

When All the Women Are Gone

When All the Women Are Gone: Ending Violence against Women One Man at a Time

by

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Men Stopping Violence

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***Writer's reflections:** I have so much interest in the subject of violence against women that I actually felt overwhelmed writing this piece. I gathered a great deal of research on the topic and it took a considerable amount of time to wrestle it all into a usable batch of typed notes.*

I took the day off from work to write the draft and the entire day was used to accomplish the task. I was nearly in tears at one point in the evening as the midnight deadline loomed and I still had a little less than half of the report to compose. In the end, I am pleased with my ability to express the impact that violence against women has on the global community and the need for men to become the solution to this problem. The whitepaper format allowed for a formal presentation of the subject matter while showcasing a male-focused organization that is working towards ending violence against women.

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INTRODUCTION

During the global recession of the last two years, much has been said about the new position of women in the workforce. In the United States, in particular, women now represent half of the workforce as men have lost their jobs in record numbers. What has not been discussed in great depth is the increase in violence against women in households where women are now the breadwinners. In patriarchal societies, men walk around with a sense of privilege and entitlement that is largely defined by their ability to control women emotionally, financially, as well as physically. Violence against women, the extreme of which is femicide, represents man's ultimate control over woman.

Women make significant contributions to the economic security of the global community. And all women are at constant risk of encountering violence from men in and outside of their families. If violence that escalates to murder continues to destroy the lives of women, every member of society will ultimately be affected. What will become of the global community when all of the women are gone? The answer: we must never allow this to occur.

Men Stopping Violence (MSV) is a 24-year-old community-based organization that works directly with male batterers and non-batterers. The organization's aim is to re-frame patriarchal views and to teach men to treat women with the respect that all human beings deserve. MSV offers several programs that challenge the patriarchal philosophy and offers a safe place for men to put down their old beliefs and try on new ones. In this report, we discuss the impact violence against women has on the global community.

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No woman is safe from the possibility of violence entering her life. In most cases, women are being sexually assaulted, raped, beaten, financially deprived and killed by members of their own family. In many patriarchal societies, women are not in control of their lives. Instead their fathers, husbands, even brothers have control. Men also punish women in their families when community or religious norms are not followed. The financial toll violence against women takes on the family and community are also explored in this paper.

Following the progression of violence to its ultimate end, the report looks at the phenomenon of femicide. Femicide is the murder of women because they are women. The report looks at the reasons for categorizing the murder of women separate from men and how this practice can impact homicide statistics.

Finally, this report will offer a solution for ending violence against women. That solution being the very perpetrators of most violence against women: men. Our programs are described as well as our philosophy of changing men's way of seeing themselves in the world and how they define themselves as men. We encourage men to accept women as fully human and requiring respect and positive regard. Men are informed that challenging patriarchal ideology will allow them to be more open with other men and to build, strong, positive and non-violent relationships with women and girls.

Women, Violence and the World: A Global Problem

Amnesty International calls it "...the greatest human rights scandal of our times (p. 1)." Violence against women is a global problem that causes all women and girls to live in a constant state of fear. The degree of fear may depend on what region of the world a woman is from or

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even the area in her city that she resides, but no woman walks through life unaware that the potential for violence is ever present. In its 2004 report entitled *It's In Our Hands*, Amnesty International stressed the impact of violence on women's lives in every part of the world at every phase of a woman's life: "From birth to death, in times of peace as well as war, women face discrimination and violence at the hands of the state, the community and the family (p. 1)."

With one in three women subjected to sexual abuse (Barthick and Kaufman, 2001), it should not be a surprise that the effect of violence against women is far reaching and growing rapidly out of control. This epidemic includes acts other than sexual abuse such as, sexual assault, rape, domestic violence, infanticide, forced pregnancies or abortions, honor and dowry-killings, and bride-burnings. In recent years, the use of rape as a weapon of war has been well documented. And as young girls being infected with HIV/AIDS as a result of a false belief that sex with a virgin can cure the disease has also made several news cycles. Many of these acts of violence are often committed by a member of the victim's family.

"Actual or threatened violence creates a pervasive atmosphere of fear that limits the lives of women, restricting their freedom of movement and their ability to participate in public decision-making and affecting their standard of living (Amnesty International, p. 9)." Violence perpetrated against women does what it is intended to do: it creates an atmosphere of intimidation and fear that supports patriarchal norms. As a result, women are not able to fulfill personal goals or to make significant contributions to their families and communities. In many areas of the world, women put most of their energy into staying alive and out of harm's way. This is a devastating truth that exists solely because women are viewed as sub-human creatures that men are expected to control. Even when, according to the international non-profit

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organization CARE, “the overwhelming majority of the labor that sustains life—growing food, cooking, raising children, caring for the elderly, maintaining a house, hauling water—is done by women (p. 1).” Misogyny is one of the catalysts for the escalating number of violent acts against women that must be confronted and challenged if this epidemic is to end.

Studies have shown that when women are victims of violence, society suffers from a loss of productivity and earnings and incurs medical and mental health expenses in the billions. But, change will not take hold until the mentality of men as rulers over women has been destroyed one man at a time.

The depth of this problem is apparent in news headlines: Four hundred women were abducted and/or killed in Juarez, Mexico over a ten year period. Eleven female corpses were removed from an ex-convict’s home in Cleveland, Ohio. A twenty-year-old Iraqi woman dies after being run down by her own father because she had become “too American.” These incidents confirm that even women in developed countries are at risk of coming face to face with violence.

When All the Women Are Gone: Femicide

“There is no country or region in the world where women are not in danger of being killed merely because they are women (Latin American and Caribbean Women’s Network, 2009).” On October 28, 2009, President Barak Obama signed into law the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act. This bill received praise from the gay community due to gender orientation being included as criteria for prosecution of a hate crime. Gender is

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also a criterion, meaning this bill could mark the beginning of stiffer penalties in crimes where women are killed as a result of violence perpetrated by men.

“Femicide—the murder of women—has different characteristics from murders of men and often involves sexual violence. Between 40 and 70 percent of female murder victims are killed by husbands or boyfriends in Australia, Canada, Israel, South Africa and the United States (United Nations, 2009).” The deliberate feminizing of homicide serves to call more attention to the loss of female lives to violence. Because the value of a woman’s life is low, many cultures have become desensitized to the murder of women. Societal and religious norms define the worth of a woman based on her success in conforming to the demands of the men who are the head of her life and how she carries herself in accordance with her community’s definition of womanhood.

Caputi and Russell (1992) expound on the definition of femicide, including a range of emotional and physical acts against women that may lead to death:

“Femicide is on the extreme end of a continuum of anti-female terror that includes a wide variety of verbal and physical abuse, such as rape, torture, sexual slavery, incestuous and extrafamilial child sexual abuse, physical and emotional battery, sexual harassment, genital mutilation, unnecessary gynecological operations, forced heterosexuality, forced sterilization, forced motherhood, psychosurgery, denial of food to women in some cultures, cosmetic surgery, and other mutilations in the name of beautification. Whenever these forms of terrorism result in death, they become femicides (p. 2).”

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What becomes apparent in studying the literature on violence against women and femicide specifically is that the traditional family dynamic, man, woman and children, has proven to be the most dangerous for women. The husband who believes he should control his wife's mind and body and uses physical force to do so, is a constant threat to his wife and, consequently, his children. "A femicide culture is one in which the male is worshipped. This worship is obtained through tyranny, subtle and overt, over our bruised minds, our battered and dead bodies, and our cooptation into supporting even batterers, rapists, and killers (Caputi and Russell, p. 7)."

The use of the term femicide is necessary to bring light to the sheer numbers of women who are being murdered so that those lost lives will not simply be lumped into the totals counted in a community. In an article for the *New York Press* about the rate of femicide in relation to the decreased overall homicide rate in the city, journalist Kimberly Thorpe quoted epidemiologist Victoria Frye, who stated "If the general homicide rate continues to go down and the intimate-partner femicides stay the same...pretty soon we're just going to have every murder be a woman killed by her partner."

Femicide is the ultimate proof of the terror that women live with on a daily basis. While it is obvious that the cause of the violence that so many women are subjected to are the men they sleep next to every night, it may not be as clear that the same men are the solution to this epidemic of violence.

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Stopping Violence against Women: Men are the Solution

Men Stopping Violence (MSV) is an organization founded in 1982 that works towards ending violence against women. The community-based approach focuses on changing the cultural view of men that perpetuates violence against women. MSV offers a number of programs that builds upon the re-framing of the patriarchal mindset that gives men permission to exact emotional and physical control over women.

“Men use violence to maintain their advantage in the most disadvantaged situations. The victimization of women is more a function of the status of males than of females (Hunnicut, 2009, p. 560).” MSV works with men to look at their role in continuing negative ideas about women in their homes and their communities. Our programs offer men a safe place to discuss abusive behavior and encourages non-batterers to get involved and act as a source of accountability, particularly for men who are identified as batterers.

“Learning about violence against women and its historical and cultural context invites individual men to shift the way they view the world and their place in it. They are taught that the use of coercion, dominance, and control in their relationships with women reflects their internalization of social norms that have been communicated to them through their day-to-day interactions within primary communities, microcommunities, and macrocommunities (Douglas, Bathrick, & Perry, 2008, p. 5).”

MSV offers multiple programs that help men re-frame their thinking about women at the individual level. We offer a six-month *Batters' Intervention Program (BIP)*. Half of the attendees in this program are court-ordered to complete a domestic violence class. Non-batterers

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are also included in this class, which allows for a dynamic mix of perspectives to be shared and challenged in a safe environment.

- *Because We Have Daughters*: Father-daughter guided activities that allow for open communication and encourage men to see the threats of the world through their daughters' eyes.
- *Community Education and Training*: Presentations about violence against women offered in the United States and internationally.
- *Community Restoration Project*: Graduates of the Batters' Intervention Program and men from the community continue the work of towards changing their attitudes about women and violence; offer support to one another; and participate in community events to further the cause of MSV.
- *The MSV Internship Program*: High school and college aged young men are paired with mentors and complete volunteer work that advances the goal of ending violence against women.
- *Parenting classes*: MSV teaches appropriate, non-violent parenting techniques for families that have struggled with issues of violence.
- *The Mentor Training Program (MTP)*: Male college students receive training to mentor at risk male high school students.

The purpose of these programs is to provide men with the support they need to change their compliance with the patriarchal ideology. Participants are encouraged to relinquish their claim of control over women, to listen to women, take them seriously, and to change the things that they

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as men are doing wrong in their relationships with women and girls (Bathrick and Kaufman, 2001, p.3).

Men Stopping Violence believes that violence against women can be stopped, one man at a time, with the guidance and community involvement that are the foundation of our programs. MSV plans to take our successful model to the global community to the worldwide patriarchal ideology. We will teach men that they can be heads of families and community leaders without controlling women and girls. Our services will assist men in re-framing their perception of women and to develop open and non-violent relationships with the opposite sex.

Men Stopping Violence is committed to ending the proliferation of violence against women and securing the place of women in the global community for generations to come.

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