

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER WOMEN

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I. Introduction

Excessive restrictions designed to control female sexuality are used to label women's sexual expressions as transgressions, to justify victim-blaming, and to mask the high prevalence and incidence of sexual violence. Violations include being forced to watch and imitate pornography; denying the right to choose or express a different sexual orientation; forced marriage; marital rape; 'corrective' rape of lesbians; body modification and humiliation; cyber-stalking; mass rape in conflict zones; and more. In private and public spheres, sexual violence is carried out with reckless impunity, with appallingly low conviction rates (e.g., 10% in the U.S.) for rapists. Women and girls are overwhelmingly targeted for sexual violence; but boys, men, and LGBTQ individuals are also victimized.

Sexual violence is a critical issue that needs to be addressed in Asian and Pacific Islander communities for several reasons:

- *Child sexual abuse and adult assaults often stay undisclosed and/ or denied proper help when disclosed.* Many women, advocates, and the female survivors they serve, have been sexually abused as children, teens, and/or adults or know someone who has; so there are long, unresolved histories for many women. Asian and Pacific Islander women and girls fear they will not be believed, or feel silenced by familial victim-blaming attitudes, or find that disclosure did not lead to help and safety.
- *Compartmentalized services do not work for our communities.* Asian and Pacific Islander women coming to domestic violence programs may eventually disclose their histories of sexual violence, once they have established rapport with a domestic violence advocate, and may be reluctant to go to a different program.
- *Immigrants and refugees can have traumatic histories of sexual violence.* Immigrants and refugees with childhood histories of sexual abuse in their home countries, or those using unsafe immigration routes, or escaping violence in civil or international conflict zones/wars and refugee camps, may not disclose their victimization for many years, nor would they consider going to a rape crisis center.
- *Advocate discomfort about sexual violence is a barrier to disclosure by victims/survivors.* Asian and Pacific Islander battered women often mention that their domestic violence advocates hesitate to bring up sexual violence beyond the issue of marital/intimate partner rape, but that they need a place to talk about sexual abuse by non-intimates. Domestic violence service providers can address these barriers, facilitate help-seeking and refer to appropriate resources.
- *Identifying increased vulnerability to and risk of sexual violence informs prevention and intervention.* Women and girls at certain stages in their lives, in certain jobs, and in dangerous settings can be targets for sexual violence. This does not mean that everyone in these situations is assaulted or unsafe but advocates can be alert to possible exposure.

II. Definition

Sexual violence includes sexual actions and threats that are experienced as invasive to the body and violate bodily integrity. ~World Health Organization Report, 2002.

Sexual violence is defined as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.

~Jewkes, Sen and Garcia-Moreno World Health Organization Report Report, 2002.

This analysis enumerates the kinds of sexual violence women face; identifies the contexts that increase the vulnerability of immigrants and refugees, such as coming from conflict zones; addresses issues such as advocate discomfort and language difficulties that can inhibit access to services; and develops trainings for domestic violence programs to address the intersections of sexual and domestic violence in Asian and Pacific Islander communities. It distinguishes between experiences of, and vulnerabilities to, sexual violence and lists the types of sexual violence Asian and Pacific Islander women may experience; and it identifies particular contexts that increase their vulnerability. Information on types of sexual violence, vulnerable women, and potentially dangerous settings is, however, applicable to women and girls in any community.

III. Types of Sexual Violence

- Body modification or bodily humiliation by men or other women
- Child Sexual Assault (CSA) by known assailants or strangers
- Coerced (forced) sex
- Coerced sexual initiation
- Custodial rapes: in police stations, jails, etc.
- Cyber assaults, cyber stalking and cyber predators
- Date rape/Drug facilitated rape
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) or Female Genital Cutting
- Forced marriages, including marriage of children
- Forced group sex
- Gang rapes
- Ignorance about sexuality, anatomy, sex, or sexual safety, ostensibly to 'protect' girls.
- Incestuous Sexual Assault (ISA)
- Neglect/coldness: extreme sexual neglect or coldly going through the motions of sex
- Public molestation by known assailants or by strangers in crowded public spaces, particularly public transport. In India, this is termed 'eve-teasing'.
- Marriage-related sexual violence
 - Abandonment, physical and/or sexual of wives/brides
 - Infidelity
 - Marital rape
 - Polygamy: one man has several wives – whether through legal or 'cultural' marriages (listed as sexual violence because the culture or husband forces women to accept this arrangement)
 - Polyandry: one woman has several husbands (listed as sexual violence if a woman is forced into this arrangement)
 - Temporary marriage: practiced as a way to legitimize sexual relations between non-married couples (over the dating period, for example) or with a prostitute (for the length of the encounter).
 - Marriage by capture: a practice where a woman is 'captured' by potential husband and kept captive for a few days in his family home until she 'consents' to marry him.
- Pornographic-related violence: being forced to watch and mimic pornographic acts.
- Wife inheritance: also called fraternal polyandry where a widow must marry her dead husband's brother.

- Rape by known assailants or strangers
- Rape and its aftermath, which can include:
 - Victim-blaming.
 - Being forced to marry rapist or someone else right away.
 - Abandonment or violence by the victim's family towards the victim.
 - If a pregnancy results from the rape, family may send her to their home country permanently, force her to carry the pregnancy, give up child for adoption, or force her to have an abortion.
 - Few consequences for perpetrators of campus rape, disciplinary actions like suspension are decided by college administrators.
- Sexting: texting sexually explicit materials, including pictures of a partner without his/her permission.
- Sexual harassment in workplaces, places of worship, homes, schools, or university campuses.
- Survival or transactional sex: women having sex in exchange for necessities like food, children's clothes, a place to stay, etc., and not necessarily with multiple men. (This is not the same as sex work.)
- Unprotected sex (forced) leading to an unwanted pregnancy, HIV, or STI exposure. This can affect women with trans-national partners who travel between the U.S. and home countries frequently.
- Virginity examinations and attendant surgeries to ensure that her hymen is intact (e.g., sewing up a torn hymen). In fact, ruptured hymens do not necessarily bleed - referred to medically as a compliant hymen.
- Voyeurism, which includes flashing, peeping, or through the use of technology
- Witnessing rape: children or family forced to watch (or know it is happening) and how it affects both victim and witness.

IV. Vulnerable Women & Girls and Potentially Dangerous Settings

- Actresses
- Advocates
- Athletes
- Battered women
- College campuses
- Disaster zones (e.g., tsunami in Southeast Asia, earthquakes in Pakistan, Iran)
- Divorced, separated or widowed women
- Domestic workers
- Elderly
- Healthcare settings
- High schools (can include predatory behavior from teachers, coaches, other authority figures)
- Homeless women and children
- Immigration processes/unsafe travels
- Incarcerated women or those in police custody/jails
- International Marriage Bureaus (IMBs): women marrying through such services.
- Lesbians, bisexual and transgender individuals, including teens and young women.
- Mentally disabled or mentally ill
- Military wives/partners and women who live or work in the vicinity of military bases.
- Models
- Poor women and the exploitation of female poverty in the form of adoption, trafficking, and transactional sex.
- Pregnant women
- Prostituted women and children or sex workers
- Refugees or Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in war or post-war camps
- Religious and cultural minorities
- Sexual abuse by clergy/clerics
- Stalked women
- Teens: pregnant, sexually-active teens, or runaways
- Trafficked women
- War survivors (civil or international wars)
- Women with disabilities
- Workers in exploitative settings

About the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence

The Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence (formerly, Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence) is a national resource center and clearinghouse on gender violence in Asian and Pacific Islander communities. It serves a national network of advocates, community members, organizations, service agencies, professionals, researchers, policy advocates, and activists from community and social justice organizations. Its goals focus on strengthening advocacy, promoting community organizing and addressing systems change.

For information, training or technical assistance, contact us at 415.568.3315 or info@api-gbv.org.



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