

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the International Violence Against Women Act?

The International Violence Against Women Act (IVAWA) is a piece of legislation that was introduced in the 110th, 111th, 112th, 113th, and now in the 114th Congress that represents an unprecedented commitment by the United States Government (USG) to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls globally. IVAWA directs the USG to create and implement a comprehensive, multi-sectoral strategy (such as the current U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally, set to expire in summer 2015) to reduce violence around the world.

2. What do you mean by violence against women and girls?

As defined in the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally, gender-based violence is “violence that is directed at an individual based on his or her biological sex, gender identity, or perceived adherence to socially defined norms of masculinity and femininity. It includes physical, sexual, and psychological abuse; threats; coercion; arbitrary deprivation of liberty; and economic deprivation, whether occurring in public or private life.” This means that the violence could occur in the family (battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence), within the general community (rape, sexual abuse in school or at work, forced prostitution, female genital mutilation/cutting and other traditional practices harmful to women), or it could be perpetrated or condoned by state agents.

3. Is violence against women and girls a major problem?

Violence against women is a worldwide human rights violation and a public health epidemic that knows no cultural, national or ethnic boundaries. The World Health Organization estimates that an estimated one out of every three women in the world will be beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime. In some countries, close to 70 percent of women report experiencing violence. One billion women and girls are affected by such violence, including rape, domestic violence, acid burning, dowry deaths, so-called honor killings, human trafficking, female genital mutilation/cutting and other harmful practices. In times of conflict, mass rape is often used as a weapon of war.

4. How was the IVAWA created?

IVAWA was initiated in 2005 by a coalition of non-governmental organizations led by Amnesty International USA, Futures Without Violence and Women Thrive Worldwide to increase U.S. government efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls internationally. It is the result of extensive research on what works: it was drafted in consultation with more than 150 groups including U.S.-based NGOs and 40 women’s groups across the globe. In 2007 the coalition consulted with Vice President (then Senator) Joseph Biden (D-DE), Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN) and Representative Howard Berman (D-CA) who originally introduced the legislation in the 110th Congress.

5. How will passing this legislation help women?

Local women’s organizations who have been working for years to assist women and girls affected by violence in their countries will finally get the help their organizations need. Programmatic support and capacity building will focus on prevention, such as economic opportunity programs, education, and public campaigns to change attitudes and social norms, as well as response, such as training for law enforcement and judicial officials, and ensuring proper health care



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for women who have been abused. Women and girls globally will also benefit from increased U.S. and world diplomatic attention to the problem of violence against women and girls, making the issue move from an invisible private suffering to a public issue that governments work to solve.

6. What about men and boys?

IVAWA recognizes that men and boys experience violence too, therefore it utilizes the term “gender-based violence” throughout, to ensure that men and boys are in no way prevented from participating in programs and from receiving help or support they need. However, as women and girls overwhelmingly experience violence, the IVAWA recognizes the desperate inequality that is still experienced by most of the world’s women and girls and the violence that contributes to and results from that inequality. In much of the world, women and girls may still be raped and beaten with impunity and can be sold or given away to men. They can be killed for disobedience or appearing in public with a man who is not a relative or simply for being born a girl. Many cannot vote, own property or are allowed to have a job. It is this extreme level of violence and abuse women and girls experience simply because of their gender that the legislation seeks to address. Furthermore, the bill cites engaging men and boys as a key programmatic area to prevent gender-based violence. Men and boys should be seen as allies, as well as survivors, and not enemies.

7. How will IVAWA affect U.S. foreign policy?

U.S. diplomatic, development and foreign aid work will address this problem in a coordinated, efficient and integrated way. In August of 2012, President Barack Obama released the U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally via an Executive Order. The Strategy was largely modeled after the comprehensive approach outlined in IVAWA. IVAWA now seeks to make sure such a strategy remains in place, as the current strategy is set to expire this summer. IVAWA would guarantee the continuation of effective and efficient programming, accountability, as well as monitoring and evaluation of gender-based violence initiatives.

8. Isn't this the United States trying to impose its culture on other nations?

The IVAWA does not impose the cultural morals of the U.S. on other countries; rather, it seeks to support the work of local women and communities who have long been advocating for an end to violence and abuse experienced by women and girls. It recognizes that much of U.S. efforts to help countries address problems such as HIV and AIDS, maternal mortality, poverty, and conflict are aided by addressing gender-based violence. In fact, these other efforts will only be successful if concurrent efforts to support women’s wellbeing, education and empowerment are also taking place.

9. What is the difference between IVAWA and the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)?

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) is a domestic criminal justice and social services law that addresses violence against women within the United States. IVAWA is a piece of pending legislation to address violence against women and girls around the world by requiring that U.S. government agencies engaging in foreign assistance work overseas take steps in their programming to prevent and respond to gender-based violence and to be coordinated in these efforts. While both bills focus on preventing violence, supporting survivors and bringing perpetrators to justice, the way they go about achieving those aims are very different.

10. How is violence against women and girls related to human trafficking?

Trafficking of persons is a global human rights problem. Persons are trafficked into a range of forced labor situations including farm work, sweatshops, domestic servitude, and sexual exploitation. Violence against women and girls is one of the underlying causes that contribute to people’s vulnerability to being trafficked and many women face violence as they are trafficked. The United States already has legislation to address human trafficking, the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, which was passed in 2000 and has been reauthorized since then to combat all forms of human trafficking.