

From VOA Learning English, welcome to As It Is.

Hello, I'm Steve Ember. Thanks for joining us.

Activists and news reporters are questioning how media around the world report rape and other sexual abuse. The Oxford Journal of Public Health has called on world media to improve reporting on sexual violence against women. The magazine says the media too often concentrate on a few crimes -- and fail to make sense of the larger issue of sexual violence.

"We need to challenge those attitudes that, first, excuse violence by men and, secondly, disparage and denigrate women."

Rape – and other forms of sexual abuse – will be our focus on this edition of As It Is.

Media reports this year have told of many extreme sex attacks. In New Delhi, a group of men rape a young student on a bus. She later dies from her injuries. A teenage girl in South Africa is also gang raped. She also dies of her injuries. A Swiss woman is gang raped in front of her husband during a visit to India.

In the United States, young athletes abuse a girl who is unconscious and send out pictures of the sexual abuse on their mobile phones. And, most recently...

[Amanda Berry 911 emergency call]

Three missing women are rescued from a house in Cleveland, Ohio where they have been held and sexually abused for many years.

Women in public health and in media are calling for reporting that leads to social change. They are also calling for an end to reporting that blames the victim.

The United Nations says that women age 15 to 44 are “more at risk from rape and domestic violence than from cancer, car accidents, war and malaria.”

Janice Du Mont is a scientist at the Women’s College Research Institute in Toronto, Canada. She and Deborah White of Trent University wrote an editorial about rape for the Oxford Journal of Public Health. It is called *Sexual violence: what does it take for the world to care about women?*

Janice Du Mont says the media do not give a clear picture of the large numbers of rape that take place. She says western media often report on incidents in other places.

“Rape is not just India’s shame. It occurs everywhere, you know, regardless of culture or socio-economic status.”

She says the media seem interested in some rape cases, but not others.

“These are the more shocking cases. So cases in which women are gang raped or raped by more than one assailant. You know, these cases are not really representative of the full sort of realities of sexual assault, especially in non-conflict settings.”

Janice Du Mont says it is much more common for women to be attacked by someone they know, including husbands and other family members. She says these attacks harm society.

“I guess the point we would like to make is that these other more common forms of sexual assault that may not be deemed newsworthy have a huge toll on the individual and society as a whole. You know, have immediate and lingering effects. They result in a lot of pain and suffering, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections.”

Doctor Du Mont says rape victims may suffer from depression – continuing severe sadness -- or live in fear. They may leave school or even attempt suicide. In some cultures, the victim is forced to marry the attacker. Or she is killed in the name of family honor.

Janice Du Mont says any rape harms both rape survivors and their community. She says the problem is made worse by lack of information, false beliefs and blaming the victim.

“I think it’s these pervasive negative attitudes and stereotypes about women who are raped and rape, in general. And we need to challenge those attitudes, but also practices and policies that, first, excuse violence by men and, secondly, that disparage and denigrate women.”

The editorial in the Journal of Public Health also told about a report by a Nigerian writer, Amaka Okafor-Vanni in the Guardian newspaper. She criticized what she called a culture of rape in Nigeria. Miz Okafor-Vanni called for an end to social rules that demand modesty from women but

punish women when men fail to honor their modesty.

Experts Du Mont and White want others working in women's health care and public health to help reporters understand the whole story. Experts Du Mont and White want others working in women's health care and public health to help reporters understand the whole story of rape. They are calling for media reports that will explain the "psychological, physical, social and economic costs of all types of sexual violence."

"It is about exerting power and control over somebody else. It's not related to sex. It's related to abuse of power and control."

The Women's Media Center and the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health held an event this winter to educate reporters and public health students. Helen Benedict spoke at the event in New York. She also writes a blog for the Women's Media Center web site page called "Women Under Siege." She criticized media in the United States for failing to ask why men rape. She says reporters instead ask questions about the rape victim.

Reporter Mallery Jean Tenore sees differences in reporting on three main topics: the victims, the suspects and cultural beliefs about sexual attacks. Writing on the journalism website Poynter.org, she gives the example of Indian reporter Sameera Khan.

Ms. Khan writes that usually police make moral judgments about the victims and the Indian media simply repeat them. But she praised the reporting in the case of the young student in New Delhi. Ms. Khan says she thinks the

improved reporting came about because of the angry response of average people in India who wanted justice for the victim. She says the media reflected the feeling of the protesters.

Janice Du Mont says sexual attacks are underreported around the world. She says Canada's most recent survey is 20 years old. This month, the United States military reported a 35% increase in unreported sexual attacks since 2010.

President Obama immediately called for stronger enforcement to prevent abuse in the military. The report was released two days after police arrested the chief of the Air Force office that deals with preventing sexual attacks. He is accused of a sexual attack.

Rape has also become a weapon of war. A recent report by the International Rescue Committee says rape is a major and troubling feature of the Syrian civil war. The U-N says hundreds of thousands of women in the Democratic Republic of Congo have been victims of sexual violence.

And that's our program for today. Remember, for the latest world news, tune in at the top of the hour Universal Time on radio, or visit our web site. I'm Steve Ember. Thanks for joining us.