



# **SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN INTIMACY**

**IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND  
POLICY IN GLOBAL HEALTH**

Edited by  
M. Gabriela Torres and Kersti Yllö



# Sexual Violence in Intimacy

Integrating interdisciplinary and cross-cultural analysis, this volume advances our understanding of sexual violence in intimacy through the development of more nuanced and evidence-based conceptual frameworks.

Sexual violence in intimacy is a global pandemic that causes individual physical and emotional harm as well as wider social suffering. It is also legal and culturally condoned in much of the world. Bringing together international and interdisciplinary research, the book explores marital rape as individual suffering that is best understood in cultural and institutional context. Gendered narratives and large-scale surveys from India, Ghana and Africa Diasporas, Pacific Islands, Denmark, New Zealand, the United States, and beyond illuminate cross-cultural differences and commonalities. Methodological debates concerning etic and emic approaches and de-colonial challenges are addressed. Finally, a range of policy and intervention approaches—including art, state rhetoric, health care, and criminal justice—are explored.

This book provides much needed scholarship to guide policymakers, practitioners, and activists as well as for researchers studying gender-based violence, marriage, and kinship, and the legal and public health concerns of women globally. It will be relevant for upper-level students and scholars in anthropology, sociology, psychology, women's studies, social work, and public and global health.

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# 11 Prevalence and patterns of sexual violence in marriage in the Pacific Region

## Quantitative data in cross-cultural comparisons

*Henrica A.F.M. (Henriette) Jansen*

In this chapter, we will explore quantitative data from 11 Pacific Island countries that have conducted violence against women (VAW) prevalence surveys between 2000 and 2014. All the surveys examined here use the same methodology as developed for the World Health Organization Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women. The comparable way in which these studies were conducted and the way results are presented in the national reports, which are publicly available as gray literature, provides a unique opportunity to examine patterns of sexual violence in marriage in the culturally diverse Pacific region.<sup>1</sup>

The chapter starts with a short history of the collection of comparable quantitative data on violence against women across cultures and contexts worldwide, and, how recently the push for such data accelerated globally, to a large extent driven by the need for monitoring relevant indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals. We mention how since 2016 in the Asia-Pacific region, the kNOwVAW-data Initiative works to address the challenges of scarcity of VAW data and VAW data collection skills. To understand the context for the analysis in this chapter, we briefly describe the diverse Pacific subregions of Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, and provide some legal context related to domestic violence and marital rape in this region.

Quantitative data are compared between countries and subregions. We start with comparing levels of physical and/or sexual violence by intimate partners with women's experiences of such violence by people other than intimate partners; we do this to explore whether intimate partner violence (IPV) parallels the other experiences. Then, we investigate how sexual violence by intimate partners relates to and compares with physical violence by the same partner. We also explore the prevalence and patterns of specific acts of sexual violence and the number of times—in other words, the frequency—that women experience sexual violence by partners. Subsequently, we compare the attitudes women have toward sexual autonomy and whether a man is justified to beat his wife when she refuses

sex. Finally, we investigate associations between physical and/or sexual violence with injuries and mental health.

The comparisons consistently show that patterns of violence are strikingly different by subregion. This is an important finding that is not generally recognized or understood. Melanesian women experience high levels of gendered violence, reflected by high levels of sexual violence and marital rape, which is rooted in gender inequality and men's entitlement over women and their bodies. In contrast, Polynesian women experience relatively low levels of sexual violence in a context of high levels of physical violence. The physical violence in Polynesia seems to a large extent disciplinary in nature, in other words meant to educate a woman about "her place" and "acceptable behavior." In the Micronesian countries we see mixed patterns of violence and marital rape. We found that sexual violence amplifies the negative health outcomes associated with partner violence. This is relevant for context-specific interventions, especially since sexual violence is generally hidden.

The chapter concludes with a reflection on the challenges of only or mainly using quantitative data to understand sexual violence cross-culturally. We emphasize the importance of mixed methods and collaboration with disciplines that can deepen understanding, which is crucial for effective context-specific, evidence-based interventions.