

Violence against women and the girl child

Sexual violence by non-intimate partners



Key points

- Worldwide, 7% of women have experienced sexual violence by a non-partner since age 15
- Most sexual violence is perpetrated by a person known by the victim. While 49% of women who have experienced sexual violence since age 15 reported that the perpetrator was their current husband or partner, 6% reported that the perpetrator was a stranger. Friends or acquaintances were reported as perpetrators by 5% of the women.
- In 14 out of 46 countries with data, between 1% and 5% of women aged 20-29 reported experiencing sexual violence perpetrated by a non-partner since age 15. In the remaining countries the rate was less than 1%.
- International estimates on non-partner violence "in the previous 12 months" are being produced for the first time. Recent national estimates point to a risk of sexual violence by non-partners as being between 0.1 and 3.1%.

Lifetime prevalence

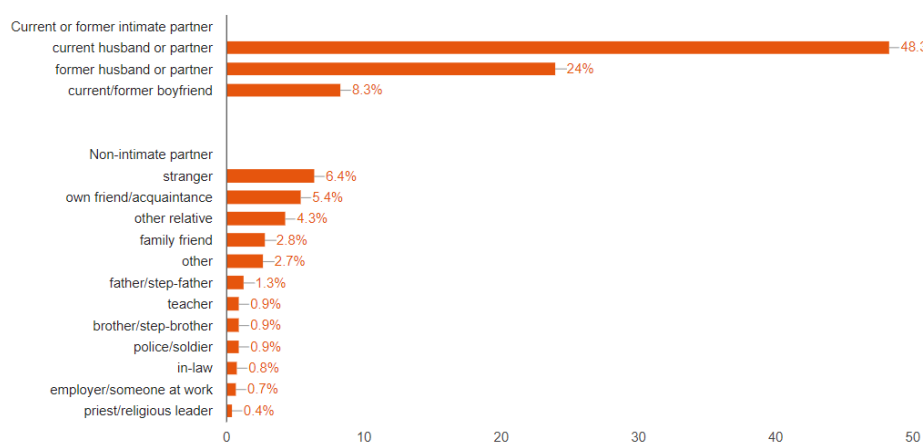
Sexual violence can be perpetrated by **women's intimate partners** or by others. According to WHO estimates in 2013,¹ worldwide, 7.2% of women have experienced sexual violence by a non-partner since age 15.

The majority of sexual violence is committed by intimate partners or someone known to the victim (see figure I). Based on data between 2005 and 2018, of those women who were subjected to sexual violence during their lifetime, almost half (48.6%) were victims of their current husband or partner; almost a quarter (24.2%) experienced violence at the hands of a former husband or partner; and 8.2% were victims of their current or former boyfriend. **This suggests that 8 out of 10 victims were subjected to sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner or boyfriend.**

On average, over 90%² of women subjected to sexual violence knew the perpetrator (see figure I), including 5.3% who reported that the perpetrator was a friend or acquaintance. Conversely, around 10% of women subjected to sexual violence did not know the perpetrator, including 6.3% who explicitly reported that the perpetrator was a stranger.

Even after excluding current and former intimate partners from the analysis, the majority of women subjected to sexual violence knew their perpetrator. At least 62%³ of non-partner sexual violence is committed by a person known to the victim, while 23%⁴ of sexual violence is committed by a complete stranger.

Figure I: Share of women 15 and older who have been subjected to sexual violence since age 15, by type of perpetrator: 2005 - 2018 (latest available) (Percentage)



Source: Calculated by UNDESA, Statistics Division, based on data from Demographic and Health Surveys for 46 countries (accessed in March 2020)

Prevalence in the past 12 months in selected countries

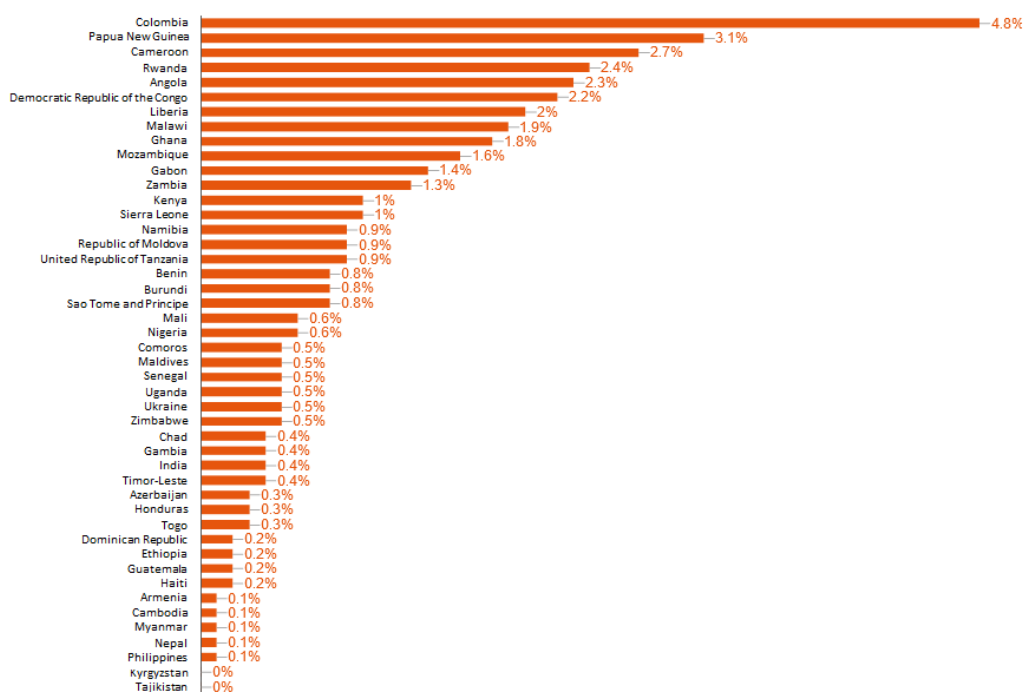
In reporting on sexual violence in the previous 12 months in eight countries in Eastern and South Eastern Europe participating in the 2019 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women,⁵ 0.8% of women reported sexual violence by a non-partner during the previous 12 months. Country estimates ranged from 0.1% in North Macedonia to 1.0% in Ukraine.⁶

In general, data availability on sexual violence is higher for dedicated studies on intimate partner violence. However, in recent years, several national statistical offices⁷ have conducted surveys of violence against women and produced estimated rates of sexual violence perpetrated by non-partners. For example, results from a personal safety survey carried out in Australia in 2016 found that 1.8% of women had experienced sexual violence by a non-partner in the past 12 months, and the 2017 national study on gender-based violence in Mongolia pointed to a proportion of 3.1%.

When looking at sexual violence by age group it is clear that younger women face a greater risk of sexual assault. According to data from justice systems and rape crisis centres in Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, Papua New Guinea, Peru and the United States of America, the incidence of certain forms of sexual violence is closely associated with the age of the victim, in particular violence taking place in schools and colleges.⁸ The proportion of women aged 20–29 who have ever experienced sexual violence by a non-partner since age 15 is an important indicator of non-partner sexual violence.

In the 46 countries for which data are available (see figure II), the proportion of women aged 20–29 who have experienced sexual violence perpetrated by someone other than an intimate partner since age 15 ranged from less than 1% in Tajikistan (2014) and Kyrgyzstan (2015) to 4.8% in Colombia (2016).

Figure II Proportion of women aged 20-29 who have ever experienced sexual violence by a non-partner since age 15: 2005-2018 (latest available)



Source: Compiled by UNDESA, Statistics Division, based on data from Demographic and Health Surveys and other sources (last accessed in March 2020).

Data availability and measurement challenges

The availability of data on sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner is much lower than that for intimate partner violence.

Furthermore, to collect such data, surveys have relied on different methodologies, used different definitions of sexual violence, formulated different questions and sampled diverse age groups. In addition, willingness to discuss experiences of violence and understanding of relevant concepts may also differ according to cultural context, a factor that can affect reported prevalence levels and the overall comparability of international data.

A further challenge is the formulation of the time frame of "previous 12 months" in SDG indicator 5.2.2. This is a problem for two reasons: firstly, far fewer countries have measured non-partner sexual violence in the preceding 12 months compared with sexual violence over the lifetime; secondly, in surveys it is often reported that the rate of past-year sexual violence for an aggregate age group of women aged 15 and older is close to zero. This very low point estimate of prevalence makes the assessment of changes over time difficult, particularly when data are presented disaggregated by age.

These factors make monitoring trends at the country, regional and international levels difficult.

Efforts are ongoing to develop international estimates of sexual violence by non-partners that account for methodological differences between studies, which will improve comparisons between countries, and enable the monitoring of trends and inform policies.

Sources

- World Health Organization (WHO), Global Health Observatory, (data repository), Violence against Women
- USAID, Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) Program, STAT compiler.
- Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women: Well-Being and Safety of Women, 2019.

About the data

- **Sexual violence:** Any sort of harmful or unwanted sexual behaviour, including acts of abusive sexual contact, forced engagement in sexual acts, attempted or completed sexual acts without consent, incest and sexual harassment.
- **Non-partner sexual violence:** For the purpose of the analysis of non-partner sexual violence, non-partner sexual violence covers violence committed by someone other than current or former husbands, partners or boyfriends. The analysis also focuses on whether or not the perpetrator is known to the victim. Far fewer countries have measured non-partner sexual violence in the preceding 12 months compared with sexual violence since age 15.
- **Prevalence of non-partner violence:** The World Health Organization (WHO) defines the prevalence of non-partner violence as the "percentage of women in a given population who have ever experienced sexual violence by someone other than a partner".⁹
- The Demographic and Health Surveys programme has an indicator on the percentage of women who have ever experienced sexual violence and an additional indicator showing the percentage of women who have experienced sexual violence committed by, inter alia: current husbands or partners; former husbands or partners; current or former boyfriends; fathers or stepfathers; brother or stepbrothers; in-laws; own friends or acquaintances; family friends; an employer or someone at work; a stranger; or other.¹⁰
- For the purpose of the analysis of DHS data on non-partner sexual violence, non-partner sexual violence covers violence committed by someone other than current or former husbands, partners or boyfriends. The analysis also focuses on whether or not the perpetrator is known to the victim.
- Far fewer countries have measured non-partner sexual violence in the preceding 12 months compared with sexual violence since age 15.

Footnotes

1. [WHO, Global Health Observatory \(data repository\), Non-partner sexual violence prevalence](#) and [WHO, Global Health Observatory \(data repository\), Non-partner sexual violence](#).
2. Assuming "priest/religious leader, police/soldier other perpetrator" are unknown to the victim.
3. Includes friends, relatives and in-laws, teachers and/or someone at work.
4. Violence committed by persons other than current husbands/partners, former husbands/partners and/or current/former boyfriends.
5. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.
6. [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe \(OSCE\), OSCE-led Survey on Violence against Women: Well-Being and Safety of Women, annex 6, 2019](#) (accessed on 27 July 2020).
7. Including national statistical offices in Australia (2016), Mongolia (2017), Mexico (2016), Trinidad and Tobago (2017) and the Philippines (2017). Other countries have also produced older estimates of "non-partner sexual violence in the past 12 months" in conjunction with their national statistics offices (including Laos (1.0%, 2014) and Bangladesh (0.8%, 2011)).
8. [WHO, World report on violence and health, chapter six, Geneva, 2002](#).
9. [World Health Organization \(WHO\), Global Health Observatory, \(data repository\), Non-partner sexual violence prevalence](#).
10. [Demographic and Health Surveys \(DHS-7\), Guide to DHS Statistics DHS-7, Persons committing sexual violence](#).