



SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ABORTION

In some countries nearly one in four women may experience sexual violence by an intimate partner, and up to one-third of adolescent girls report that their first sexual experience was forced or violent. In countries where abortion is legally restricted, abortions following rape and incest are likely to be performed unsafely and may lead to health complications and even death.

Sexual, physical and psychological violence may contribute directly or indirectly to unwanted pregnancy. Women who suffered sexual abuse during their youth may more often have unplanned and/or unwanted pregnancies. There are often many reasons for this: abuse has been associated with loss of control, anxiety, fear and substance abuse — all of which can contribute to risky sexual behavior such as unprotected sex, impair a woman's ability to use contraceptives consistently, or make it difficult for her to negotiate contraceptive use with a partner. For women whose partners are opposed to contraception, fear of violence can stop a woman from using birth control methods.

Women who are coping with ongoing violence or who have been raped may be more likely to terminate a pregnancy, especially where rape is used as a weapon of war—for example, in Darfur, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, or the former Yugoslavia. But many women don't have access to safe, legal abortion services. In some countries, women who have been raped must request court permission for an abortion; sometimes the delays in obtaining this mean that the pregnancy is too far evolved for an abortion to be performed. In some countries, the consent of parents or guardians is needed to allow adolescent women to undergo a legal induced abortion. This may constitute a barrier for young women who do not wish to talk about the cause of an unwanted pregnancy, such as rape by family members.

Since many cases of rape and incest go unreported, the number of resulting pregnancies can only be estimated. It may be assumed, however, that many of these pregnancies are unwanted. Because access to emergency contraception is unavailable or restricted in many places, women do not have the chance to prevent such pregnancies.

