

Beat: Health

Third of women worldwide have experienced physical or sexual violence

-, 21.06.2013, 05:26 Time

USPA News - More than a third of all women worldwide have experienced either physical or sexual abuse, posing a global health problem of epidemic proportions, according to a World Health Organization (WHO) report that calls for increased efforts to combat the problem. The study, conducted in partnership with the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and the South African Medical Research Council, found that intimate partner violence is the most common type of violence against women, affecting approximately 30 percent of women worldwide.

"This new data shows that violence against women is extremely common. We urgently need to invest in prevention to address the underlying causes of this global women's health problem," said Professor Charlotte Watts from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. According to the study, 38 percent of all women who were murdered were killed by their intimate partners, and 42 percent of women who have experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of a partner had experienced injuries as a result. It is also a major contributor to women's mental health problems. Women who have experienced partner violence are almost twice as likely to experience depression compared to women who have not experienced any violence. Women experiencing intimate partner violence are also almost twice as likely as other women to have alcohol-use problems. "These findings send a powerful message that violence against women is a global health problem of epidemic proportions," said WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan. "We also see that the world's health systems can and must do more for women who experience violence." The report called for a major scaling up of global efforts to prevent all kinds of violence against women by addressing the social and cultural factors behind it, and emphasized the need for better care for women who have experienced such violence. It added that victims often seek health-care, but do not always disclose the true cause of their injuries or ill-health. "The report findings show that violence greatly increases women's vulnerability to a range of short- and long-term health problems; it highlights the need for the health sector to take violence against women more seriously," said Dr Claudia Garcia-Moreno of WHO. "In many cases this is because health workers simply do not know how to respond." New WHO clinical and policy guidelines released on Thursday aim to address this lack of knowledge. They stress the importance of training all levels of health workers to recognize when women may be at risk of partner violence and to know how to provide an appropriate response. They also point out that some health-care settings, such as antenatal services and HIV testing, may provide opportunities to support survivors of violence, provided certain minimum requirements are met. This includes training health care providers how to ask about violence, consultations taking place in a private setting, and a guarantee of confidentiality. The WHO said it will begin working with countries in South-East Asia at the end of this month to begin implementing the new recommendations. The organization will partner with ministries of health, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and sister United Nations agencies to disseminate the guidelines, and support their adaptation and use.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-1149/third-of-women-worldwide-have-experienced-physical-or-sexual-violence.html>

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619