

## BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS AND EVERYDAY REALITY: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN UZBEKISTAN AND WORLDWIDE IN RECENT YEARS

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**Abstract:** In 2025, nearly one in three women worldwide (approx. 736 million) have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. Despite international frameworks (DEVAW, CEDAW) and Uzbekistan's progressive reforms — including the 2019 law against harassment and violence and the 2023 criminalization of domestic violence — implementation gaps, cultural tolerance of abuse, and underreporting persist. Using descriptive and comparative methods, this article examines global trends, rising femicide and online abuse, and landmark cases that spurred change. It concludes that protecting women from violence is essential for human progress and requires stronger enforcement, awareness, and cultural transformation.

**Key words:** violence against women, domestic abuse, World Health Organization, UN Women, DEVAW, CEDAW, UNESCO, Uzbekistan, SDGs, women's rights.

### Introduction

Nothing in the world can adequately define the term "woman." A woman is the epitome of compassion, strength, and support in her roles as a wife, mother, daughter, sister, grandmother, and friend. She embodies the qualities of the sun's warmth, the flower's beauty, the sky's hope, the star's guidance in the dark, the diamond's ability to withstand pressure, and the water's ability to sustain life. A woman is an angel in every capacity.

Nevertheless, violence, sexual harassment, and discrimination against women and girls persist worldwide, despite their incalculable worth. Voices are raised, conventions are signed, protests are staged, and laws are drafted, but all too frequently these attempts are unsuccessful. Words honor her worth, but deeds forget her.

My goal in writing this article is to draw attention to the inequities that women experience and the pressing need to defend their rights. We can remind society that protecting and valuing women is not only morally required, but also crucial to the welfare and advancement of all people by facing the realities of violence and inequality.

### Methods and Materials

This study employs descriptive and comparative research methodologies to investigate the manifestations of violence against women, assess statistical trends across various nations, and evaluate the efficacy of current legal frameworks. These methods help present the situation correctly and point out the most important differences and similarities in how different countries deal with violence against women.

The research utilizes diverse materials sourced from credible international websites, international conventions and agreements (including UN documents), national legislation and legal acts of Uzbekistan, academic literature, and reports generated by women's organizations and human rights institutions.

### Results and Discussion

From history, we know that women and girls have long been subjected to various forms of violence. But the question remains: why, even today, have we not been able to fully protect women? Despite the existence of many international and national legal acts aimed at safeguarding women's rights, their impact is still incomplete. In every country, cases of domestic violence and sexual harassment continue to surface, and the statistics have never fallen to zero.

The study highlights information that is not widely known: violence against women is a direct violation of their fundamental human rights. These include the right to life, the right to be free from torture or inhuman and degrading treatment, the right to respect for private and family life (including physical and psychological integrity), and the right to non-discrimination. These rights belong to every human being. Men are able to exercise these rights freely, so why should women experience violations of their most basic freedoms? Women deserve to live in peace, dignity, and full enjoyment of their rights, just as all individuals do.

The research shows that the term "violence against women" includes many forms, such as gender inequality, sexual violence, domestic abuse, stalking, forced marriage, and the abuse of women and girls in online spaces. These types of violence appear in different countries with varying levels of prevalence. Recent estimates from the World Health Organization (WHO) and UN Women indicate that nearly one in three women worldwide—approximately 736 million—have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime<sup>1</sup>. In 2024, WHO regional data revealed stark disparities, with lifetime intimate partner violence rates reaching 33% in both the African and South-East Asia regions<sup>2</sup>. Alarmingly, every day in 2024, an estimated 140 women and girls were killed by family members, underscoring the lethal escalation of domestic abuse<sup>3</sup>. Technology-facilitated violence has also surged, with 73% of women journalists reporting online abuse in a 2024 UNESCO survey. In conflict zones, the situation is even graver: UN reports documented over 4,600 cases of conflict-related sexual violence in 2024, an 87% increase from 2022<sup>4</sup>.

These statistics not only quantify the scale of the problem but also expose systemic failures in prevention and response. Internationally, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW), adopted in 1993, provides a foundational framework by defining violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." DEVAW emphasizes state obligations under Articles 4 and 5 to exercise due diligence in preventing, investigating, and punishing such acts, while promoting education and awareness to eliminate gender biases. Complementing this, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), ratified by over 180 states including Uzbekistan in 1995, addresses violence as a form of discrimination under Articles 2 and 5. It mandates states to condemn discrimination, modify social patterns perpetuating stereotypes, and suppress trafficking and exploitation (Article 6). CEDAW's General

<sup>1</sup> <https://pmnch.who.int/news-and-events/events/item/2024/11/25/international-days/international-day-for-the-elimination-of-violence-against-women---2024>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theglobalstatistics.com/domestic-violence-statistics-by-country/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/11/1157451>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-women-peace-and-security>

Recommendation No. 35 (2017) further clarifies that gender-based violence impairs women's human rights to life, security, and equality, urging comprehensive legal reforms.

In Uzbekistan, these international commitments align with national efforts, though implementation gaps persist. Article 19 of the Uzbekistan Constitution guarantees equal rights for all citizens regardless of gender, while Article 58 specifically affirms equality between women and men, and Article 26 prohibits torture, violence, and cruel treatment. The 2019 Law "On the Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence" defines physical, sexual, economic, and psychological violence, establishing protective measures like shelters and rehabilitation centers. A landmark advancement came in April 2023 with amendments to the Criminal and Administrative Codes, criminalizing domestic violence as a standalone offense, imposing liability for stalking and harassment, and barring early release for sexual offenders. By 2024, these reforms led to the establishment of nearly 200 shelters and a national call center, with over 36,000 reported cases of violence against women in 2021-2022 alone<sup>5</sup>. The Gender Equality Strategy (2021-2025) further prioritizes prevention through education and economic empowerment. Despite this progress, challenges remain: cultural norms often view domestic violence as a "family matter," leading to underreporting, and economic/psychological abuse is not fully criminalized.

High-profile cases illustrate the urgency of enforcement. Globally, the 2024 Gisele Pelicot case in France exposed systemic failures in addressing drug-facilitated sexual violence, where her husband and 50 accomplices were convicted<sup>6</sup>, sparking worldwide outrage and calls for consent-based rape laws. In India, the August 2024 Kolkata rape-murder of a trainee doctor ignited nationwide protests, highlighting workplace vulnerabilities and leading to the Aparajita Bill for faster trials in sexual violence cases<sup>7</sup>. In Uzbekistan, the 2022 Khorazm scandal – involving the rape of minor girls in a state group home by officials – prompted the 2023 criminalization reforms and Supreme Court clarifications on child protections<sup>8</sup>. These incidents, while tragic, have catalyzed advocacy, as seen in the UN's 2024 "No Excuse" campaign<sup>9</sup>, which mobilized global action during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence.

Comparatively, Uzbekistan's strides mirror regional trends in Central Asia, where Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan also re-criminalized light battery in 2024, yet lag behind OECD averages where 22% of women report lifetime intimate partner violence<sup>10</sup>. The effectiveness of legal frameworks hinges on implementation: while DEVAW and CEDAW provide blueprints, national action—like Uzbekistan's shelters—must be scaled with funding and cultural shifts to achieve SDG Target 5.2.

<sup>5</sup> <https://nadja.co/2023/04/10/uzbekistan-adopts-landmark-legislation-on-domestic-violence/>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.womensvoicesnow.org/gisele-pelicot?gad\\_source=1&gad\\_campaignid=14623495605&gbraid=0AAAAADjLCo2iCOu2Pyk2IQDoymEY7RNi&gclid=Cj0KCQiArOvIBhDLARIsAPwJXObJSZkK-9j\\_cMi2DZFK0PA5BsxU1cycIRj5gN8u0c6FleVM5I6m5v4aAuCHEALw\\_wcB](https://www.womensvoicesnow.org/gisele-pelicot?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=14623495605&gbraid=0AAAAADjLCo2iCOu2Pyk2IQDoymEY7RNi&gclid=Cj0KCQiArOvIBhDLARIsAPwJXObJSZkK-9j_cMi2DZFK0PA5BsxU1cycIRj5gN8u0c6FleVM5I6m5v4aAuCHEALw_wcB)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.jaagruckbharat.com/indias-soaring-rape--violence-against-women-what-the-nation-should-know-in-2024-MTIxOQ==>

<sup>8</sup> <https://thediplomat.com/2024/10/kazakhstan-and-uzbekistan-new-domestic-violence-laws-and-the-protection-of-children/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/11/1157451>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/society-at-a-glance-2024\\_918d8db3-en/full-report/violence-against-women\\_fbbd1878.html](https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/society-at-a-glance-2024_918d8db3-en/full-report/violence-against-women_fbbd1878.html)

## Conclusion

Violence against women has not stopped – it still happens every single day. The basic rights that every human being should enjoy – the freedom to walk anywhere without fear, to live in safety and dignity, to work, to study, and to be shielded from harassment, assault, and discrimination – remain out of reach for millions of women. What we saw in the Kolkata doctor's case and in the tragedies coming out of Khorezm is not exceptional; similar horrors take place in every corner of the world, often unnoticed.

If we wait for someone else to fix this, nothing will change. Change starts with us. Every man has a direct responsibility for the safety and respect shown to his daughter, his sister, his wife, his mother, and every woman he encounters. When we make our own homes and our own streets places where women are truly safe and valued, that example spreads. One secure family, one respectful neighbourhood at a time, we can transform an entire society.

The United Nations, UN Women, and many other organisations are doing vital work: gathering data, publishing reports, and sounding the alarm so that the world cannot claim ignorance. International agreements like CEDAW and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, along with national laws in many countries, have put strong protections on paper. The problem is not the absence of laws; it is the failure to live by them.

That is why indifference is no longer an option. We cannot look away. Respecting and protecting women is not a favour we do for them – it is the foundation of a decent society. Real change is within our reach, but only if each of us decides to be part of it.

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