

How Goes it with Women?
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Every year, I do a survey of how women are doing around the world. Historically, women have always been at the bottom of the power curve, domestic abuse being one of the main ways of keeping them subservient. Because women are generally smaller and less muscular than men, and because of child bearing, they are more vulnerable physically. The power curve disfavors women.

Religion and ancient traditions have also played a malignant role until changes in the Western world began changing patterns. The changes began with the upper classes, first in Western Europe (France and England). Women could inherit if they had no brothers, and an heiress (or widow) had choices that most women did not have, including choice of mate or no mate at all.

The printing press provided a revolution in literacy (books widely available) and the Protestant Reformation encouraged women to be literate, primarily to teach their children to read the Bible. Men no longer had a monopoly on literacy. Wife beating among the educated became socially frowned upon.

The final blow to the chains that held women captive was contraception, a medical-technological advance in the 20th century, that gave women power over their fertility. Fertility rates fell from seven or more per woman to two or three, greatly enhancing family health and prosperity. With the political emancipation of women, voting, the gap closed between the genders. A marriage of mutually respectful partners is far better than that of bully and submissive.

The 20th century changes started a process of sweeping the world. Upper classes in all modern or modernizing countries led the way to changing the status of women from property to equal (or almost equal). But as with all social revolutions, changes do not come simultaneously. Some men bitterly resent their loss of power over their wives and children and others have never gotten the message.

If we consider the size of the global population, the continued abuse of women has greatly diminished, except in those sectors in which religion or blind tradition still call the shots. We know that laws in Muslim-majority countries disfavor women, and practices in India and dictatorships keep women in line.

But even in the most modern, most emancipated societies, domestic abuse still lives. France, a country famed for its reverence for women, a country that invented courtesy, manners, and male gentility as long ago as the high Middle Ages, is in the grip of massive demonstrations of women who want domestic violence to stop.

The UN found that 87,000 women were intentionally murdered worldwide in 2017. More than half (58%) were killed by intimate partners or family members, meaning that 137 women daily are killed this way. More than 30,000 of the women intentionally killed in 2017 were killed by their current or former intimate partners. The largest number killed (20,000) killed by partners or family were in Asia, followed by Africa. There were more in the Americas than in Europe or Oceania, but those numbers are dwarfed by Asia and Africa, mostly in "honor killings" (Muslim) or in "dowry murders" (India).

Although 80% of homicide victims are men killed by men, intimate partner and family-related victims are by far females (82%).

A 2014 EU survey of 42,000 women across all 29 member states found that. 26% of French respondents said they had been abused by a partner since age 15, physically or sexually. That is below the global average of 30%, but is the sixth largest among the EU countries. Could the large immigrant population play a role here?

The Russian parliament is trying to undo Putin's decriminalization of simple assault of family members (spousal and parental abuse), which Russia's religious conservatives promoted. Their notion of "family values" has produced domestic violence of 40%, which is fine with them.

In the US, the number of women killed by homicide grew by 21% between 2015-16, but studies are not suggesting the causes. Could this parallel the opioid crisis?

Discouraging as these numbers are, unmasking them is the road to ending them. We can fix this if we have the will.

681 words

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