



March 8 is
International Day
of Women

Empowering Women - Empowering Humanity: Picture It



March 8 is International Women's Day. This is a key time to celebrate women's roles, contributions and accomplishments, but we must also recognise the challenges and the work that still needs to be done.

We must not rest until women enjoy the same right as men. We must work to do away with gender inequality that sees women paid less for the same work as men; that sees child marriages and female genital mutilation sanctioned; that sees so many women and girls trafficked into the sex trade, that sees fewer girls going to school and that sees poor women still struggling to obtain family planning support. We also have to recognise the growing prevalence of alcohol and other substance abuses that exacerbate poverty and violence. "Empowering Women - Empowering Humanity: Picture It!" is the United Nations' official theme for this year's international day for women. It is a fitting theme to tackle poverty and inequality.

Adolescent pregnancy and domestic violence are two particular challenges faced by many women and girls in Asia and Pacific. The Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development highlights these two issues in this special E-newsletter. We're also focusing on the parliamentary actions that aim to provide sustainable solutions to these population and development issues.

Empowering humanity requires empowering women. Empowering women means ensuring their rights so that they can live a life with dignity and freedom. Happy International Women's Day. Take part in empowering women.

Hon. Dr Sharman Stone, Member of the House of Representatives,
Australia; Chair – Australian Parliamentary Group on Population
Development; AFPPD Chair, Standing Committee on Women

In this Issue:

Adolescent Pregnancy

Asia-Pacific Parliamentarians Taking Action

Violence against Women and Girls: Domestic Violence

Efforts to End Domestic Violence



Adolescent Pregnancy – 2m girls under 15 give birth each year

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) State of the World Population 2014 report reveals an alarming prevalence of teenage pregnancy. According to the report, there are over seven million girls under 18 who give birth every year. An estimated two million of those girls are 14 years old or younger.

Early pregnancy among young girls is a health, social and economic issue that needs to be recognised and addressed.



Why Adolescent Pregnancy Should Be A Priority Issue

Teenage pregnancy is considered as a major health issue. Some of these negative outcomes of pregnancy during adolescence are anaemia, postpartum haemorrhage, transmission of diseases, and psychological and mental disorders such as depression. UNFPA notes that adolescent pregnant girls under the age of 14 are vulnerable to obstetric fistula and maternal death.

Adolescent pregnancy has long-term implications for teenage girls and their families and communities. Many pregnant teenagers stop going to school because they are forced to leave school. Many of them face shame, discrimination, and social isolation. Some of them attempt or commit suicide due to stigmatisation. Pregnant adolescents are also susceptible to substance abuse, which causes serious problems to both mother and child.

UNFPA Executive Director Dr Babatunde Osotimehin explains that communities often blame the girl for getting pregnant. “The reality is that adolescent pregnancy is most often not the result of a deliberate choice, but rather the absence of choices, and of circumstances beyond a girl’s control... It is a consequence of little or no access to school, employment, quality information and health care.”

Dropping out of school results in serious social and economic disadvantage. Uneducated adolescent mothers become low-skilled workers who struggle to make ends meet. They are also vulnerable to even human trafficking.

“Adolescent pregnancy is intertwined with issues of human rights. A pregnant girl who is pressured or forced to leave school, for example, is denied her right to an education. A girl who is forbidden from accessing contraception or even information about preventing a pregnancy is denied her right to health. Conversely, a girl who is able to enjoy her right to education and stays in school is less likely to become pregnant than her counterpart who drops out or is forced out. The enjoyment of one right thus puts her in a better position to enjoy others,” said Dr Babatunde Osotimehin.

Asia-Pacific Parliamentarians Taking Action

The health, social and economic problems that arise with prevalent adolescent pregnancy are a serious matter. Reducing the number of pregnancies and ensuring that the rights and needs of adolescent girls have been prioritised in global frameworks on population and development. Committed parliamentarians in the Asia-Pacific region are contributing to curb the high rate of teenage pregnancies in their countries.



Dr Jetn Sirathranont, Member of Parliament in Thailand

Reproductive Health Bill for Thailand

Chair of Thailand’s National Legislative Assembly’s (NLA) Public Health Committee and AFPPD Secretary General Dr Jetn Sirathranont is leading advocacy efforts to address teenage pregnancy through a Reproductive Health Protection Bill in the country.

Adolescent pregnancy rate in Thailand is high. According to information from the Ministry of Public Health, the number of teenage mothers is growing - from 14% of all pregnancies in 2003 up to 17% in 2013. Most alarmingly, between 60-70 children aged ten give birth each year.

In a recent seminar on adolescent pregnancy organised by the NLA's Committee on Public Health, the National Reform Council's Public Health Committee, the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development, and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), Dr Jetn explained the need for Reproductive Health legislation in Thailand to protect the health, welfare and rights of teenagers.

"An RH law would decrease unwanted pregnancies and would prevent adolescent girls from dropping out of schools," Dr Jetn said.

Pushing for Effective Implementation of Philippine RH Law

Reproductive health advocates in the Philippines took decades to realise the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health (RPRH) Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10354), informally known as the Reproductive Health Law or RH Law. The law ensures universal access to sexual and reproductive health education and services. The implementation of the law was temporarily delayed in March 2013 and was implemented on April 8, 2014 after the Supreme Court ruled that the law was 'not unconstitutional.' The principal author of the law is former Philippine Representative Edcel Lagman, who also formerly served as AFPPD Deputy General Secretary.

Leaders of the Catholic Church in the Philippines appealed the Senate and the House of Representative to stop the approval of the RH Bill. The recent visit of the Pope to the country renewed some opposition to the RH law. AFPPD champion parliamentarian Congressman Rodel Batocabe, Member of the House of Representatives, defended the approval of the RH as having met due process and constitutional and that the law is for the wellbeing of children, women and girls.

Another champion AFPPD parliamentarian, Ms Luz Ilagan, asked the government to increase the funding for implementation of the RPRH law. Representative Luz said that increased funding would improve delivery of health services to children, women and girls, specially in the poor communities.

Pacific MPs want adolescent pregnancy to 'slow down'

Pacific parliamentarians are committed to 'slow down' teenage pregnancy. In August 2013, UNFPA, AFPPD, and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) organised the Pacific Conference of Parliamentarians for Advocacy on ICPD Beyond 2014.

The Pacific parliamentarians at the meeting aimed to push renewed commitments into programmes that seek to reduce the high rate of teen pregnancy across the Pacific Islands. The subregional meeting resulted in commitments, which were summarised in the Moana Declaration.

The declaration includes 18 recommendations and commitments that include the creation of an enabling environment to ensure access to sexual and reproductive health and rights for all people and without discrimination, the incorporation of sexual and reproductive health-related issues in development strategies and increased participation of women and young people in decision-making processes.

UNFPA Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director (Programme) Kate Gilmore participated in the event and noted that the Pacific parliamentarians are keen to slow down the pattern of teenage pregnancy and that they want to make sure that access to contraception allows the young women of the Pacific Islands choices about when to have children, how many and over what intervals.

Reproductive Rights Bill for Kyrgyzstan

Former Kyrgyzstan parliamentarian Hon. Mdm Damira Niyazalieva initiated a bill on Reproductive Rights in 2013 as a response to emerging sexual and reproductive health issues in the country. The proposed law addresses the high rate of teenage pregnancy and abortions in the country.

Hon. Niyazalieva stated that more than half of the Kyrgyz adolescent population does not have access to proper sex education. "They only gain sexual education only from internet." The bill calls for compulsory comprehensive sexuality and reproductive health education to be offered in schools.

The SRHR bill campaign faced strong opposition. Although the proponents consolidated their efforts, the bill was returned to the Committee and the second hearings were postponed. This year the campaign will be headed by the Vice-Speaker of Parliament Hon. Mdm Nadira Narmatova who will present and support the bill during Parliament Hearings.



Hon. Mahtab Akbar Rashdi, Member of Parliament in Pakistan

Pakistan: Child Marriage Restraint Bill of 2013

In Pakistan, the Sindh Provincial Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution opposing the Council of Islamic Ideology's "no age requirements for marriage" read out by AFPPD champion parliamentarian Hon. Mahtab Akbar Rashdi in April 2014. The resolution was also against other Council's recommendations that are oppressive for women. Ending child marriage is an important step in curbing teenage pregnancy in Pakistan. Honorable Rashdi actively advocated for The Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Bill of 2013 that declares marriages below 18 years old to be punishable by law. The bill was passed into law in April 2014.

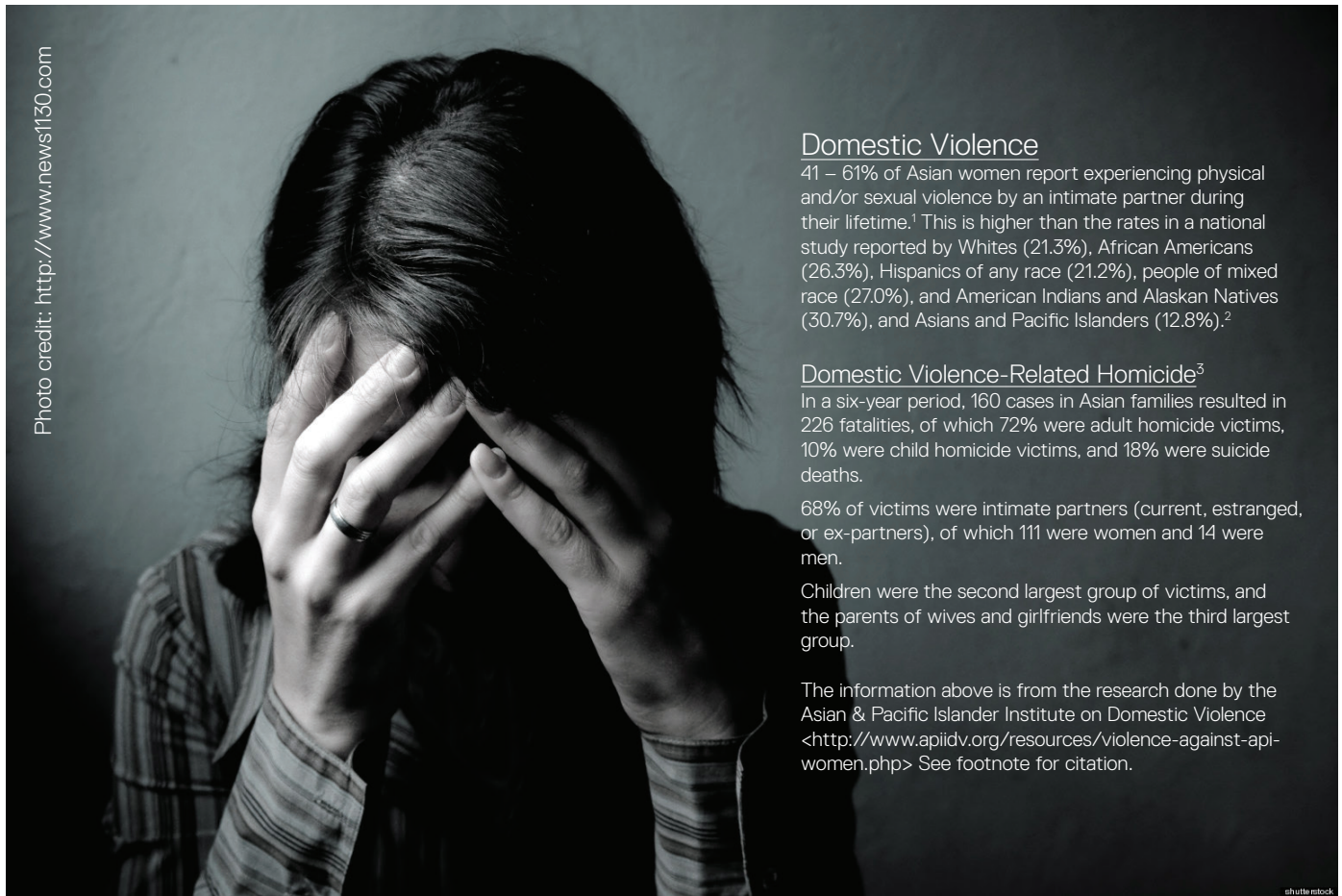


Photo credit: <http://www.news1130.com>

Domestic Violence

41 – 61% of Asian women report experiencing physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner during their lifetime.¹ This is higher than the rates in a national study reported by Whites (21.3%), African Americans (26.3%), Hispanics of any race (21.2%), people of mixed race (27.0%), and American Indians and Alaskan Natives (30.7%), and Asians and Pacific Islanders (12.8%).²

Domestic Violence-Related Homicide³

In a six-year period, 160 cases in Asian families resulted in 226 fatalities, of which 72% were adult homicide victims, 10% were child homicide victims, and 18% were suicide deaths.

68% of victims were intimate partners (current, estranged, or ex-partners), of which 111 were women and 14 were men.

Children were the second largest group of victims, and the parents of wives and girlfriends were the third largest group.

The information above is from the research done by the Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence <<http://www.apiidv.org/resources/violence-against-api-women.php>> See footnote for citation.

Violence against Women and Girls: Domestic Violence

Violence against women and girls is a serious violation of human rights. Violence negatively affects women's health and general well-being but it also prevents women from participating in society. Violence against women and girls comes in many forms. Domestic violence is a common form of violence that many women and girls across the world are subjected to on a daily basis.

Domestic violence is the recurrent infliction of violent behaviour of an intimate partner to a spouse or a partner and other members of a family. Domestic violence comes in many forms of abuse — physical, verbal, emotional and even psychological. Many women and girls in Asia-Pacific are victimised by domestic violence every day.

Efforts to End Domestic Violence

With advocacy from the international community, civil society organisations, women's groups and women government leaders, more and more governments are realising the effects of the domestic violence and other gender-based violence. There are several means of ending domestic violence. Parliamentarians are legislating laws that aim to protect women and girls from domestic violence and at making 'ending violence against women and girls' a priority in national agenda.

Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010 of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs. The law aims to protect women and children from physical, sexual and psychological abuse and other forms of domestic violence. Through this legislation, a victim will be able to lodge complaints against an abuser to a judicial or metropolitan magistrate to seek protection from any domestic violence.

Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2012 of Pakistan attempts to recognise domestic abuse as a criminal (punishable) offence, to extend its provisions to all those in domestic relationships (women, children and other vulnerable persons), and to provide for emergency relief for the victims, in addition to legal recourse.

1 The low end of the range is from a study by A. Raj and J. Silverman, Intimate partner violence against South-Asian women in Greater Boston Journal of the American Medical Women's Association. 2002; 57(2): 111-114. The high end of the range is from a study by M. Yoshihama, Domestic violence against women of Japanese descent in Los Angeles: Two methods of estimating prevalence. Violence Against Women. 1999; 5(8):869-897.

2 Tjaden P, Thoennes N. Extent, Nature, and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence: Research Report. Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2000.

3 Dabby C, Patel H, Poore G. Shattered Lives: Homicides, Domestic Violence and Asian Families. San Francisco, CA: Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence; 2009.



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Afghan Legislation: Elimination of Violence Against Women Law.

In Afghanistan, parliamentarian champion Hon. Fawzia Koofi is working towards passing the bill titled The Elimination of Violence Against Women Law. According to Honorable Koofi, “the legal system has failed to protect women adequately when it comes to some of the most common crimes against them; rape, domestic violence, underage and forced marriages.”

Higher License Fees on Liquor outlets. Australia’s then Victorian Minister for Liquor and Gaming Regulation Edward O’Donohue pushed for changes in liquor license fees in 2014. Large supermarket-style outlets with a liquor floor space of more than 1,000 square meters would pay an annual \$10,000 licence fee, up from \$1,880.80. “We believe the biggest outlets that sell more and make more should pay more than the licensees of small local liquor stores,” Mr O’Donohue said. This endeavour aims to reduce alcohol-related harm including street violence and domestic violence. Increasing the price of liquor should result in reduction of alcohol abuse which may result in decreasing domestic violence.



Hon. Pen Pannha, Member of Parliament in Cambodia, AFPPD Chair of Male Standing Committee on Ending Violence against Women

Regional Commitments to End Violence against Women and Girls.

AFPPD engages with parliamentarians from Asia and the Pacific region to advocate for the elimination and prevention of violence against women and girls. AFPPD gathered parliamentarians in two major events in 2014 during the 10th Women Ministers and Parliamentarians Conference on Progressing SRHR into Beijing+20 in September in Manila and the Regional Parliamentarians’ Meeting on Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls in October in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

These two meetings focused on regional and national recommendations and strategies to promote policy and legislative changes aimed at eliminating violence against women and children. Commitments to ensure a high standard of well-being for all women and girls and their families were made during these conferences.

These commitments were translated into actions by parliamentarians, who were members of official country delegations at the Beijing+20 regional meeting in Bangkok in November 2014. These parliamentarians are moving and supporting strong rights-based

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