

CONCEPTS OF GENDER AND THE GLOBAL ABUSE OF WOMEN

*Steven R. Tracy**

Globally, women aged between fifteen and forty-four are more likely to be injured or die as a result of male violence than through cancer, traffic accidents, malaria, and war combined.¹

Introduction and Thesis

Throughout human history, violence against women has been one of the greatest moral and social problems faced by societies around the world. This continues to be true today. Even in North America, where most women enjoy strong social empowerment and legal protection, and the abuse of women is widely condemned, male perpetrated abuse of females continues to be an enormous problem. In fact, abuse rates among some populations of American females, particularly adolescents and young adults, appear to be increasing.² Consider the following current North American statistics regarding violence against women:

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11630/1550-4891.09.01.01>

* Steven R. Tracy is Professor of Theology and Ethics at Phoenix Seminary, 4222 E. Thomas Road, Suite 400, Phoenix, AZ 85018; he and his wife Celestia are also the founders of Mending the Soul Ministries and staff members of Global Training Network; srtracy@phoenixseminary.edu.

1. Marie Vlachova and Lea BIASON, eds., *Women in an Insecure World: Violence against Women: Facts, Figures and Analysis—Executive Summary* (Geneva: Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2005), 1. An excellent overview of the documented prevalence of global violence against women is Charlotte Watts and Cathy Zimmerman, “Violence against Women: Global Scope and Magnitude,” *The Lancet* 359 (April 6, 2002): 1232–1237.

2. Steven R. Tracy, “An Ugly Secret: Definitions, Prevalence, and Denial of Sexual Abuse,” in *The Long Journey Home: Understanding and Ministering to the Sexually Abused*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 7–8.

- One out of five adolescent girls in America reports being physically or sexually assaulted by a dating partner (who is almost always male).³
- Thirty-eight percent of all female respondents in a recent population study reported at least one experience of sexual abuse in their lifetime; but of the women thirty-one years old and younger, almost 42 percent reported having been sexually abused.⁴
- Twenty-two to thirty-three percent of North American women will be assaulted by an intimate partner in their lifetime.⁵
- More than 40 percent of visits to the hospital emergency room made by adult females are caused by violence at the hand of an intimate male partner (whereas violence by intimates causes less than 5 percent of male emergency room visits).⁶
- According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, 75 percent of the victims of violent family crimes are female.⁷

3. Jay G. Silverman et al., "Dating Violence against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Abuse, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 286 (August 1, 2001): 572–579.

4. Erin A. Casey and Paula S. Nurius, "Trends in the Prevalence and Characteristics of Sexual Violence: A Cohort Analysis," *Violence and Victims* 21 (October, 2006): 635–637.

5. I extrapolated this statistic from one of the largest and most cited U.S. surveys of intimate partner violence (IPV), the Violence against Women Survey, which found that 22 percent of females who had a lifetime intimate partner had been assaulted by their partner: P. Tjaden and N. Thoennes, *Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence against Women: Findings from the National Violence against Women Survey* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice and Centers for Disease Control, 1998). Using a screening tool recommended by the American Medical Association, other researchers found a 31 percent lifetime prevalence for IPV among adult American women: R. M. Siegel et al., "Screening for Domestic Violence in a Community Pediatric Setting," *Pediatrics* 104 (October, 1999): 874–877.

6. L. A. Greenfield et al., *Violence by Intimates: Analysis of Data on Crimes by Current or Former Spouses, Boyfriends, and Girlfriends* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 1998).

7. *Special Report: Violence among Family Members and Intimate Partners* (Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation, revised January 2005): 344.

Though these North American statistics are startling, in much of the majority world, violence against women is even more prevalent. In many communities, it is epidemic. For instance, 28 percent of South African men surveyed admitted having raped a woman, and 54 percent of those who had raped had done so more than once. Thus, currently, a woman born in South Africa has a greater chance of being raped than she has of learning to read.⁸ Epidemic rates of global violence against women are particularly seen in times of crisis, such as natural disasters and war. During Liberia's recent civil war, 75 percent of the women were raped, most having been gang raped.⁹ Sometimes military conflict alters social norms, leading to escalating violence against women even after the conflict has ended. Since war ended in 2003 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, assaults against women have risen dramatically in prevalence and brutality. A recent study found that annually over four hundred thousand women are raped.¹⁰ This finding, believed by the authors to greatly underestimate actual assaults, is twenty-six times higher than the previous estimate. Violence against Congolese women is now so severe that experts have had to create a new label for it: "REV, rape with extreme violence."¹¹

The tragic reality of global violence against women naturally leads us to ask etiological questions. What are some of the factors which promote and maintain global violence against women? Why is violence so asymmetrical based on gender, with males many times more likely to abuse females than females to abuse males? In particular, how do understandings of gender contribute to understandings of the global abuse of women?

8. One out of three South African men surveyed admitted having raped or attempted to rape one or more women: C. Kapp, "Rape on Trial in South Africa," *The Lancet* 367 (March 4, 2006): 718–19, <http://doi.org/ch4knm>; Rachel Jewkes et al., "Gender Inequitable Masculinity and Sexual Entitlement in Rape Perpetration in South Africa: Findings of a Cross-Sectional Study," *Plos One* 6 (December 28, 2011): 1–10, <http://doi.org/fx3m3q>.

9. Nicholas D. Kristof, "After Wars, Mass Rapes Persist," *New York Times*, May 21, 2009.

10. Amber Peterman, Tia Palermo, and Caryn Bredenkamp, "Estimates and Determinants of Sexual Violence against Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo," *American Journal of Public Health* 101 (June, 2011): 1060–1067, <http://doi.org/ckhd68>.

11. Denis Mukwege and Cathy Nangini, "Rape with Extreme Violence: The New Pathology in South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo," *PLoS Medicine* 6 (December 22, 2009): 1–5.

For the sake of clarity, I will articulate my conclusions at the beginning of this article. God designed human gender to reflect his own image, particularly his relationality. Our gender as males and females was furthermore designed to reflect equality and to produce intimacy, joy, and life. But our world is now thoroughly corrupted by sin. Things are not as they were supposed to be. In our current fallen world, conceptions and experiences of gender are confused and broken and have led to various types of destructive sin, including abuse. *Such distorted views of gender, particularly ones that militate against gender equality, are leading factors in the widespread global abuse of women.*¹²

Challenges

At first blush, this might seem like an obvious thesis. However, there are several challenges one must face in asserting that the global abuse of women by men is widespread and is fueled by distorted views of gender that deny or compromise male/female equality.

1. American gender experiences are often sanitized. In a country where women work in virtually all professions, serve on the Supreme Court, and run for president, it is hard to fathom that women cannot legally drive an automobile in one of the most prosperous and modern countries of the Middle East (Saudi Arabia) and may be arrested and beaten for doing so. In a country in which women can receive huge jury awards for sexual discrimination or harassment by employers, it is hard to believe that around the world, thousands, if not millions, of raped women have been thrown out of their homes, with no legal recourse, by their “dishonored” husbands. In a land where females now significantly outnumber males on college campuses across the country, it is hard to believe that one of the most significant risk factors for global poverty is being female.¹³ Yet these injustices do happen around the world and are experienced daily by millions of women and girls.

12. I strongly agree with Vlachova and Biason’s assertion that the “roots of gender-based violence lie in the pervasive systems of inequality that perpetrate the domination of men and the subordination of women,” *Women in an Insecure World—Executive Summary*, 4.

13. This is evidenced by the fact that women constitute more than 70 percent of the world’s poorest people: Bread for the World Institute, *Agriculture in the Global Economy: Hunger Report 2003* (Washington, DC: Bread for the World Institute, 2003), 151.

2. American Christians live in a highly polarized culture which has created harmful gender backlashes. In particular, the “family-values culture wars” have seriously compromised Evangelical and conservative Catholic understandings of gender and injustice.¹⁴ In the past several decades, conservative Christians ostensibly seeking to protect and promote the traditional family have reacted so aggressively against feminist concerns regarding gender injustice and violence against women that they have often minimized these concerns. This is seen at a popular level in the way Rush Limbaugh, the highest paid talk-show host in the world, ridicules feminists, calling them “feminazis,” and mocks virtually all feminist assertions regarding gender injustice.¹⁵ Another recent example of the Religious Right’s reactionary minimization of gender injustice and abuse is seen in the Concerned Women of America’s (CWA) recent fight against reauthorization of the 1994 Violence against Women Act, legislation that has proven very beneficial for combatting the abuse of women, including immigrant and Native American women.¹⁶ CWA asserts this legislation promotes “the feminist agenda” and “domestic violence ideology,” often resulting in the victimization of men.¹⁷ Much conservative Christian family literature similarly reacts against feminism by distorting or minimizing feminist gender concerns, including violence against women. For instance, Beth Impson says the “facts” regarding domestic violence “have been distorted and concealed by the feminists themselves and by the media who promote their agenda.”¹⁸ In direct contradiction to social science research on abuse, she goes on to assert that most likely only one in fifty women experiences domestic violence, “very few” rapes occur on college campuses, and the real question

14. For a detailed development of this assertion, see Steven R. Tracy, “The Culture Wars over ‘Family Values’: Are Evangelicals Fighting the Wrong Battles in the Wrong Way and Losing Badly?” *Africanus Journal* 3 (November, 2011): 57–76.

15. See, for instance, Kate O’Beirne, *Women Who Make the World Worse and How Their Radical Feminist Assault is Ruining Our Schools, Families, Military, and Sports* (New York: Sentinel, 2006). In this book, which has Limbaugh’s strong endorsement on the back cover, feminist concerns regarding sexual harassment, domestic violence, and rape are serially and often mockingly dismissed (see especially pp. 17–19, 59–64, 94–95).

16. Lisa Sharon Harper, “Mothers, Violence, and the House GOP,” Sojourners’ God’s Politics Blog, May 4, 2012; <http://sojo.net/blogs/2012/05/04/mothers-violence-and-house-gop-2012>

17. Tobin Grant, “News: Evangelical Leaders Split over Violence against Women Act,” *Christianity Today* (Web-only), May, 2012.

18. Beth Impson, *Called to Womanhood: The Biblical View for Today’s Woman* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 61.

is why there are not more resources to help men battered by women.¹⁹ Finally, the overriding Religious Right's emphasis on homosexual threats to society and the family have led to a minimization of concern over male-perpetrated violence against women. But the fact is that the vast majority of physical and sexual abuse is perpetrated by heterosexual men, often against their wives, and that such abuse is prevalent in North America and around the world.

3. Conservative religious understandings of gender which strongly emphasize male power and authority over females, and espouse virtually unqualified female submission, perpetuate gender inequality and numb individuals to the reality and injustice of the global abuse of women.²⁰ For instance, one can find many examples of discussions of male/female roles which emphasize the virtue of wives submitting to sinful, unjust husbands and suffering "for righteousness sake."²¹ Several writers even appeal to the use of Jesus as an example to abused slaves in the first century (1 Pt 2: 18–23) and admonish abused wives to respond in a similar fashion—to meekly submit to an abusive husband and trust God.²² Others tell wives to submit to abusive husbands in spite of the potentially destructive consequences. Linda Dillow argues that Sarah showed her godliness by submitting to Abraham's sinful plan to protect himself by lying about Sarah's being his wife. Dillow then asks what Sarah did after Pharaoh took her into his harem: "Did Sarah

19. Ibid., 62–64; similarly, David Ayers, "The Inevitability of Failure: The Assumptions and Implementations of Modern Feminism," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: Responding to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. Wayne Grudem and John Piper (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 314, 328, 330.

20. The one qualification to submission recognized by most "complementarians" is when a husband's command clearly violates a *direct* biblical command. For a specific discussion of "complementarian" understandings of submission, including how they relate to abuse, see Steven R. Tracy, "What Does 'Submit in Everything' Really Mean? The Nature and Scope of Marital Submission," *Trinity Journal* 29 (Fall, 2008): 285–312. For a nuancing of the complex relationship between patriarchy and abuse, see Steven R. Tracy, "Patriarchy and Domestic Violence: Challenging Common Misconceptions," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50 (September, 2007): 573–594.

21. For example, see Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *Lies Women Believe and the Truth that Sets Them Free* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2001), 232–233; Martha Peace, *The Excellent Wife*, rev. ed. (Bemidji, MN: Focus Publishing, 1999), 185.

22. For various specific examples and a critical exegetical response, see Steven R. Tracy, "Domestic Violence in the Church and Redemptive Suffering in 1 Peter," *Calvin Theological Journal* 41 (November, 2006): 279–296.

scream ‘rape?’ Did she cry, kick, or throw a tantrum? No. Trusting God, she submitted to Abraham’s pathetic plan and went into Pharaoh’s harem.”²³

In addition to some conservative marriage literature labeling submission to abusive husbands obligatory and virtuous, male authority is sometimes understood in even more extremely controlling and all-powerful ways which can demean women and foster a climate in which unhealthy men can justify abuse. For instance, Lou Priolo argues that the husband’s headship means he is responsible for essentially everything in his wife’s life. Thus, he is to “preside over” his wife and to “rule” and “control her” since he is the “boss.”²⁴ This includes being responsible to know everything that is going on in the home, especially what his wife is doing, how she is doing it, and who all of her friends are.²⁵ With this knowledge, he is to keep his wife from the dangers of becoming too close to their children, and from the dangers of bad friends, unsound books, and unhealthy music.²⁶ Similarly, Nancy Wilson states that a husband’s authority is absolutely comprehensive and necessitates the wife to submit to the husband “in everything” in every domain of life (other than a direct, explicit violation of Scripture). She does not even have the right to get another opinion or to question his orders, not even by asking a pastor, a pastor’s wife, or going to a counselor without his express permission.²⁷ It is not difficult to see how such understandings of gender and gender roles can perpetuate gender inequality and numb individuals to the reality and injustice of the global abuse of women.

In his new book, *The Sacredness of Life*, David Gushee emphasizes the importance of prioritizing gender justice issues and suggests that the Evangelical church’s frequent apathy about these issues may well be related to the way women are often treated in the church. His comments are helpful in understanding this link:

23. Linda Dillow, *Creative Counterpart: Becoming the Woman, Wife, and Mother You’ve Longed to Be* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986). See also Rebecca Jones, *Does Christianity Squash Women? A Christian Looks at Womanhood* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2005), 25, 188.

24. Lou Priolo, *The Complete Husband: A Practical Guide to Biblical Husbanding* (Amityville, NY: Calvary, 1999), 219–221.

25. *Ibid.*, 187, 216.

26. *Ibid.*, 187–191, 197.

27. Nancy Wilson, *The Fruit of Her Hands: Respect and the Christian Woman* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 1997), 16–17, 28, 40, 45.

I am entirely convinced that *honoring the sacredness of life in the twenty-first century requires full engagement with global women's issues*. I am also convinced that the forms of women's marginalization that still can be found in conservative religion here in the United States contribute to our relative indifference to women's rights issues around the world (emphasis his).²⁸

Theological Framework

The assertions made in this essay are documented from social science research, but grounded in biblical theology regarding creation, gender, and human relationships. The creation account in Genesis is particularly significant for understanding gender injustice. The use of plural pronouns in Genesis 1:26 ("Let *us* make man in *our* image, in *our* likeness") is very unusual with a singular noun. They are used here to indicate that God is in relationship within his own divine being. So when he creates beings in his image, they are fundamentally relational.²⁹ They are also fundamentally equal since the Three Persons of the Trinity are equal as One. The details of this passage support this thesis. We are told that when humans were made in the image of God, they were made "male and female." When God created human beings in his own image he did not create monolithic, independent beings, but ones that through their respective gender equally and jointly reflect who he is. The implications of this text for gender equality are enormous. Neither gender is any more like God than the other. In fact, males and females together, in healthy loving relationship, most clearly and fully image God. Richard Davidson notes that Genesis 1:26-28 "underscores the profound importance of the personal relationship and mutuality of communion in human existence as male and female... The image of God is primarily a relational concept. Ultimately we do not reflect God's image on our own but in relationship."³⁰ The extended creation account makes it clear

28. David P. Gushee, *The Sacredness of Human Life: Why an Ancient Biblical Vision Is Key to the World's Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 386–387.

29. See Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: 2007), 36–42; Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2001), 267–287; Gerhard Hasel, "The Meaning of 'Us' in Gn 1:26," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 13 (1975): 58–66; Celestia G. and Steven R. Tracy, *Forever and Always: The Art of Intimacy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012), 3–21.

30. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 40; see also Stanley J. Grenz, "Theological Foundations for Male-Female Relationships," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41(December, 1998): 615–630.

that individual humans made in God's image are not complete in themselves, for Adam, though created perfect and placed in a perfect environment, was incomplete and dissatisfied. God himself interprets his situation by declaring, "[I]t is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gn 2:18). Gender, like the differences in Persons within the Trinity, was not meant to create otherness and individuality, but unity and intimacy between equals. Genesis 2:18 has often been used to imply gender inequality, to assert that women were made to serve men as their inferiors. In reality, this text dramatically teaches gender equality. The Hebrew word translated "helper" (*ezer*) is almost always used in the Hebrew Bible of God, particularly in reference to him as helper of Israel (Dt 33:7; Ps 33:20; 124:8). Thus, "helper" does not mean "junior partner," but one who is entirely equal. It might also imply one who has some qualities lacking (and hence needed) by the other. The Greek word used in the Septuagint to translate *ezer* is *boethos*, and it is used just once in the New Testament, in Hebrews 13:6 of the Lord being our helper.

The conclusion of the creation account in Genesis 2:24–25 summarizes the divine intent for human gender reflected in the most intimate of male/female relationships—"and they will become one flesh... naked, and they felt no shame." Our human relationships were designed to produce joyful loving intimacy. They were intended to be life-giving. They were intended to show the world what the creator of the universe is like (see Jn 17:21–23; Eph 5:25–33).

Given the unique potency of human relationships, particularly gender relationships, to image God and create life, it is not surprising that Satan would strategize to pervert God's plan. And thus, in a fallen world, relationships in general and male/female relationships in particular suffer from alienation and exploitation resulting in shame and pain. Genesis 3:16 predicts this, indicating that since sin had entered the world, men and women would experience harmful strife, not loving unity. More specifically, the man would rule over the woman. The majority of commentators recognize that "he shall rule over you" does not reflect God's decree based on his desire, but his predication based on his omniscient knowledge. Thus, Victor Hamilton argues that this phrase in Genesis 3:16 means, "[T]he sinful husband will try to be a tyrant over his wife."³¹

31. Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 202. The Hebrew verb for "rule" found in Gn 3:16 (*mashal*) is the same term

Hence, the original assertion that men would dominate women throughout human history was not launched recently by secular feminists but by Moses millennia ago. And throughout Scripture, beginning in the very next chapter following the account of the fall, humans are depicted abusing and exploiting each other. The first act of fatal domestic violence occurs in Genesis 4:8. By Genesis 6:13, violence is so widespread that God determines to destroy the earth and most of the human race. Abuse occasions the writing of many of the Psalms.³² Violence and oppression is a dominant theme in most of the Major and Minor Prophets.³³ Scripture characterizes sinful abusers as those who prey on those who are weaker and more vulnerable.³⁴ Scripture repeatedly condemns the abuse and oppression of the poor, aliens, widows, and orphans, groups that had the least power in the ancient world.³⁵ Scripture also places tremendous emphasis on pursuing justice for the oppressed and caring for them.³⁶

It is important to note that males are no more sinful than females. However, since males, with very few exceptions, have greater physical, social, and religious power, they are far more likely to abuse females than to be abused by them. Male abuse of females is documented throughout Scripture.³⁷

Conversely, the divine creative intent that men and women jointly and fruitfully reflect God's image is also affirmed throughout Scripture. This is particularly seen in the coming of Christ and his new kingdom, in which the old sinful order (reflected in human conflict and alienation) is being overcome (see Eph 2:14-19). As John Stott insightfully notes, "[T]he church is meant to be the [justice and mercy loving] Kingdom community, a model of what human community looks like when it comes under the rule of God,

found in Gn 4:7 used of Cain's need to harshly dominate or master that which would harm him, namely, sin.

32. For example, Ps 5, 10, 35, 37, 52, 59, 64, 140.

33. For example, see Is 59:1-5; Jer 7:6-11; Ez 11:5-12; Hos 4:1-2; Jl 3:19; Am 5:11-12, 24; Ob 10; Jon 3:8-9; Mi 3:10; 6:8; 7:2-3; Na 3:1-3; Hb 1:2-3, 9; Zep 3:1-4; Zec 7:9-10; Mal 2:16.

34. Eccl 4:1; Jer 23:10; Ez 22:6; Mi 2:1-2.

35. Ex 22:22; Dt 10:18; 24:14-20; Ps 10:3-18; 94:6; Is 10:1-2; Ez 22:7; Mal 3:5.

36. Jb 29:12-17; Ps 72:1-4, 13-14; 82:2-4; Prv 31:8-9; Is 1:15-17; 58:6-9; Jer 22:2-3, 16-17; Am 5:11, 21-24; Mal 6:8, 7:2; Jas 1:27.

37. Gn 4:23-24; 34:1-2; Ex 21:10; Dt 22:25-27; 28:30; Jgs 19; Ru 2:9, 22; 2 Sm 11; 13; 16:22; Jb 24:21; Is 1:23; 10:2; 13:16; Lam 5:11; Ez 22:7, 10-11; 25; Zec 14:2; Mal 2:14-16; Mk 12:40.

and a challenging alternative to secular society.”³⁸ With respect to gender, the kingdom of God means that in Christ there is no longer “male nor female,” but both genders, as well as all races and social groupings, are equal and “are all one in Christ” (Gal 3:28). Christian men and women are equally indwelt, gifted, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to bless others (Acts 1:14; 2:1, 17).

In short, abuse and oppression of the vulnerable by the strong will be sadly prevalent in a fallen world. Sin poisons gender relationships so that they become a source of exploitation and pain. But as citizens of the kingdom of God, Christians are called to live a redemptive lifestyle in which gender relations are built on complete equality and mutual blessing. They are also called to fight against gender injustice.

Categories of Gender Injustice

There are many different types of violence against women that are fueled by distorted concepts and expressions of gender. The following are some of the most notable.

1. Physical and Sexual Abuse

Violence against women is one of the leading causes of female injury, death, and poor health world-wide.³⁹ A high percentage of global violence against women is perpetrated by intimate partners. Intimate partner violence (IPV) thus reflects a particularly tragic case of gender distortion. Physical and sexual abuse, be it by an intimate partner or not, is often perpetrated by men with a sense of superiority over women.

The most comprehensive recent study of global violence against women was published by the World Health Organization in 2005.⁴⁰ This study surveyed

38. John Stott, *Human Rights and Wrongs: Major Issues for a New Century*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999); See also Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 39.

39. See L. Heise and C. Garcia Moreno, “Violence by Intimate Partners,” in *World Report on Violence and Health*, ed. E. G. Krug et al. (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2002), 87–121; J. C. Campbell, “Health Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence,” *The Lancet* 359 (May 27, 2002):1331–1336, <http://doi.org/dmdw43>.

40. *WHO Multi-Country Study on Women’s Health and Domestic Violence against Women* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2005).

twenty-four thousand women from fifteen sites in ten countries. It corroborated previous findings about the staggering global prevalence of sexual abuse.⁴¹ It specifically found that the proportion of ever-partnered women (women who had had one or more partners in their lifetime) who had ever experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner ranged from 15 to 71 percent, with most sites falling between 29 and 62 percent. The prevalence of physical and sexual violence perpetrated by a non-partner over the age of fifteen years ranged from 5 percent in Ethiopia to 65 percent in Samoa. Similarly, in the United States, almost two-thirds of women who report being raped, physically assaulted, or stalked since age eighteen were victimized by an intimate partner.⁴²

Much research has been conducted on men who abuse their partners. While there are various types of abusers with varied characteristics, the majority of North American perpetrators of IPV are highly insecure men. Most experts believe this is related to childhood experiences of witnessing or receiving domestic violence. These men are not hyper masculine, as is commonly perceived, but in fact tend to rate themselves lower in masculinity, which leads them to control and batter the one who most threatens their fragile male ego, viz., their female partner.⁴³ The abuser's low estimation of his own masculinity also appears to be a factor in the prevalent attitude of superiority and entitlement that grows out of his insecurities and need for power and control.⁴⁴ Some IPV experts argue that "entitlement may be the single most critical concept in understanding the batterer mentality."⁴⁵ It is also relevant to this discussion to note that perpetrators of IPV are disproportionately

41. For instance, a meta-analysis of 169 international studies found that the global prevalence of lifetime sexual abuse for females was 25 percent, and 8 percent for males: World Health Organization, *Comparative Risk Assessment: Child Sexual Abuse* (Sydney, Australia: WHO Collaborating Centre for Evidence and Health Policy in Mental Health, 2001).

42. Tjaden and Thoennes, *Intimate Partner Violence*, iv.

43. Edward W. Gondolf, *Research on Men Who Batter: An Overview, Bibliography and Resource Guide* (Bradenton, FL: Human Services Institute, 1988), 7.

44. Lundy Bancroft and Jay G. Silverman, *The Batterer as Parent: Addressing the Impact of Domestic Violence on Family Dynamics* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002), 5–13; Mary Nomme Russell, *Confronting Abusive Beliefs: Group Treatment for Abusive Men* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995), 41.

45. Bancroft and Silverman, *The Batterer as Parent*, 7.

uneducated, unemployed, and have a deep sense of disempowerment.⁴⁶ It is easy to see how such men would be inclined to view masculinity in terms of aggression and strength over others, particularly female partners.

Not as much research has been done on the mindsets of male abusers outside North America; but we do know that they generally have a deep sense of entitlement which is linked to distorted views of male superiority. We see this in a study of Arab husbands from Israel in which 62 percent of the men “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that an unfaithful wife deserves to be beaten, and 37 percent “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that a husband has a right to beat his wife if she insults him in front of his friends.⁴⁷ Similarly, a sense of superiority and entitlement was found to be among the most distinctive traits of the 27 percent of South African men who admitted raping women, 45 percent of whom reported experiencing no guilt for doing so.⁴⁸

2. Femicide

The ultimate physical violence against women is murder, and it is staggeringly common around the world. Some global violence experts have sought to illustrate this problem as follows:

The number of ‘missing’ women, killed for gender-related reasons, is of the same order of magnitude as the estimated 191 million human beings who have lost their lives directly or indirectly as a result of all the conflicts and wars of the 20th century—which was...the most violent period in human history so far.⁴⁹

In a most perverse gender distortion, women around the world who are murdered are likely to be killed by the very ones who should most love and value them—husbands, boyfriends, and family members. The World Health Organization notes that studies from Australia, Canada, Israel, South Africa,

46. Philippe Bourgois, “In Search of Masculinity: Violence, Respect and Sexuality among Puerto Rican Crack Dealers in East Harlem,” *The British Journal of Criminology* 36, Issue 3 (1996): 412–427, <http://doi.org/msq>.

47. Muhammad Haj-Yahia, “A Patriarchal Perspective of Beliefs about Wife Beating among Palestinian Men from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip,” *Journal of Family Issues* 19 (September, 1998): 595–621, <http://doi.org/dtvb2x>; Muhammad Haj-Yahia, “Predicting Beliefs about Wife Beating among Engaged Arab Men in Israel,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 12 (August, 1997): 530–545, <http://doi.org/fdb724>.

48. Jewkes, “Gender Inequitable Masculinity,” 5, 8–9.

49. Vlachova and BIASON, *Women in an Insecure World—Executive Summary*, 1.

and the United States show that 40 to 70 percent of female murder victims were murdered by their husbands, ex-husbands, or boyfriends, whereas at least in the United States, from 1976 to 1996, only 4 percent of the men murdered were killed by their wives, girlfriends, or ex-wives.⁵⁰ According to the National Institute of Justice, intimate partner homicides account for 40 to 50 percent of all murders of women in the United States, and in 70 to 80 percent of these homicides, no matter which partner was murdered, the man abused the woman prior to the murder.⁵¹

Some of the most extreme gender injustice related to sexual behavior involves “honor killings,” in which a woman who is believed to have been sexually immoral brings dishonor on her family or clan, and the only way the dishonor can be removed is for the woman to be killed. This practice is based on the “commodification” of women, according to which they are viewed as the property of the male head of the family and as the exclusive guardian of the family honor. Males are generally not subject to the same sexual rules, evidenced by the fact that, according to one study, only 7 percent of those killed in honor killings were male, and 81 percent of those men were killed when the couple in question was together.⁵²

Precise statistics on the prevalence of honor killings are impossible to determine since such deaths are rarely listed as such in official government reports. Most experts agree, however, that this is a major global problem, particularly in the Middle East, parts of Africa, and India. One study found that honor killings accelerated significantly in the twenty-year period between 1989 and 2009.⁵³ It is estimated that one out of four homicides in Jordan is the murder of a woman killed by family members in an honor killing.⁵⁴ And this is not a problem limited to uneducated villagers. A recent study of male university students in Turkey found that 45 percent approved

50. World Health Organization, *World Report on Violence and Health*, ed. Etienne G. Krug et al. (Geneva, 2002), 93. This report is available at http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/en.

51. Jacquelyn C. Campbell et al., “Assessing Risk Factors for Intimate Partner Homicide,” *National Institute of Justice Journal* 250 (November, 2003): 18.

52. Phyllis Chesler, “Worldwide Trends in Honor Killings,” *Middle East Quarterly* 17 (Spring, 2010): 3–11.

53. Ibid.

54. Jan Goodwin, *Price of Honor: Muslim Women Lift the Veil of Silence in the Islamic World*, rev. ed. (New York: Penguin, 2003), 266.

of honor killings of women.⁵⁵ Examples abound of women beaten, mutilated, and murdered because they brought “dishonor” on their male relatives.⁵⁶ Additionally, in more conservative Muslim cultures, women are often punished and even executed because they were raped.⁵⁷

3. Gender-Based “Sex Selection”

Adult and adolescent women are not the only ones in danger of being killed due to their gender. In much of the world, particularly Asia, abortion/infanticide has often been utilized as an expression of patriarchal devaluing of women with astoundingly destructive consequences for females and the broader society. Due to the overwhelming preference for males, who are considered more desirable, there are an estimated one to two hundred million “missing females” in the world, who were aborted or killed shortly after birth because they were females, and this has led to great gender disparities, particularly in India and China.⁵⁸ This gender birth disparity has especially increased among the more affluent, who have access to ultrasound technology and hence can choose to abort female fetuses. A recent report from the Chinese Academy of Sciences warned that at the current trajectory, one in five young Chinese men will be unable to find a bride in the next decade because there will be thirty to forty million more young men than women.⁵⁹ In other words, China may soon have a young male population the size of the whole young male population of the United States with little prospect of marriage because their female peers have been killed, since they were not considered as valuable as males.

55. Adana Filiz et al., “Views of Male University Students about Social Gender Roles; An Example from East of Turkey,” *Journal of Family Violence* 26 (2011): 519–526.

56. For instance, see Souad, *Burned Alive: A Victim of the Law of Men* (New York: Warner Books, 2004).

57. Nicholas D. Kristof, “A Pakistani Rape and a Pakistani Love Story,” *New York Times*, August 2, 2005. See also Geraldine Brooks, *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995), 33–37, 42–54; Cassandra, *Thirty-Three Secrets Arab Men Never Tell American Women* (Philadelphia: Xlibris, 2008), 38–61; Goodwin, *Price of Honor*, 5–6, 266, 321.

58. Amartya Sen, “Missing Women—Revisited: Reduction in Female Mortality Has Been Counterbalanced by Sex-Selective Abortions,” *British Medical Journal* 327 (2003): 1297–1298.

59. “Gendercide: The Worldwide War on Baby Girls,” *The Economist*, March 4, 2010; Wei Xing Zhu, Li Lu, and Therese Hesketh, “China’s Excess Males, Sex Selective Abortion and One Child Policy,” *British Medical Journal* 338 (2009): 1211, <http://doi.org/ctmcjx>.

4. *Female Genital Mutilation*

Another widespread form of global violence against women is female genital mutilation (FGM). This practice, in which the female genitals are cut, and typically the clitoris and sometimes the labia minora are removed, is a direct assault on the female body.⁶⁰ While it is most often performed and encouraged by females and is often done to preserve a woman's purity, the demeaning nature of the practice is inescapable. It is based on patriarchal social norms in which the female's lifelong sexual pleasure as well as physical and sexual well-being are devalued and compromised in favor of the male. (It is often believed that FGM will help insure a woman's sexual fidelity to her husband.) The World Health Organization estimates that between one hundred million and one hundred forty million girls and women worldwide have been subjected to FGM. An estimated 91.5 million girls and women in Africa are currently living with the consequences of FGM. In addition to the loss of sexual pleasure and impaired sexual functioning in marriage, FGM can have grave health consequences.

5. *Other Forms of Global Violence against Women*

Several other major categories of global violence against women exist, including prostitution/sex trafficking, pornography, and neglect. The last category is particularly important to acknowledge since most studies focus on assertive male violence, not on gender biased failure to act.⁶¹ For instance, in the majority world, girls are much more likely to be malnourished than boys and are less likely to receive health care. In India, girls are four times as likely as boys to suffer acute malnutrition, while boys are forty times more likely to be taken to the hospital when they are ill.⁶² Globally, females are also less likely to receive an education or to become literate, which in turn contributes to lifelong poverty. These dynamics help to explain why, according to the World Bank, "[E]ducating girls yields a higher rate of return than any other investment available in the developing world."⁶³ Lack of

60. Health experts have classified FGM into four types. See *Understanding and Addressing Violence against Women: Female Genital Mutilation* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2012).

61. For a sensitive discussion of the global experience of girls that also acknowledges the needs of boys, see Nikki van der Gaag, *Because I Am a Girl, the State of the World's Girls 2011, So What about Boys* (London: Plan International, 2011).

62. Michael Todaro and Stephen C. Smith, *Economic Development*, 8th ed. (Boston: Addison Wesley, 2003), 151, 231.

63. Mary Carmichael, "A Shot of Hope," *Newsweek*, October 1, 2007.

space prevents exploring these other forms of violence against women, though it should be noted that they are globally prevalent and exceedingly destructive. Men are also exploited and violated through prostitution, pornography, and neglect, but unequally so; men are by far the predominant perpetrators and females are disproportionately objectified, devalued, and harmed.⁶⁴

*Implications/Responses for the Church*⁶⁵

In light of the prevalent global violence against women, the church must do the following:

1. *Redouble efforts to teach and live out gender justice, especially gender equality.*

Virtually all Evangelical groups formally proclaim that men and women are equally made in the image of God and are invested with inherent worth and dignity that should be affirmed and protected. But theory does not always translate into practice. Given the clarity of biblical teaching regarding human dignity and equality, including gender equality, and given biblical teaching on the priority of justice for the people of God, the church must make gender justice a practical priority. Our church budgets, policies, libraries, and ministries should reflect this commitment. One of the best ways to start is by proactively listening to the voices of women, particularly those wounded by abuse and other forms of gender injustice. Otherwise, we will not know what is most needed and may inaccurately assess what we are doing. For instance,

64. A few of the more significant works on prostitution and pornography which emphasize their connection with patriarchy and male violence are Gail Dines, Robert Jensen, and Ann Russo, *Pornography: The Production and Consumption of Inequality* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Melissa Farley, *Prostitution and Trafficking in Nevada: Making the Connections* (San Francisco: Prostitution Research and Education, 2007); Sheila Jeffreys, *The Idea of Prostitution* (North Melbourne, Australia: Spinifex, 1997); Robert Jensen, *Getting Off: Pornography and the End of Masculinity* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007); Victor Malarek, *The Johns: Sex for Sale and the Men Who Buy It* (New York: Arcade, 2009); Diana E. H. Russell, *Dangerous Relationships: Pornography, Misogyny, and Rape* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998).

65. From a secular perspective, there are many excellent suggestions for responding to and eradicating global violence against women; for instance, Vlachova and Biason, *Women in an Insecure World—Executive Summary*, 23–25; and Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2009).

in one study of almost two hundred parishioners, including fifty-seven battered women, there was a dramatic difference (an over 100 percent discrepancy) between the perceptions of abused versus non-abused parishioners regarding whether the church offered financial support to battered women, whether church teachings contributed to a climate that fostered domestic violence, and whether domestic violence was addressed in sermons.⁶⁶

2. *Prioritize the empowerment of women.*

This is closely related to the previous point, but warrants its own notation. Female disempowerment leads to and results from gender injustice. So empowering women to have a voice to express their own thoughts and feelings, empowering them to use their gifts, validating their right as daughters of God to their own convictions, and listening and responding to their concerns and needs go a long way in preventing and healing male perpetrated violence. In this context, female empowerment is most powerfully accomplished by healthy, godly males.

3. *Educate congregations regarding gender injustice, particularly violence against women.*⁶⁷

Until very recently, there were few Evangelical resources on gender injustice and abuse. This is starting to change, with many new ministries and published works appearing in the last decade. Yet, most Evangelical congregations still receive little or no systematic education on these issues. And we do not always accurately assess the education we do provide. For instance, one leading social science expert on domestic violence in the religious community reports that when clergy were surveyed regarding their abuse education efforts, 31 percent reported having preached a sermon on abuse. But when Christian women were surveyed regarding the abuse education they had received in church, 95 percent of the women surveyed reported never having heard a sermon on abuse.⁶⁸ Considering the ubiquity of

66. Ameda A. Manetta et al., "The Church—Does It Provide Support for Abused Women? Differences in the Perceptions of Battered Women and Parishioners," *Journal of Religion & Abuse* 5 (2003): 5–21, <http://doi.org/ct6kqn>.

67. Various resources can be found on the Mending the Soul Ministries website at www.mendingthesoul.org.

68. Nancy Nason-Clark, "When Terror Strikes the Christian Home," in *Beyond Abuse in the Christian Home: Raising Voices for Change*, ed. Catherine Clark Kroeger, Nancy Nason-Clark, and Barbara Fisher-Townsend (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 174.

gender injustice and violence, churches must educate broadly and systematically.

4. *Prioritize ministries and projects that address gender injustice.*

This means that specific programs are developed to assist abused and oppressed women in our communities and around the world. Sometimes this will involve establishing new programs; other times it will involve reviewing existing ministries to insure that gender justice issues are thoroughly considered and systematically addressed. Often this will lead to an analysis of the causes and systemic nature of such injustice. For instance, many churches support global programs to help the poor, including widows and orphans. Within those ministries, churches should be asking if and how abuse and other forms of gender injustice contributed to the plight of poor women, widows, and children, and how they (or the ministries and missionaries they are assisting) can respond to that gender injustice. Virtually all churches have some sort of family and marriage ministry, often with numerous components, including marital and premarital counseling, youth programs, and marriage classes. A church's various marriage and family ministries should be evaluated in terms of whether the reality of abuse is factored in and responded to in an informed and prudent manner. Sometimes this will lead to new ministries. Other times a small addition to an existing ministry can make a substantial difference; for example, a pastor might introduce a few well-informed, sensitive comments about domestic violence into a sermon series on the family.

Conclusion

The data surveyed here gives sobering evidence of the widespread global abuse of women fueled by unhealthy gender conceptions which compromise or deny the dignity and equality of females. But this is not the end of the story. In response to this abuse, the body of Christ should embody kingdom values, reflecting Jesus' power to transform and redeem. The church is uniquely equipped to demonstrate healthy gender practices in which women are valued and empowered to bless others. The church must resolutely respond to global gender injustice.