



# National Organization for Women

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## **Several Aspects of Violence Against Women in the U.S. An Overview Prepared by the National Organization for Women Foundation for the University of Virginia Human Rights Law Clinic and the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women**

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### **Introduction**

Violence against women in the United States manifests in a variety of ways that deserve closer examination and heightened exposure to the public and to policy-makers and law enforcement officials. In this brief report, the National Organization for Women (NOW) Foundation would like to call to the attention of the U.N. Special Rapporteur the following types of violence against women: gun violence; familicide; gang rape; acquaintance rape on campus; the recently disclosed serial murders of hundreds of women along highways; violence against Native American women; sexual violence against women in the military; and the profusion of media images of violence against women. It is our hope that the Special Rapporteur may examine more closely these types of violence which serve to injure and oppress women in this country.

### ***Gun Violence Is Prevalent in the United States Women Are More Likely to Be Victims Than Men***

The U.S. is the most heavily armed country in the world<sup>1</sup> with an estimated 283 million guns in civilian hands.<sup>2</sup> This means that in the U.S. there are 97 guns for every 100 persons. The rate of firearm homicide in the U.S. is 19 times greater than in any other of the high-income nations.<sup>3</sup> It is not surprising that each day an average of 300 people are shot or killed with a gun. Annually, this results in 30,896 individuals being killed and 78,622 more people being injured.<sup>4</sup>

Firearms are not only used in the streets between strangers or persons engaged in criminal activity, but also by intimate partners. According to the Violence Policy Center (VPC) report *When Men Murder Women* issued in 2007, 91 percent of murdered women were killed by someone they knew.<sup>5</sup> Another finding demonstrates that in single victim/single offender incidents, 51 percent of female homicide victims were killed with a gun. Furthermore, 62 percent of the murdered women were killed by men with whom the victims had an intimate relationship at one point in their lives.<sup>6</sup> Black women are especially at risk, since a black woman is three times more likely to be killed by her partner or a family member than a white woman<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSL2834893820070828>

<sup>2</sup> Base on the results from the 2004 national firearms survey.

<sup>3</sup> International Journal of Epidemiology. 1998; 27: 214-21

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.bradycampaign.org/facts/gunviolence/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.vpc.org/studies/wmmw2009.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.vpc.org/studies/wmmw2009.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.vpc.org/studies/wmmw2009.pdf>

Gun proponents have argued that if more women were armed, they would be better equipped to defend themselves against violence by an intimate partner. However, a 2003 study by the American College of Emergency Physicians found that having a gun in the home increases the overall risk of someone in the household being murdered by 41 percent -- and for women the risk is tripled.<sup>8</sup> Another study published in the *Social Science and Medicine Journal* shows that states with high gun ownership levels have 114 percent higher firearm homicide rates and 60 percent higher homicide rates than states with low gun ownership.<sup>9</sup> Study after study highlights that the rate of homicide against women is disproportionately high and is closely tied to gun ownership.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Murders of Families Correlated with Economic Recession***

#### ***U.S. Rate Higher Than Other Developed Nations***

Familicide is another type of crime increasingly seen in the current economic recession and, though relatively rare, is seen as the most common form of mass murder. A number of tragic familicides have taken place over recent months as job losses and home foreclosure rates have mounted in the U.S. The Violence Policy Center reports that murder-suicides used to be rare at one or two every three months, but that there is a huge increase, with a murder-suicide occurring at the rates of one every week or two.

Several factors are found to be present in familicides: presence of a step-child, substance abuse by the perpetrator, depression or serious mental illness of the perpetrator, revenge by husbands against wives, jealousy or alleged infidelities, a means to end abuse, desire to alleviate real or imagined suffering from their children and economic stress.

Psychologists and criminologists define familicide as murdering one's spouse and at least one child before committing suicide. In familicide, 91 per cent of the time the perpetrator is a man,<sup>11</sup> though other studies have found the figure to be closer to 95 percent. More incidents of murder-suicide are committed with guns than any other weapon. According to findings published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* in 2008, 88 percent of 408 homicides-suicides studied were carried out with a gun.<sup>12</sup> Compared to other developed nations, the U.S. rate of familicide is three times higher than Canada's, eight times higher than Britain's, and 15 times higher than Australia's<sup>13</sup>. The U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ) also reports that states with lax gun control laws have eight times the rate of murder-suicides within a family than the states with more restrictive gun control laws.<sup>14</sup>

With all of the available findings on the correlation between violence against women and a ready availability of firearms, a clear picture emerges showing that, in the U.S., guns are used to take women's lives and not to save them. In order to reduce violence against women and intimate partner violence (as well as increase

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<sup>8</sup> Wiebe, D.J., (2003) "Homicide and Suicide Risks Associated with Firearms in the Home: A National Case Control Study", *Annals of Emergency Medicine*, Volume 41, American College of Emergency Physicians.

<sup>9</sup> Miller, Matthew, David Hemenway, and Deborah Azrael. "State-Level Homicide Victimization Rates in the US in Relation to Survey Measures of Household Firearm Ownership, 2001-2003." *Social Science and Medicine* 64 (2007) 656-64

<sup>10</sup> David Hemenway et al., "Firearm Availability and Female Homicide Victimization Rates among 25 Populous High Income Countries," *Journal of the American Medical Women's Association (JAMWA)* 57 (Spring 2002): 100-104 and Harvard School of Public Health press release, April 17, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Logan, J., Hill, H.A., Black, M.L., Crosby, A.E., Karch, D.L., Barnes, J.D. and Lubell, K.M., "Characteristics of Perpetrators in Homicide-Followed-by-Suicide Incidents: National Violent Death Reporting System — 17 US States, 2003-2005," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 168 (November 2008): 1056-1064.

<sup>12</sup> Logan, J., Hill, H.A., Black, M.L., Crosby, A.E., Karch, D.L., Barnes, J.D. and Lubell, K.M., "Characteristics of Perpetrators in Homicide-Followed-by-Suicide Incidents: National Violent Death Reporting System — 17 US States, 2003-2005," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 168 (November 2008): 1056-1064.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/topics/crime/intimate-partner-violence/murder-suicide.htm>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/topics/crime/intimate-partner-violence/murder-suicide.htm>

child safety), the data strongly suggest that stricter regulation of gun ownership is urgently needed. Additionally, better availability of mental health facilities and insurance coverage of mental health services could prevent some of these tragic events.

### ***Gang Rape is a Special Problem***

#### *Little Research Conducted on This Form of Violence*

Gang rape is one of the most heinous and frightening crimes against women in the U.S. Yet, abysmally little research has been done to better document and understand the factors involved in gang rape in order to prevent this type of violence.

With research limitations taken into account, the following statistical information about gang rape can be cited. Gang rapes constitute 11 percent of the estimated 100,000 rapes reported annually in the U.S., with 73 per cent of gang rapes are committed by strangers.<sup>15</sup> A 2007 report by Sarah E. Ullman, PhD, found that victims of gang rape have a “marginally greater likelihood of current Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) than single-offender victims.” Additionally, gang rape victims have reported more suicide attempts and are more likely to use illegal drugs than single-offender victims.

Other differences between gang and single-offender rapes show that gang rapes are more likely to occur indoors, involve substance abuse, and more likely contain verbal and physical threats and use of weapons than a single-offender rape. While few demographic differences between gang and single-offender rapes were discovered, gang rape victims tend to have lower education levels.<sup>16</sup> Similar to single-offender rape, the victims of the gang rapes are frequently ridiculed, disbelieved and blamed for their assault -- which can make seeking help and recovery an exceedingly painful process<sup>17</sup>.

In the 2007 report, Dr. Ullman concludes that “future studies of sexual assault should include more detailed questions about gang rape specifically in order to determine the characteristics of victims, offenders, and contexts of these attacks,” and that “Given the greater levels of violence, injury, sexual acts, and poorer assault aftermath shown in this study, more resources are needed to improve treatment and support to these victims.”<sup>18</sup>

### ***Acquaintance Rape on Campus***

#### *When Trying to Prosecute Rapists, Survivors Face Institutional Barriers*

Rape commonly happens on college campuses. According to a 2006 USDOJ report, there were 35 reported rapes per 1000 female college students over a seven month period.<sup>19</sup> Based on a separate victimization study by the USDOJ, of the 86 incidents categorized as a completed rape, when asked whether or not they believed they were the victims of rape, 46.5 percent answered “yes,” 48.8 percent answered “no,” and 4.7 percent answered “don’t know.” Among women who experienced other forms of sexual victimization, it is noteworthy that 3.4 percent defined their sexual victimization as a rape and 1.1 percent answered “don’t know.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/11/15/MN551AK5VK.DTL&tsp=1>

<sup>16</sup> Sarah E Ullman. (2007). Comparing Gang and Individual Rapes in a Community Sample of Urban Women. *Violence and Victims*, 22(1), 43-51. Retrieved December 20, 2009, from Psychology Module.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/11/15/MN551AK5VK.DTL&tsp=1>

<sup>18</sup> Sarah E Ullman. (2007). Comparing Gang and Individual Rapes in a Community Sample of Urban Women. *Violence and Victims*, 22(1), 43-51. Retrieved December 20, 2009, from Psychology Module.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/files/RIC/Publications/e07063411.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.ce-credit.com/articles/100186/SexualVictimizationCollege100186.pdf>

No clear agreement exists on the reasons why some women don't view their experience as a rape. Some suggest this phenomenon can be attributed to failure by the researchers to "truly measure the crime of rape."<sup>21</sup> Others hypothesize that women might not define their experiences as rape due to embarrassment, not clearly understanding the legal definition of rape, not wanting to classify someone they know as a rapist, or because they were blamed for the rape. More systematic research is needed to establish with certainty the reasons behind women's responses on the subject of rape.<sup>22</sup>

Gang rape is also a problem on college campuses and usually occurs between acquaintances during social get-togethers. Fifty-five percent of gang rapes on college campuses are committed by fraternity members, 40 percent by sports team members, and five percent by others.<sup>23</sup> Incoming freshmen women are especially vulnerable to rape and gang rape, particularly in the first few weeks of the new school semester.<sup>24</sup> Women who have been consuming alcohol at parties and may be in a reduced state of awareness could be at a greater risk of being raped. According to the USDOJ, "some men see alcohol as a tool for sexual conquest," and "many college men may be unaware that having sex with someone who is drunk is rape."<sup>25</sup>

The USDOJ reports also show that fewer than five percent of attempted and completed rapes were reported to law enforcement officials. Research suggests that the low rate of reporting can be attributed to the fact that some women did not view their experiences harmful or important enough to bring the authorities.<sup>26</sup> Women's safety advocates have noted that reporting and prosecution of rape is often more painful for the victim and, thus, many women seek to avoid this.

Alleged victims told the interviewers from the Center for Public Integrity that while they had encountered roadblocks from their school's administrators, their alleged attackers were almost uniformly unpunished. Federal law, known as The Jeanne Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Security Act [20 USC 1092 (f)], requires that institutions investigate and take action to end sexual assault, and mandates policies for addressing complaints on campus. The USDOJ's Office on Violence Against Women also awards grants to colleges to combat on-campus stalking as well as sexual and domestic violence against women.

Whether all colleges and universities have taken the Clery Act seriously is in question. In Fall 2008 progress reports from 26 institutions, there were only 25 sexual assault cases that resulted in any in a campus disciplinary proceeding, while another 16 were dismissed altogether. To put things into perspective, the combined female student population for the previous year was around 270,000 women<sup>27</sup> and a reasonable estimate would put the number of campus sexual assault cases much higher. This suggests that few on-campus resolutions to earnestly investigate and address rape reports were adopted and many incidents were allowed to slide under the radar. It can be surmised that more than 95 percent of college students who are sexually assaulted remain silent<sup>28</sup>. Students who decide to speak out say that they are met with discouragement.<sup>29 30</sup>

Better enforcement and oversight of the Clery Act is needed so that all post-secondary institutions will comply with the law.

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.ce-credit.com/articles/100186/SexualVictimizationCollege100186.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.ce-credit.com/articles/100186/SexualVictimizationCollege100186.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> O'Sullivan, C. (1991). Acquaintance gang rape on campus. In A. Parrot and L. Bechhofer (Eds.) Acquaintance rape: The hidden crime. New York: John Wiley and Sons. 140-156

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/files/RIC/Publications/e07063411.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/files/RIC/Publications/e07063411.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.ce-credit.com/articles/100186/SexualVictimizationCollege100186.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> [http://www.publicintegrity.org/investigations/campus\\_assault/articles/entry/1822/](http://www.publicintegrity.org/investigations/campus_assault/articles/entry/1822/)

<sup>28</sup> The Sexual Victimization of College Women, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, 2000

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/files/RIC/Publications/e07063411.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> [http://www.publicintegrity.org/investigations/campus\\_assault/articles/entry/1822/](http://www.publicintegrity.org/investigations/campus_assault/articles/entry/1822/)

## ***Highway Serial Murders Revealed***

### ***FBI Says Hundreds of Women's Bodies Are Found Along the Highways***

In what is one of the most shocking revelations of violent crimes against women, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) disclosed in April, 2009 that over the last three decades hundreds of women's bodies have been found near major highways. The victims in these cases are mostly prostitutes and hitchhikers who are living high-risk, transient lifestyles. They are frequently picked up at truck stops or service stations and then sexually assaulted, murdered and their bodies dumped along a highway. Stranded motorists and women employed at businesses along major highways have also been among the victims. To date, more than 500 women's bodies have been found, and the FBI officials maintain that the numbers are "grossly underreported."<sup>31</sup> Several newspaper reports have speculated that the total number of victims may be in the thousands. A map of the locations of some of the found victims along major transportation routes can be seen at [http://www.fbi.gov/page2/april09/highwayserialkillings\\_040609.html](http://www.fbi.gov/page2/april09/highwayserialkillings_040609.html)

The FBI has been gathering data on these unsolved murders and formed the Highway Serial Killers Initiative in April 2009.<sup>32</sup> The FBI uses a computer database to search for patterns and similarities in highway murder cases in hopes of discovering the perpetrators. Based on findings, investigative authorities believe long-haul truck drivers may be responsible for many of these serial highway killings. The database also contains information on scores of truckers who have been charged with or suspected of murders and rapes committed near highways. So far, 200 potential suspects have been identified by the FBI.

However, while it is possible to discover links between some cases, identifying perpetrators still remains a difficult task. As one investigator put it, "You've got a mobile crime scene. You can pick a girl up on the East Coast, kill her two states away and then dump her three states after that."<sup>33</sup> The mobile nature of the crime complicates the work of law enforcement authorities, but the implementation of a countrywide database is a step in the right direction. The Highway Serial Killer Initiative yields results, according to the FBI. Hitherto, at least 10 suspects believed to be responsible for 30 homicides have been apprehended and placed into custody.<sup>34</sup>

But these few arrests and prosecutions pale in comparison to the sheer volume of women's bodies that have been found. The difficulty in investigating these homicides is apparent, but other measures such as increased federal regulatory requirements for interstate trucking companies and more extensive driver criminal background checks may be necessary. It is indeed a sad commentary that so many murders of women have occurred over decades with little recognition and very belated law enforcement responses.

## ***Sexual Violence Against Native American Women***

### ***Native American Women Are More Likely To Be Sexually Assaulted***

Sexual violence against women in Indian Country (defined as reservations, trust land, and communities) is a critical human rights issue which has been ignored for a long time. According to the USDOJ, more than one in three Native American women will be raped or sexually assaulted in her lifetime. According to a 2007 Amnesty International report, the rate of sexual assault of Native American women is 2.5 times higher than that of women from other racial backgrounds in the U.S.A.<sup>35</sup> Rape of Native American women is also exceedingly violent, with weapons being used three times more frequently than in other reported rape

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<sup>31</sup> <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/apr/05/local/me-serialkillers5?pg=6>

<sup>32</sup> [http://www.fbi.gov/page2/april09/highwayserialkillings\\_040609.html](http://www.fbi.gov/page2/april09/highwayserialkillings_040609.html)

<sup>33</sup> <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/apr/05/local/me-serialkillers5>

<sup>34</sup> [http://www.fbi.gov/page2/april09/highwayserialkillings\\_040609.html](http://www.fbi.gov/page2/april09/highwayserialkillings_040609.html)

<sup>35</sup> United States of America: Maze of injustice: The failure to protect indigenous women from violence, Amnesty International 2007

cases.<sup>36</sup> A significant characteristic of sexual violence against Native American women is that at least 86 percent of the offenders are non-Native American.<sup>37</sup> By contrast, data on sexual violence against non-Native American women, show that sexual assault is usually committed against a woman with the same race or ethnic background as her attacker.

Unfortunately, these statistics are understated because many incidents of sexual violence against Native American women remain untold and unreported. The first and foremost barrier to reporting is the jurisdiction problem. There are more than 550 federally recognized Native American tribes and Alaska Native groups in the U.S, and approximately 275 Native American tribes have their own court systems. Tribal prosecutors are prohibited from prosecuting crimes committed by non-Native American perpetrators as well as passing custodial sentences that are in keeping with the seriousness of the crimes of rape or other forms of sexual violence. Cases involving non-Native American offenders must be referred to federal or state prosecutors, who often lack the time and resources to pursue them.<sup>38</sup> As a result of the juristic confusion, police and courts tend to ignore cases of sexual violence involving Native American women. Consequently Native American women, who survive sexual assault, are denied justice and most offenders go unpunished.

Another problem is that tribal governments are chronically under-funded and provided with significantly fewer resources by federal and state governments than non-Native American communities. Amnesty International's report informs that the million-acre Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, straddling North Dakota and South Dakota, has only seven police officers on duty. Another example: in Alaska, where state and Native Alaskan police patrol a vast landscape, it took officers four hours to reach the village of Nunam Iqua, during which time a barricaded suspect raped a 13-year-old girl in front of her siblings.<sup>39</sup> Lack of appropriate police training can lead re-victimization by police of some Native American victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse. Additionally, the Indian Health Service is unable to guarantee Native American survivors of sexual violence access to adequate and timely forensic examinations and treatment.<sup>40</sup>

In 2000, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) authorized The Tribal Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Coalitions Grant Program, which funded 11 new projects, totaling more than \$3 million to end violence against Native American and Alaska Native women in Fiscal Year 2008. The Grants to the Native American Tribal Governments Program (Tribal Governments Program), authorized in Title IX of VAWA 2005, provided approximately \$30 million to enhance the ability of tribes to respond to violent crimes against Native American women, enhance victim safety, and develop education and prevention strategies. However, in an Amnesty International 2008 update report titled "Maze of Injustice: the failure to protect Indigenous women from sexual violence in the USA", researchers suggest that without adequate funding there is still a significant barrier to implementation of health services, data collection and enforcement of anti-violence legislation in Indian Country.<sup>41</sup>

### ***Sexual Assault in the U.S. Military***

#### ***Military Officials Fail to Adequately Address the Problem***

Though U.S. servicewomen dedicate and risk their lives in order to protect their country, they remain at risk of sexual assault from their fellow servicemen. In 2006, the military received 2,947 reports of sexual assault

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<sup>36</sup> Broken Justice in Indian Country, by N.Bruce Duthu, The New York Times, August 11, 2008

<sup>37</sup> [http://www.amnestyusa.org/uploads/house\\_interior\\_testimony\\_deer.pdf](http://www.amnestyusa.org/uploads/house_interior_testimony_deer.pdf)

<sup>38</sup> Broken Justice in Indian Country, by N.Bruce Duthu, The New York Times, August 11, 2008

<sup>39</sup> United States of America: Maze of injustice: The failure to protect indigenous women from violence, Amnesty International 2007

<sup>40</sup> United States of America: Maze of injustice: The failure to protect indigenous women from violence, Amnesty International 2007

<sup>41</sup> [http://www.amnestyusa.org/pdf/maze\\_1yr.pdf](http://www.amnestyusa.org/pdf/maze_1yr.pdf)

within its ranks. The number, as it turns out, had increased by 25 percent since 2005.<sup>42</sup> USDOJ statistics estimate fewer than 40 percent of Military rapes are reported.<sup>43</sup> Even though the military claims it works to address sexual violence against servicewomen, the number of women reporting sexual harassment has not changed significantly over the years.<sup>44</sup>

As with the cases of civilian rape reports, servicewomen are faced with dismissive attitudes and sometimes outright threats from supervising military personnel. For example, when Lt. Jennifer Dyer reported being raped by an officer, she was threatened with prosecution for filing a false report; and when she would not report for duty in the same location as her rapist, she was threatened with prosecution for an AWOL charge. Dyer's rapist received an acquittal.<sup>45</sup> Cases like Dyer's are far from isolated within the military ranks. Time and again the military has demonstrated a callous disregard for the safety of women, even going as far as according burial with honors to convicted rapists who were also veterans.

The 2009 report of the Defense Task Force on Sexual Assault in the Military Services (Task Force) further documents the military's deficient approach to prevention and response to sexual assault. The report finds the military has consistently failed to provide comprehensive sexual assault prevention training and to provide appropriate professional help for victims of sexual assault. According to the defense task report, current sexual assault prevention and response training "prioritizes efficiency over effectiveness."<sup>46</sup> As such, the current training is conducted with the use of electronic briefing slides in large group settings with mixed genders and ranks present and concentrates on "basic awareness and reporting options."<sup>47</sup> The current approach does not yield productive results, and majority of the feedback from participants has been "consistently negative."<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, the current restricted reporting option that gives victims of sexual assault access to medical care and counseling does not provide the confidentiality needed to aid the victim in the healing and legal processes. The Task Force report calls for the services of fully certified Victim Advocates to be offered to the survivors of sexual assault. While the Department of Defense (DOD) does establish rules for the use of Victim Advocates, the DOD does not require Victim Advocates get appropriate training. According to Task Force findings, victims felt their current representatives were unqualified to provide advocacy services.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, military medical clinics are also unprepared to perform Sexual Assault Forensic Exams because the staff is not trained in performing these exams, and military health care facilities are not keeping adequate records of sexual assaults.<sup>50</sup> All of these factors contribute to creating a climate of indifference toward sexual assault within the military, and women are left to suffer degradation and injustice as a result.

More committed leadership from the White House and the Pentagon is needed to accelerate training, enhance prevention efforts, adopt important policy and program changes to protect victims, and to thoroughly investigate and prosecute sexual assault crimes in the military.

### ***Violence Against Women in Mass Media*** ***Media Helps to Normalize Violence Against Women***

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<sup>42</sup> <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/web/la-oew-marshall30jan30,0,2956277.story>

<sup>43</sup> <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/jan/23/opinion/oe-ream23?pg=2>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/421/index.html>

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/02/17/60minutes/main674791.shtml>

<sup>46</sup> [http://www.dtic.mil/dtfsams/docs/11\\_09docs/DtfsAMS-Rept\\_Dec09.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/dtfsams/docs/11_09docs/DtfsAMS-Rept_Dec09.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> [http://www.dtic.mil/dtfsams/docs/11\\_09docs/DtfsAMS-Rept\\_Dec09.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/dtfsams/docs/11_09docs/DtfsAMS-Rept_Dec09.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> [http://www.dtic.mil/dtfsams/docs/11\\_09docs/DtfsAMS-Rept\\_Dec09.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/dtfsams/docs/11_09docs/DtfsAMS-Rept_Dec09.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> [http://www.dtic.mil/dtfsams/docs/11\\_09docs/DtfsAMS-Rept\\_Dec09.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/dtfsams/docs/11_09docs/DtfsAMS-Rept_Dec09.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> [http://www.dtic.mil/dtfsams/docs/11\\_09docs/DtfsAMS-Rept\\_Dec09.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/dtfsams/docs/11_09docs/DtfsAMS-Rept_Dec09.pdf)

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) maintains that “extensive research evidence indicates that media violence can contribute to aggressive behavior, desensitization to violence, nightmares, and fear of being harmed” among children.<sup>51</sup> American children, ages 2-18, spend an average of six and a half hours daily consuming various forms of media, a large percentage of which includes violent acts. AAP informs that 21 percent of the 33 most popular video games contain violence against women, with popular music by artists including Eminem featuring graphic song lyrics about murdering and raping women. On average, by the time a person turns 18 he or she will have viewed 200,000 acts of violence by watching television alone.<sup>52</sup> The AAP reports that “more than 3,500 research studies have examined the association between media violence and violent behavior” and “all but 18 have shown a positive relationship.”

According to a report in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, video games perpetuate the most uniform sex stereotypes of any media popular with today’s youth, so that 83 percent of male characters are portrayed as violent and 32 percent of video game scenes glamorize violence.<sup>53</sup> Female video game characters, on the other hand, are marginalized and presented as sexual objects, and victims of male violence. An experiment conducted by the Lenior-Rhyne College’s School of Social and Behavioral Sciences found that men exposed to stereotypical representations of gender were significantly more likely to make judgments tolerating real-life sexual harassment, and that long-term exposure to video game violence correlates with tolerance of sexual harassment and greater acceptance of rape myths. Furthermore, “the males who were exposed to the objectified female video game characters were the most tolerant of any of the [experimental] groups towards sexual harassment.”<sup>54</sup>

Another study conducted by researchers from Brigham Young University and the University of Central Lancashire Departments of Psychology found subjects who viewed clips from movies demonstrating physical aggression and relational aggression (in which people manipulate relationships to deliberately harm somebody) were more physically and relationally aggressive than subject who viewed neutral clips. According to the report, “the results show evidence for a generalization effect of viewing media aggression, in that viewing one form of aggression can influence the manifestation of other forms.”<sup>55</sup> Consequentially, viewing violence in the media can lead to more aggression that is expressed in a different form from what was witnessed on screen, so that “viewing physical violence in the media can generalize to relational aggression.”<sup>56</sup>

Despite the prevalence of evidence suggesting connections between consumption of violent media and manifestations of violence, including violence against women, some scientists contend that the evidence is inconclusive. For instance, while a study conducted by Kaiser Family Foundation in 2003 found that while 47 percent of children ages four through six mimic aggressive behavior, children are still more likely to imitate positive behavior.<sup>57</sup> Japan is another interesting case. Japanese media is often far more violent than the media in the U.S., yet the crime rate in Japan is significantly lower. Conversely, other studies have found that the introduction of television does in fact increase violent behavior within a society. A 1970s study by the University of British Columbia found that violent incidents in a remote British Columbian village increased by 160 percent after the introduction of television. Similarly, South African crime rates skyrocketed after the country’s ban on television was lifted in 1975.<sup>58</sup>

The prevalence of violence against women in mass media presents a special challenge in a nation that constitutionally protects speech -- of nearly all kinds. Heightened advocacy to challenge broadcasters and

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<sup>51</sup> <http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/pediatrics;108/5/1222>

<sup>52</sup> <http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/pediatrics;108/5/1222>

<sup>53</sup> *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 44 (2008)

<sup>54</sup> *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 44 (2008) 1402–1408

<sup>55</sup> *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 44 (2008) 1551–1554

<sup>56</sup> *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 44 (2008) 1551–1554

<sup>57</sup> [http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/violence/effects\\_media\\_violence.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/violence/effects_media_violence.cfm)

<sup>58</sup> [http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/violence/effects\\_media\\_violence.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/violence/effects_media_violence.cfm)



producers to limit their focus on violent treatment of women is one strategy that could be more aggressively pursued. Also useful is increased public education about evidence showing a connection between viewing violent images and subsequent violent behavior by the viewer. Women's rights activists in the U.S. have long advocated for gender balance in top media industry positions, with only a few notable gains. Having women in more decision-making roles within mass media would likely have an important impact on the portrayal of violence against women.

### ***Final Comments***

In September 2009, the National Organization for Women wrote that in the midst of our serious economic recession funding for many domestic violence programs were being cut (<http://www.now.org/issues/violence/090309dvbg.html>). Other social service programs aiding sexual assault and child abuse survivors were facing budget reductions as well. At the same time, demand for these services skyrocketed. Because federal funds that had been authorized by Congress but not fully allocated over previous years and because state governments faced and continue to face serious deficits due to declining revenues, critical social service programs and survivors of violence are being placed in jeopardy.

Though much progress to help survivors of domestic violence has been made since the passage of the Violence Against Women Act in 1994, programs and services continually face funding shortfalls. The current economic crisis has resulted in an added strain on an already stretched-thin fabric of support. To demonstrate the extent of services provided and document unmet demand, the National Network to End Domestic Violence conducts an annual census. The one-day National Census of Domestic Violence Services in September 2008 found that the 78 percent of domestic violence programs reporting served 60,799 domestic violence survivors with shelter and that 30,366 adults and children received non-residential assistance and services, such as counseling and advocacy. But, because many programs reported a critical shortage of funds and staff to fully assist victims in need, 8,927 requests for help went unmet. This count is just for one day -- a tiny slice of the 24/7 burden placed on domestic violence programs that for many years have not seen adequate financial support. The figures for the 2009 census, when fully compiled, are likely to be very similar.

We are at a critical juncture with a growing population, an added stress of economic hardship and with increased incidence of family violence. Advocates for survivors of violence are looking for ways to drive home the message to governments and donors that our ability to aid survivors is inadequate and growing more so. We are hoping that an examination of the situation in the United States --- where violence against women remains an enormous social problem -- can help win the necessary resources to meet the need.

*This report was prepared with the assistance NOW Communications Intern Liz Doubossarskaia and NOW Foundation Law Intern Qing Luo.*