

Violence Against Women

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Violence against women involves all seven sites of violence taken up by the Geneva Peace Symposium. More women than men of the world are poor. Women have long been victims as the spoils of war. More girls than boys endure violence as children. Patriarchal religions relegate women as inferior to men and have institutionalized violent acts against them. And of course, women as well as men suffer in the sites of violence against nature and against people of color.

Violence against women is being actively addressed by many agencies in our country and throughout the world. The United Nations is in the vanguard of these efforts. The UN website, www.un.org/womenwatch, is a joint United Nations project created in March 1997 to provide Internet space for global gender equality issues and to support implementation of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. It was founded by the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and is managed by the Interagency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE). This website posts numerous related topics including a specific section on Violence Against Women and updates the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) currently posted on our Geneva Peace Symposium "Useful Sites" web page.

Critical areas of concern include domestic and sexual violence, harmful traditional practices, trafficking in women and girls, HIV/AIDS, and crimes in war and armed conflict. In July 2010, The United Nations General Assembly created UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. UN Women is grounded in the vision of equality enshrined in the UN Charter, working for the

- elimination of discrimination against women and girls
- empowerment of women
- achievement of equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of development, human rights, humanitarian action, and peace and security.

In the United States, in fact just a few miles from where our Geneva Peace Symposium meets today, we have the historical honor of having convened the first Women's Rights Convention on July 19th and 20th, 1848. This event launched changes that would gradually alter the globe in the years to come. In 1923, again in Seneca Falls, the Equal Rights Amendment was introduced to Congress and reintroduced every year until it passed in 1972. As of 1982, state ratification fell short of passage in Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, North and South Carolina, Nevada, Oklahoma, Utah and Virginia.

One of the major players in the early women's rights movement was Matilda Joslyn Gage, who co-edited *History of Woman Suffrage* with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. A brilliant researcher, Gage also wrote *Woman, Church, and State*, published in 1893. She painstakingly describes the history of violence against women in this country and the horrendous acts that were once commonplace and sanctioned by religion and government. Perhaps an analysis of how our country has addressed, albeit slowly, violence against woman toward the present status of women might illuminate possibilities for change in more violent places today. A major question for the world today may be, is gender equality a possibility for Islam? A further question for America is, will fundamentalism undermine the status of women? In both cases the question of violence against women is central.

While crime rates in America are declining, there is still much to be done. According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), 203,680 rapes or sexual assaults occurred among females compared to 6,200 among males in 2004. Of those among females, 136,550 were perpetrated by a nonstranger. It is estimated that well less than half of all rapes or attempted rapes are reported to law enforcement. According to NCVS, the rate of rape in the U.S. has remained stable since 2000.

There are hundreds of organizations in the U.S. that focus on violence against women. One set of resources can be found at www.vawnet.org, Violence Against Women Network, the National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women, funded through a Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and housed within the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (NRC DV).

Once again in our Symposium, we must look to the places where children spend most of their waking time to address attitudes and behaviors that lead to violence. Television, computer games, popular music, and competitive sports all share a part in desensitizing our children to violent acts. It is no accident that in the use of the word "scoring" we find a glaring connection between competitive sport and objectified sexual conquest. Groups of boys and men must be sensitized to judge derogatory language and behavior against women as totally unacceptable. Girls and women must reject the male models of sport and the workplace and revolutionize, not copy, these arenas with their participation. In sport, it means a revival of cooperative games and an insistence on physical activity where everybody wins. In the workplace, it means bringing our babies to the conference table, into the classroom, and accommodating them wherever they can be without physical danger. Work and life need to be brought together so that business-like decisions are made with children as our witnesses, and hopefully as a reinforcement of our community conscience.

One example in this direction is Men Stopping Violence, which has evolved since the 1980s in Atlanta, Georgia. In 2005 MSV launched Because We Have Daughters, a campaign to provide an opportunity for men to experience a new perspective on the world in which women live. (www.menstoppingviolence.org)

In 1991 Canada began the White Ribbon Campaign to urge men to speak out against violence against women, wearing the white ribbon as symbol. In six weeks, over 100,000 men across Canada wore the ribbon and many more were drawn into discussion of men's violence against women. (www.whiteribbon.ca)

In 1996 Mary Gordon created Roots of Empathy in Toronto, an evidence-based classroom program of bringing babies into the schools that has shown dramatic effect in reducing levels of aggression and violence among school children while raising social/emotional competence and increasing empathy. This program has reached over 325,000 children worldwide. (www.rootsofempathy.org)

It is also in Ottawa, Canada, where one can find a stirring monument in the middle of a community park in the city that reads:

To honour and to grieve
All women
Abused and murdered by men
Envision a world without violence
Where women are
Respected
& Free

There is much to learn from our neighbors to the north.