wash the ink off their hands after being fingerprinted by police in Cape Town, South Africa. The brothers and their 11-year-old friend were taken in by the Police Child Protection Unit after being identified as the sexual assailants of a three-year-old boy who lived near them. The boys allegedly forced the younger child to perform oral sex on them and then did the same to him.

Image: Mariella Furrer

A man is led away after being found guilty of stabbing his wife to death in a savage example of domestic violence in the United States. He stabbed her 17 times in front of their two children and other adult witnesses.

Image: Donna Ferrato/Network Photographers

Making man myths

Cross-cultural studies reveal that in most communities simple anatomical maleness is not enough to be a man. Real manhood lies elsewhere and is often a “precarious or artificial state that boys must win against powerful odds.”¹² Does this “masculine mystique” encourage toughness, dominance and extreme competitiveness at the expense of honest emotion, empathy and communication?¹³

Violence against women is more predominant in cultures where the idea of manhood is linked to entitlement to power or male honour.¹⁴ Historically, wars have been intensely masculine endeavours and the majority of all warriors, soldiers, generals, admirals, police, militias and prison wardens are and have been men. In addition, bureaucrats, politicians and those who monopolise the systems of collective or institutional violence throughout the world are men.

As boys become men within these societies, attributes of action, decisiveness, aggression and supremacy are prized and closely associated with “manhood”. These qualities, however fallacious, are perpetuated and considered the “natural” order and the preserve of masculinity. The expression of these characteristics in different societies can range from subtle to overt. Socialisation of this kind negatively impacts both women and men. A recent publication from Brazil called *Dying to Be Men* — based on studies of violent male behaviour in the United States, the Caribbean, Brazil and Nigeria — suggests that because young men are losing their lives in their attempts to embody certain models of masculinity, they are literally “dying to be men”.

In many non-Western societies, strict social rules that perpetuate the notion of the dominant male also deny women access to public life, private property, or even joint custody of their children. A woman is the protected possession of a man — his housekeeper, cook, monogamous sex partner and mother of his children. Even in countries that are considered more advanced in terms of democracy and representation — those with gender-sensitive legislation and significant structural equality between the sexes — violence against women continues. Many observers blame the influence of modern media, in particular television, films and advertising, for both subtly and explicitly perpetuating patriarchal role models for men and women.¹⁵

Myriam Miedzian's *Boys Will Be Boys: Breaking the Link Between Masculinity and Violence* examines how and why males are increasingly resorting to

violence and what society can do about it. “As long as male behaviour is taken to be the norm,” she writes, “there can be no serious questioning of male traits and behaviour. A norm is by definition a standard of judging; it is not itself subject to judgement.”¹⁶

Violence and sexual abuse in marriage

In South Africa, researchers for the Medical Research Council estimated in 2004 that male partners kill their girlfriends or spouses at the rate of one every six hours — the highest mortality rate for domestic violence ever recorded, they claim. According to a United Nations report that same year, domestic violence accounted for more than 60 percent of murder cases in court in Harare, Zimbabwe. In Zambia, a recent study found that nearly half the women surveyed had been beaten by a male partner.¹⁷

Outside Africa and throughout the world, similar statistics for domestic abuse are staggering, with only a small minority of communities apparently free of this violence. “For God’s sake!” exploded one Nigerian when questioned about his wife-beating. “You are head of the home as the man — you must have a home submissive to you.”¹⁸

A high number of women who report domestic violence also report rape within their relationship. “My sex life in marriage has been dominated by

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rape, rape, rape — and nothing to do with love,” concluded one woman from Latin America, echoing similar claims by women interviewed in different contexts around the world.¹⁹

All too often sex in marriage is not a mutually pleasurable event but a brutal service exacted by force, threat or social convention.

According to one expert on domestic violence, “At an individual level, some men are more likely to sexually assault women: men who have hostile and negative sexual attitudes towards women, who identify with traditional images of masculinity and male gender role privilege, who believe in rape stereotypes, and who see violence as manly and desirable. ... Men with more traditional, rigid and misogynistic gender-role attitudes are more likely to practise marital violence.”²⁰

The perpetrators of rape within marriage are not readily characterised as any particular group. Using force in marriage to gain sexual access is a cross-cultural and cross-societal phenomenon that is not the monopoly of any economic or social class. In many cases those who are accused or — in isolated instances — convicted of rape in marriage may not conform to popular notions of what a rapist is. Perpetrators of rape in cultures that expect and condone the brutal deflowering of a young bride (sometimes with knives) may be committing a severe assault and rights abuse, but they would be surprised to be labelled a rapist, which illustrates the complexity of dealing with these issues on a global basis.

There are common myths about perpetrators of domestic violence. These include the notion that domestic violence is rare or that perpetrators are somehow “abnormal” men who cannot control their anger. In reality, most men who beat their wives do not exhibit violent or antisocial traits outside the home. The idea that perpetrators are driven to violence by the behaviour of their partners is also a myth, as perpetrators are often unaffected by their partners’ efforts to change or avoid so-called “provocative” behaviour. The notion that poverty causes violence is a myth as well: Poverty can be a contributing factor to domestic abuse, but intimate-partner violence exists at every socioeconomic level.²¹

Whatever the myths may be, it is indisputable that domestic violence has especially frightening and tragic implications for victims, who are locked socially, economically and often emotionally into the abusing relationship and share a home with their abuser. In many countries, the

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environment outside the home is fiercely unwelcoming to women who leave or divorce violent husbands, seek refuge or protective custody away from their partners, or seek legal redress. In Nigeria, where there are over 130 million people and wife battering is widespread, there are only two shelters for battered women.²²

Law enforcement in many countries will not intervene in what is still regarded as a domestic quarrel, despite evidence indicating that without intervention (legal or social) abusers are unlikely to seek rehabilitation or stop their battering behaviour. In most cases law enforcement and the judiciary are run entirely by men, who are part of the patriarchal society

that tacitly or overtly perpetuates attitudes that tolerate beating women. Numerous reports from Latin America, the Middle East and Central and South Asia cite examples where law enforcement officials have delivered wives who had been beaten back to the very families and perpetrators from whom they sought refuge.

Training programmes and special units of law enforcement to assist victims of domestic violence have been developed only recently in a select number of countries. It was originally believed that if a victim of domestic violence could leave the abusive relationship the violence would stop, but now it is widely accepted that leaving does not guarantee an end to the abuse. In fact, separation is often the riskiest time for women, as many abusive men continue to harass, stalk and harm their victims long after the separation, sometimes resulting in murder. In one United States study, 70 percent of the reported injuries from domestic violence occurred after a couple separated.²³

Many working in the field maintain that the most effective way to stop perpetrators abusing their partners is arrest and incarceration. Legally and socially, however, societies still struggle with the complexities of domestic violence, the gravity of the crime and their overall commitment to tackling it.

Great strides have been made in terms of highlighting the scale and scope of intimate-partner violence over the last two decades. While the problem remains great, there is some evidence of progress, particularly in settings where women’s rights and choices have increased and they have gained more economic independence. But in more traditional societies, where a woman is secondary to the male head of the house and where male domination or patriarchy is more overt, the overwhelming majority of violence against women goes unreported, forcing women to suffer in silence. Documenting the prevalence of male violence against women in the home in more traditional cultures warrants further research.

In recent years, much has been made of certain studies indicating that men are also victims of domestic abuse where the perpetrators are women. Some suggest that there is a degree of “gender symmetry” in domestic violence — that women abuse at their partners at similar rates as men — but a closer look at the methodology used in these studies casts doubts over the veracity of these claims. Opposing studies show that only 5 percent of domestic violence cases involve female

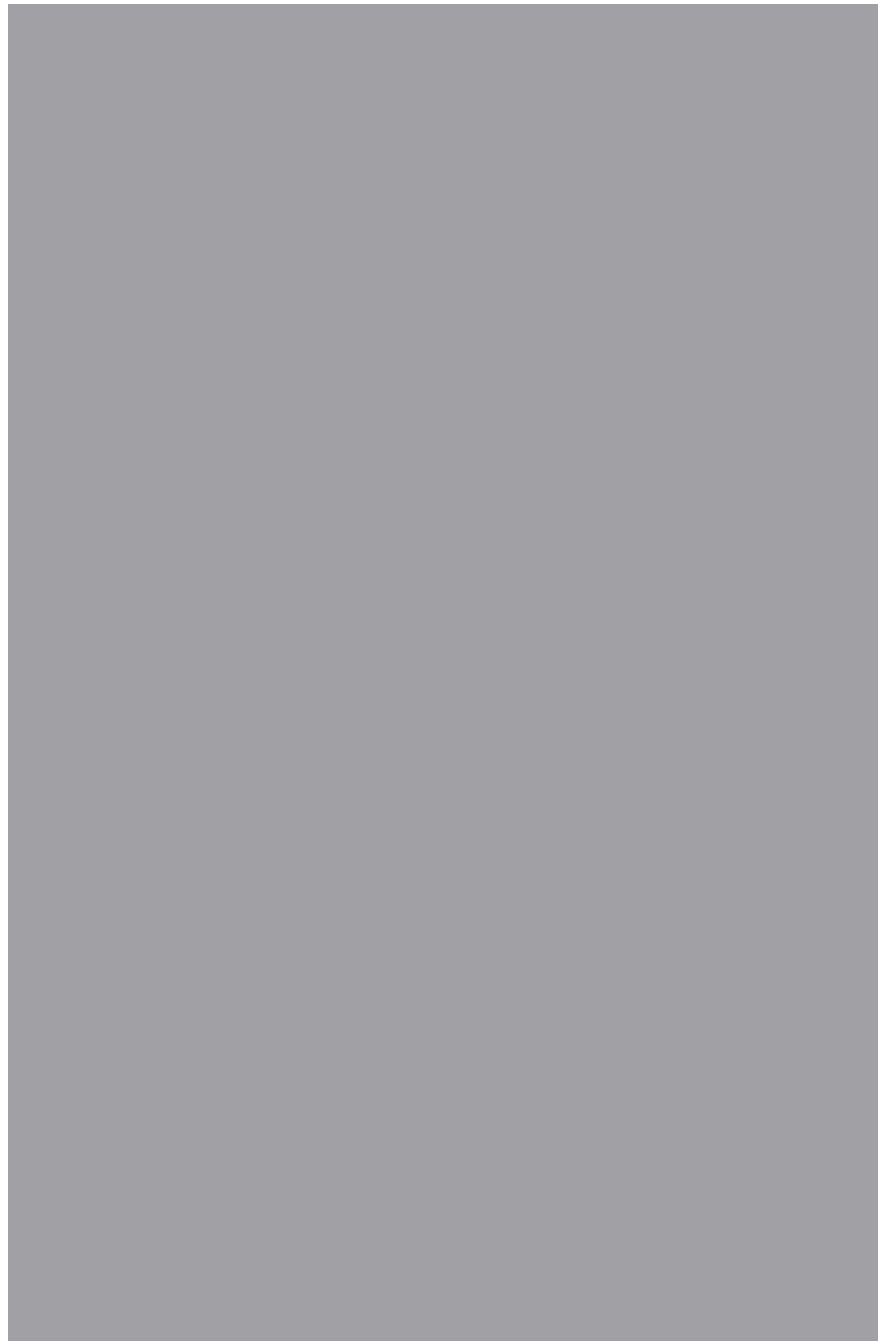
A Roman Catholic priest in Cape Town, South Africa, hangs his head as police search his home. He was arrested in July 2005 after police received reports from several men alleging that he had abused them when they were boys. In 2002, a child-abuse scandal implicating Catholic priests affected nearly every diocese in the United States, and more than 200 priests were removed from their ministries. According to surveys, some of the abusive priests defended themselves by asserting that mutual masturbation, fellatio or touching children's bodies, while sinful, did not violate their vow of celibacy.

Image: Mariella Furrer



Bosnian Serb rapist Dragoljub Kunarac shocked the United Nations International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in his initial court appearance by pleading guilty in 1998 to raping Muslim women. During the Balkans conflict, there was widespread and systematic use of rape by all belligerents — in particular the Serbian forces. During the ICTY trials, rape, which was closely associated with ethnic cleansing was officially recognised for the first time as a war crime.

Image: Jerry Lampen/AFP



One of the accused cries as she is led from the courthouse in Angers, France, in July 2005 after hearing the verdict in the biggest ever paedophilia trial in French legal history. In total, 65 men and women were accused of the rape and sexual abuse of numerous children — some of them their own — over a period of years. Some of the children were only a few months old. The six principle defendants were accused of organizing the child-abuse network in a poor district of Angers.

Image: Alain Jocard/AFP

perpetrators.²⁴ An examination of the reality of power relations, access to economic resources and possibilities for separation or divorce indicates that by any standards the violence and vulnerability of men who are abused by female partners is of a different calibre than the pandemic of abuse of women by male partners throughout the world.²⁵

A dangerous catalyst

Studies of the link between intimate-partner violence and rape and substance abuse indicate that “a large proportion of incidences of physical and sexual violence involve alcohol or drug use by perpetrator, victim or both.”²⁶ Research has shown that sexually aggressive dates are more likely to drink heavily or use drugs. Other studies mention that while the consumption of alcohol may lower inhibition for some men who are predisposed to sexual aggression, the pharmacological effect of alcohol on physical arousal may actually impede a man’s ability to complete a rape.

Numerous testimonies from battered and sexually abused women confirm that alcohol — while not a cause of violence — can be a common catalyst to abuse. Research indicates an association between heavy alcohol consumption and sexual and physical violence against women, but it is unclear, however, how alcohol increases the risk of violence.²⁷

Drunkenness can provide an excuse for antisocial behaviour, such that men feel they will not be held accountable for their actions. There is evidence that men with alcohol problems tend to be violent more frequently and inflict more serious injuries on their partners.²⁸

Dishonouring women and girls

“Pakistani police have arrested five men on charges of kidnapping and gang-raping a woman in the latest of a string of so-called honour crimes. The married woman was attacked because one of her male cousins had an affair with a woman whose father disapproved of the relationship, police said. ...”²⁹

Despite popular perceptions, the concept of “honour” as a pivotal force around which family and society are formed is by no means the monopoly of Muslim culture. Research in Latin America, Mediterranean countries, the Middle East, Asia and the Far East, as well northern and sub-Saharan Africa, shows that patriarchal models of honour dominate

cultural and social arrangements. The threat to women’s basic human rights and personal safety is severe in these environments, where perpetrators of honour-restoring violence neither see themselves as wrongdoers, nor are seen as wrongdoers by their society. In the preceding example from July 2005, the perpetrators were required to carry out the judgement on orders from a village council in a rural area in Pakistan where tribal customs still hold sway.

Honour crimes have been described as a “retrogressive patriarchal tradition”.³⁰ They are based on the idea that a man’s honour is predicated largely on his ability to control the behaviour, especially sexual, of his womenfolk. Institutions that foster male domination and sexual segregation have accordingly become fundamental to the social order in such societies.

In a context that would be considered extraordinary outside of these communities, a father, brother or uncle may be the perpetrator of femicide and not consider it a crime or anything other than the right thing to do. “This is my daughter’s wedding night and those people are pretending that my daughter is not a virgin,” an Algerian father shouts

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to doctors at 3 a.m. in a hospital emergency room. “I want you to examine her and clear my honour. I swear if she is not a virgin I will kill her right now.”³¹ Loss of virginity, or perceived loss of virginity, brings permanent dishonour to an unmarried woman and her family. The only way to cleanse the family honour is to kill the woman.

In these cultures, the police and judiciary display gender bias in favour of men who have killed women or girls for alleged breaches of honour. Where there is legislation, it is often ineffective in prosecutions and frequently regarded as Western or modern/urban by communities that predominantly live according to centuries-old customary law and informal tribal jurisdiction.

Documented cases from Brazil, Palestine, Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco, Syria and Lebanon (amongst many other countries) illustrate present-day examples of lenient judgements for wife murdering. This exists on a universal scale and therefore does “not result from religious or cultural factors but from a shared attitude to do with a

woman's worth and their proper role in society."³² In such cases the perpetrator may even be exonerated.

In these contexts what can we say of the perpetrators? Are they individuals guilty of gross human rights abuses and murder or are they part of a culture, a system that is collectively perpetrating these abuses?

The hegemony of patriarchy

While significant progress has been made in the last 20 to 30 years in challenging patriarchal systems in many parts of the world, structures of male dominance are so pervasive in most cultures that many women and men accept them and live out their days without questioning the "norms" under which they live. The inevitable involvement of women in particular forms of gender-based violence is therefore significant and, in some cases, instrumental. This is perhaps most evident where traditional gender roles remain entrenched.

Practices such as sex-selective abortion, female infanticide, child marriage and female genital cutting survive and persist with the direct endorsement and participation of women. Mothers, grandmothers, aunts and sisters all live under the hegemony of a cultural system of codes and practices that stem from male-dominated attitudes towards a woman's worth, her commoditisation, her subjugation and the importance, at any cost, of ensuring a woman's fidelity through the control of her sexuality.

As a result, these practices are often perpetrated and facilitated by women, who, like their male counterparts, do not seek to change their customs. The same is true in societies where crimes related to "honour" continue. It would be erroneous to suggest that women are united against the men of their societies over issues of honour. The extent to which women are implicated and involved as perpetrators of practices which harm their own sex illustrates how slow and complicated any future change will be.

Rape and sexual abuse

Rape is a pandemic of huge proportions that affects millions of people across the globe. The perpetrators are almost exclusively male and the victims predominantly women and girls. Their victims may be infants, adolescents, women in their reproductive years and older women. Men

and boys are also raped in high numbers, usually by heterosexual males. Rape may happen in the context of "dating", in marriage, or as part of gang initiation. Rape is widespread in areas of civil unrest and where the rule of law is weak. Rape and sexual abuse are also rife in protected and "captive" environments such as prisons, refugee and displaced person's camps, the armed services and schools.

Countries of recent notoriety for high numbers of reported rapes are South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo, but the rates of rape in India, the United States and many other countries are equally high. Research shows that amongst developed countries the United States has unusually high levels of rape. In 1980 the rate of reported rape in the United States was 18 times higher than the corresponding rate for England and Wales.³³ More recent data from the State Department of the United States in 2000 indicated that a woman is raped in that country every 90 seconds. According to a 2002 study in Ireland, 6.4 percent of the female population reported having been raped.³⁴

Cultural definitions of manhood that stress the importance of sexual conquest and potency place women at increased risk of sexual assault. Many rapists do not consider their aggressive or coercive tactics to be

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criminal and often feel justified in forcing a woman into having sex. Studies have shown that men do not place as great a value on sexual consent as women.³⁵

The act of sexual violence may be motivated by different impulses depending on the rapist and the social or political context in which the violation is performed. Many researchers have concluded, however, that rape is essentially an expression of power rather than an act committed for sexual gratification. They argue that while sexual arousal and even sexual gratification may be a by-product of rape, sex serves as the medium through which perpetrators of rape both demonstrate and exercise control over their victims.

Even when acting according to the same basic impulse, rapists are as varied as those who are raped, and efforts to pin down specific characteristics of rapists are inconclusive. Despite the popular representation of rapists as "sick" or depraved monsters, studies have

Police surround the body of convicted rapist Carlos Pardilla outside a Manila court in the Philippines in June 1999. Pardilla leapt to his death from the fifth floor of the courthouse after being sentenced to death by legal injection for raping his daughter.

Image: Mike Alquinto/AFP

David Potse, age 23, after being convicted in a South African court of raping a nine-month-old baby. Potse's DNA matched samples taken from the victim, and his girlfriend, who witnessed the rape, testified against him. He was given a life sentence for the rape, with an additional 18-year sentence for indecent assault.

Image: Emile Hendricks/AFP



Doctors check for any remaining signs of life in the bodies of two Saudi men and one Kuwaiti man, which hang from the gallows in front of the interior ministry in Kuwait City in 2004. The men were convicted of the rape and murder of a six-year-old girl they had kidnapped in 2002. After taking the child from her home, they drove to a remote desert area, where they raped her and then stabbed her five times in the chest before slitting her throat.

Image: Yasser al-Zayyat/AFP

shown that fewer than 5 percent of men were “psychotic” when they raped.³⁶ The central assumption in the psychological model is that violent male sexual aggression is strange or abnormal, but the prevalence of rape and the range of perpetrators links sexual aggression, instead, to social and environmental variables.

A study of 114 convicted and incarcerated rapists in the United States revealed a range of motivations from the perpetrators’ perspective. A number of rapists used sexual violence in revenge against another male and/or as punishment — by abusing another man’s woman they punish the man — while others used it as a means of gaining sexual access to unwilling or unavailable women. In one example, a man had an argument with victim’s husband. “I grabbed her and started beating the hell out of her. Then I committed the act. I knew what I was doing. I was mad. I could have stopped but I didn’t. I did it to get even with her and her husband.”³⁷

In some cases perpetrators said that rape was just a “bonus” added to burglary or robbery. The rapists found themselves in a position of power and the opportunity presented itself. One man interviewed said, “Rape was a feeling of total dominance. Before the rapes, I would always get a feeling of power and anger. I would degrade women so I could feel there was a person of less worth than me.”³⁸

Rape also was considered by some to be a recreational activity. The act was described as an adventure and an exciting form of impersonal sex which gave the rapists power over their victims. A common thread in

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these interviews was the objective of dominance. The analysts of this study concluded, “The pleasure these men derived from raping reveals the extreme to which they objectified women. Women were seen as sexual commodities to be used and conquered rather than as human beings with rights and feelings.”³⁹ Researchers came to the final conclusion that perhaps they were asking the wrong question. “Instead of asking men who rape ‘why?’ perhaps we should be asking men who don’t ‘why not?’”⁴⁰

Organized rape can be used as a tactical device to accomplish particular political and social ends. It may be used to intimidate, to punish

individual women and social groups, to destabilise and demoralise communities or to drive unwanted people from their land.⁴¹ Conflicts in the last decade in the Balkans and the present atrocities in Darfur, western Sudan, as well as the mass rape of women and girls during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda are examples of rape being used to achieve these kinds of ends. Men may be forced at gunpoint to rape female family members or other men, as part of the use of rape to terrorise and humiliate people.

The perpetrators in these cases are a wide range of men, uniformed and civilian, who act with the tacit or explicit approval of their political or military leaders. While many rapists in these contexts may claim, after the event, that they were coerced into committing rape, there is a long history of rape being seen and enjoyed as the spoils of war.

The role of vice and greed

There are categories of gender-based violence — such as trafficking of women and children, the sale and use of child pornography, and forced prostitution (adult and child) — where the perpetrators are engaged in illegal activities for financial gain. The activities may be neither culturally acceptable nor allowed by national or international law, but unlike other forms of violence against women and girls, the perpetrator’s primary interest in his victim is as a lucrative commodity.

The intended end of a perpetrator’s activities in these instances is to earn income, and the means involve coercion and infringement of other people’s rights. While the violent gangs that often control trafficking and prostitution may directly sexually abuse the women and children they control, vice and greed are the primary motivation for their activities.

Patriarchal societies which already victimise women and girls create the preconditions for trafficking and forced prostitution to exist. The exploitation of women and girls occurs within contexts that deny them their most basic human rights.

Perpetrators who organize, plan, invest in and dominate aspects of the illegal sex industry are predominantly male, but women are also complicit at different levels. Female agents are directly involved in running brothels, disciplining and maintaining prostitutes and recruiting girls for trafficking.

The users of Internet pornography involving minors, the global patrons of women who are forced into prostitution, and those who keep trafficked women in virtual slavery (as domestic or sexual slaves) are no less perpetrators of sexual crimes.

The sex “industry” operates within market dictates of supply and demand, and both sides have to take responsibility. Perpetrators on the supply side of the illegal sex industry are normally criminals and organized in what is a highly competitive and lucrative multimillion-dollar economy. On the demand side, users of prostitutes and Internet pornography throughout the world are demographically diverse, and include men of all ages and characters. Women also use these sex services, although it is less common. Sometimes these users may be ignorant — or choose to be ignorant — of the gender-based violence they involve themselves in.

National laws in various Western countries are beginning to reflect this sense that the users of these “services” are complicit in the illegal activity irrespective of where the crime occurs. In recent years, cases of British sex tourists being prosecuted for activities committed in Cambodia or the Philippines, or Australians when visiting Thailand are sobering reminders to perpetrators that international boundaries no longer provide them with the immunity that they previously enjoyed. There also have been initiatives in some countries to criminalise domestic prostitution by policing and punishing the clients rather than the sex workers themselves.

Perpetrators of child abuse

“There are many perpetrators who have committed sexual crimes against children, some of their own children, in a very deliberate, systematic, premeditated, thoughtful, manipulative and conniving sort of way. These are not sick, demented abnormal people. These are thoughtful, intelligent planned initiatives undertaken by perpetrators to get what they want.”⁴² This psychotherapist from Canada echoed the conclusions of numerous studies that focus on the characteristics of perpetrators of child sex abuse.

Sexual abuse of children and adolescents is one of the most invisible forms of sexual violence because of the considerable taboo surrounding

the notion of incest and child abuse in most cultures. Research shows that the majority of perpetrators are men; only a small percentage of the abuse — between 3 percent and 10 percent — is conducted by women.⁴³ The male perpetrator is normally a father, brother, uncle, step-father or grandfather. One study suggested that while 13 percent of all perpetrators of female incest were the biological fathers and 12 percent

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were brothers, only 0.5 percent were mothers.⁴⁴ In many cases the victim’s fear of testifying against the known perpetrator, combined with the considerable social disapprobation for the perpetrator if exposed, means that countless cases of child abuse are hidden by families or communities. Victims of child abuse within the family suffer a special sense of harm: The violations break spoken and unspoken rules of kinship that traditionally codify the identity of the child.⁴⁵

As with other gender-based crimes, people who prey on children are not a homogenous group. They range from those clinically defined as “preferential paedophiles”, to situational abusers, to those who are indifferent to the age of their sexual partners and finally to those who perpetrate infant rape. Situational abusers may not be exclusively attracted to children but in a single case or series of cases may take advantage of a situation where they engage in sex with a minor. “Indifferent” abusers are unlikely to seek out young children but are nevertheless willing to pay for casual sex with underage girls, particularly when abroad. The motivations for perpetrators of infant abuse and rape may be the most unclear, although in some cultures those who believe in the myth of the “virgin cure” may rape infants in hopes of being protected against and/or cured of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.⁴⁶

It is likely that all child abuse is underreported, but this may be even more the case when the victims are boys. Evidence suggests a causal relationship for boys between being abused as a child and becoming a perpetrator of abuse as an adult.⁴⁷ Studies of female victims, on the other hand, indicate they rarely become perpetrators of child abuse. Instead, girls are more likely to have other problems such as early pregnancy, substance abuse and abusive relationships.

Witnessing domestic/marital violence as a child appears to increase the

In civil wars, when the rule of the gun replaces the rule of law, women and girls are at great risk of all forms of violence.

Image: Georgina Cranston/IRIN

In efforts to combat the increasingly publicised tide of violence and sexual abuse in South Africa this billboard in Johannesburg asks, "What kind of man are you? ... Violence against women hurts us all."

Image: Mariella Furrer

likelihood of a male abusing a partner later in life.⁴⁸ Notably, being directly abused appears to be less of a risk marker for committing future abuse than is witnessing violence, but it is nevertheless significant. In other words, violence in adult relationships is in part a learned response of young boys who grow up in violent homes. However, exposure to family violence is not a prerequisite for future abuse. For example, one study found that 38 percent of wife abusers had neither witnessed nor experienced physical aggression as a child.

Addressing the prevalence of perpetration

Whether the by-product of cultural tradition or predatory and impulsive masculinity, gender-based violence throughout the world is perpetrated in the main by men. In every category of sexual violence and gender-based discrimination, the victims are predominantly women. Violence against women and girls is a global epidemic that permeates, in some form, all cultures and communities.

This chapter seeks to explore the motivation that drives perpetrators of some aspects of gender-based violence against women. Many writers and commentators describe the behaviour of perpetrators in different ways, using sociological, cultural or psychological constructs, but some of the individual testimonies researched for this book were so gratuitously brutal, so monstrous in intent and so utterly careless of the suffering of the victim that the term "evil" seems to be the only suitable description. This writer was at a loss to understand or explain the

motives of some perpetrators — whose actions were violent in the extreme and directly targeted against women — in any other way.

Most men, however, are not violent towards women and treat the women and girls in their lives with care and respect. There are a growing number of groups and networks of men around the globe who are now taking action, often in alliance with women, to help stop gender-based violence. Amongst various initiatives, perhaps the best known example of men's antiviolence activism is the White Ribbon Campaign. Started in 1991 in Canada, it has now spread to the United States, Europe, Africa, Latin America and Australia.⁴⁹

Responding to perpetrators of different forms of gender-based violence is a major challenge due to the scope and extent of the violations themselves and the involvement of such a wide spectrum of men. The problem is compounded and facilitated by the fact that most societies are patriarchal, with structures and systems that directly or indirectly defend and reproduce perpetrators of physical violence and sexual assault and abuse.

Research shows that these forms of violence, and in particular child abuse, are most often transmitted intergenerationally through those who have been subject to, or witness to, abuse.⁵⁰ In such an environment, it is difficult to see how real changes will take place to break the cycle of violence unless men themselves, as chief perpetrators, take a leading role in creating societies that structurally and socially reject gender-based violence in all its forms. ■

Recent conflicts in West Africa, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda and Sudan are examples of wars in which government soldiers, militias, rebels and criminals have perpetrated many thousands of brutal rapes. This woman, a nurse by profession, was abducted by rebels in Sierra Leone to live as a "bush wife". The scar on her forehead is from a bullet wound she sustained when the soldiers, after gang-raping her, tortured her by seeing how close they could come to killing her with an AK-47.

Image: Brent Stirton

A 13-year-old girl and former "bush wife" who became pregnant through rape in Sierra Leone. She was fortunate enough to return to her family after peace accords were signed, but shortly afterwards her father threw her out of the household for bringing "dishonour" to the family. In the countless stories of this nature, the perpetrators are never brought to account for acts that shatter women's and girls' lives. In many cases victims suffer the secondary impact of rejection by their families and communities. Frequently, girls in this predicament find that prostitution is their only means of survival.

Image: Brent Stirton