A photograph of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and light-colored pants, sitting on the floor against a textured wall. She has a visible bruise on her left cheek and is looking down with a somber expression.

Tip of the Iceberg:

Reporting and gender-based violence in developing countries

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Gender-based violence is widespread globally. One in three women experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime, and approximately 7 percent of women experience non-partner sexual violence^{1,2}. There are myriad negative effects of gender-based violence, including health, social, and economic consequences, both at the individual, community and societal levels.

Efforts to address the problem of gender-based violence should be informed by a clear understanding of prevalence and dynamics surrounding who, when and where violence occurs. Recently, great strides have been made to estimate the prevalence of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence and document consequences. However, the majority of existing program and policies are targeted towards survivors who have accessed services. This is problematic, as we believe that few women actually report victimization either formally to law enforcement or health care institutions, or informally to family and friends. To better understand the hidden nature of violence and how to better reach these women, we must first understand rates of reporting and how women who do and do not disclose their victimization differ.

In the research summarized in this brief, we find that the percentage of female gender-based violence survivors who report their experiences to any formal source (legal, medical, or social services) is low (7% globally), ranging from 2% in India and East Asia to 14% in Latin America and the Caribbean. Informal reporting—that is, to a friend, family member, or neighbor—is higher (34% globally), but still a minority of women report to any source in all regions. In addition, we investigate characteristics associated with reporting, as well as reasons women give for non-disclosure of victimization.

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How the research was conducted

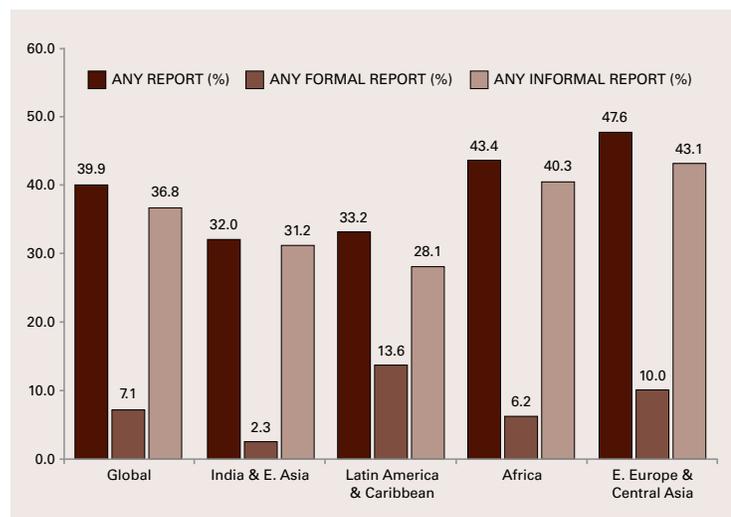
We analyzed data on 93,656 women aged 15 to 49 who had experienced any gender-based violence, using data from the nationally representative, cross-sectional, Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS). We included surveys from 24 countries conducted since 2000, which included information on gender-based violence.

FIGURE 1. DEFINITIONS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

MEASURE	DEFINITION
Sexual Violence	Any act of violence of a sexual nature (e.g. forced sexual debut, forced sexual acts) perpetrated by intimate partners or anyone else
Physical Violence	Any physical violence (e.g., hit, kicked, slapped) perpetrated by an intimate partner or anyone else
Any Violence	Experienced any physical or sexual violence
Reporting	Sought help to stop the perpetrator from perpetrating the violence.
Formal Reporting	Sought help from any of the following: a religious leader, a doctor/medical personnel or health center, police, a lawyer, a social service organization, or a community leader
Informal Reporting	Sought help from the woman's own or partner's family, her current or last partner, a friend, a neighbor, or "anyone else"

We performed descriptive analysis to estimate prevalence of reporting (informal, formal, or any) using sample weights and adjusting standard errors for the complex survey design in the DHS. Figure 2 shows that the percentage of survivors who report their experiences to any formal source is 7% globally and ranges from 2% in India and East Asia to 14% in Latin America and the Caribbean. Informal reporting is higher at 34% globally, but still a minority of women report to any source in all regions. Next we conducted country-level multivariate logistic regression analysis among 15 of the 24 countries to explore socioeconomic and demographic characteristics associated with reporting to formal sources, conditional on having experienced violence (the remaining 9 countries had formal reporting rates that were too low to perform analyses).

FIGURE 2. RATES OF REPORTING OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AMONG WOMEN EVER HAVING EXPERIENCED VIOLENCE



Characteristics associated with formal reporting

On average, women with increased age, educational attainment, and those living in an urban area were more likely to report gender-based violence to a formal source. The most common reasons for not reporting violence were embarrassment and a belief that there was no use in reporting.

The way forward

Our estimates show that rates of physical or sexual gender-based violence in the population may be 7-44 times the number of incidents reported to legal, medical, and social sources combined. This finding confirms and quantifies the underestimation of victimization which occurs when examining only women who report violence to formal sources. Based on these findings, Lori Heise at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, says that we are "missing the boat" by "focusing on trying to reform formal institutional responses to domestic violence and "efforts should be recalibrated to also focus on the first responders [friends and family]"³.

BASED ON THESE FINDINGS, POLICY INITIATIVES SHOULD:

- strengthen legal and judicial systems to reduce impunity of perpetrators;
- make these institutions more supportive and sensitive to women reporting violence.

PROGRAMMATIC EFFORTS SHOULD:

- increase awareness of available services to underserved populations;
- provide assistance in navigating the legal framework and medical services;
- reduce stigma surrounding violence victimization.

Most importantly, the policy, research, and program communities should now focus efforts on understanding what interventions work to prevent violence, particularly in the area of primary prevention, to decrease both the prevalence and adverse consequences of gender-based violence.

For more information, please email tia.palermo@stonybrook.edu or access the full article at <http://aje.oxfordjournals.org/content/179/5/602>

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¹Abrahams N, Devries K, Watts C, et al. Worldwide prevalence of non-partner sexual violence: a systematic review. *The Lancet*. 2014;383(9929):1648-1654.

²Devries KM, Mak JYT, Garcia-Moreno C, et al. The Global Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women. *Science*. 2013;340(28 June 2013):1527-1528.

³Shapiro D. Why Don't Women Report Their Attackers? 2013. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/witw/articles/2013/12/20/new-study-says-gender-based-violence-is-vastly-underreported.html>