

The Grammar of Male Violence

By Jennie Ruby

Our use of language in discussing violence works to disguise to the point of invisibility the perpetrators of most of the violence done in the world. One especially egregious and pervasive misuse of language is the focus on women as the victims and not on men as perpetrators. Crime reports are written in the passive voice, with no mention of the perpetrator. The result is that the gender of the victim is clearly stated but the gender of the perpetrator is completely hidden: “A woman was raped” rather than “A man raped a woman” or “A man raped someone” or even “An unknown male assailant raped a person...”

Mass statistics are reported in terms of numbers of female victims rather than numbers of male perpetrators. Because of the paucity of convictions of rape perpetrators (and can we reject the term “rapist,” which sounds kind of like “artist,” in favor of a more pejorative term?) we simply do not have the statistics on how many men are committing these crimes—we know only how many women have been victimized by them.

The focus on women as the victims of these crimes leaves us with no one but the women to deal with. So we tend to advise women how to avoid getting themselves raped instead of focusing on getting men to stop raping.

It is the same across the board with all male violence against women. The focus is on the women and the perpetrators are hidden, ignored, and not even mentioned.

What if we changed the way we talk about male violence toward women? What if we used the active voice with the male perpetrators in the active role? What if we named the gender of the perpetrator and left unmentioned the gender of the victim? What if we tried to estimate the numbers of perpetrators instead of toting up the numbers of victims?

What follows is a suggested re-write of an Amnesty International news release about violence against women, refocusing it as a news brief about violence committed by *men*.

Amnesty International Press Release—Revised

Violence Against Women Terrifyingly High—Amnesty
Fri Mar 5, 7:53 AM ET
By Jeremy Lovell

Men’s Violence Against Women Outrageously High Re-written by Jennie Ruby for *off our backs*

LONDON (Reuters) – From battlefields to backstreets and bedrooms, women across the world are being subjected to terrifying levels of abuse, human rights pressure group Amnesty International said on Friday. **From battlefields to backstreets and bedrooms, men across the world are subjecting women to terrifying levels of abuse, human rights pressure group Amnesty International said on Friday.**

“This is not something that just happens ‘over there.’ It happens here,” said Amnesty’s secretary general Irene Khan, launching a campaign to end violence against women.

“This is not something that just happens ‘over there.’ It happens here,” said Amnesty’s secretary general Irene Khan, launching a campaign to end violence by men.

“It is not something that only happens to other people. It happens to you, your friends and your family,” she added. “Until all of us, men as well as women, say ‘no, I will not let this happen’ it will not stop.”

“It is not something that only other people do. It is done by you, your friends, and your family,” she added. “Until all of us, men as well as women, say ‘no, I will not commit nor let the men in my life commit these crimes,’ they will not stop.”

In a report “It’s in our hands. Stop violence against women,” Amnesty said up to one billion women one in every three had been beaten, forced to have sex or otherwise abused, often by a friend or family member. **In a report “It’s in our hands. Stop men’s violence,” Amnesty said up to one billion men, one in every three, had beaten, forced sex upon, or otherwise**

abused a woman, often a friend or family member.*

~~In Zambia, five women a week were murdered by a male partner or family friend, while around the world one woman in five would suffer a rape or attempted rape at some point, and the practice had even become a weapon of war.~~

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“Armed conflict by men is having a devastating and desperate impact on women that goes far beyond the inherent violence of war,” Kahn said.

~~Each year two million girls between the ages of five and 15 were forced into prostitution and the traffic in women was worth up to \$7 billion a year, Amnesty said.~~

Each year men force two million girls between the ages of five and 15 into prostitution and men place a value of up to \$7 billion a year on the traffic in women, Amnesty said.

~~The problem was by no means confined to developing regions. In the United States, a woman was beaten by her husband or partner on average every 15 seconds and one was raped every 90 seconds, while in France 25,000 women were raped each year, the report said.~~

In the United States, a man beat his wife or partner on average every 15 seconds and a man committed rape every 90 seconds, while in France men committed 25,000 rapes each year, the report said.

~~But such was the stigma attached to rape victims — some of whom might later be murdered by a family member in so-called honor killings that the level of reporting was a fraction of the truth.~~

But men have made it so socially unacceptable for a woman to report that a man has raped her, even killing rape victims in so-called honor killings, that the level of reporting was a fraction of the truth.

~~“Behind closed doors and in secret, women are subjected to violence by their partners and close relatives, too ashamed and afraid to report it and so seldom taken seriously when they do,” Khan said.~~

“Behind closed doors and in secret, men subject

their female partners and close relatives to violence, and then shame the women and make them afraid to report it, and seldom take the women seriously when they do report it,” Khan said.

~~In sub-Saharan Africa, the epicenter of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, nearly 60 percent of infected people were women a rising trend exacerbated by the belief in some countries that raping a virgin would cure the perpetrator of the disease.~~

In sub-Saharan Africa, the epicenter of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, nearly 60 percent of infected people were women—most deliberately infected by men through rape, because many men there believe that raping a virgin would cure the man of the disease.

~~Worldwide more than 135 million girls and women had undergone female circumcision, and the number was rising at a rate of two million a year, Amnesty said.~~

Worldwide more than 135 million girls and women had been subjected to genital mutilation for the purpose of making them acceptable partners to men, and the number was rising at a rate of two million a year, Amnesty said.

~~“The effects of economic globalization are leaving more and more women trapped in poverty on the margins of society,” Khan said.~~

“The effects of male-dominated economic globalization are trapping more and more women in poverty on the margins of society,” Khan said.

~~“In this, as in so many other ways, governments are failing to address the real terror of our world that millions of women face every day,” she added, urging global action to end the abuse of women.~~

“In this, as in so many other ways, male-dominated and male-controlled governments are failing to address the real terror that millions of women face at the hands of men every day” she added, urging global action to end men’s violence. ♦

**Of course we don’t have the real statistic on this, because we count victims instead of perpetrators. But realistically, how many men is it that are committing all these beatings and abuses against women? Is it not a billion? Is it only seven hundred and fifty million men? Is it one in four men? One in seven?*

***Again, we don’t have the real statistic. Is it one man in six? One in ten?*