

One in four adolescent girls worldwide will experience physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner before reaching the age of 20, according to a new report by the World Health Organization (WHO). This equates to approximately 19 million young women enduring such violence.

The study, published in *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health* today, paints a disturbing picture of the extent of intimate partner violence (IPV) among this vulnerable population. The data reveals that the consequences of IPV can be devastating, impacting physical and mental health, education, and future relationships.

While the problem is global, the report highlights stark disparities between regions. Oceania and sub-Saharan Africa have the highest rates of IPV among adolescent girls, while countries in central Europe and central Asia report lower prevalence.

The study also found a strong correlation between poverty, lack of education, and harmful gender norms with increased risk of IPV. Early marriage was identified as a particularly significant risk factor, as it often creates power imbalances and isolates young girls.

Dr. Pascale Allotey, Director of WHO's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Research department, expressed deep concern over these findings. "Intimate partner violence is starting alarmingly early for millions of young women around the world," she said. "We must prioritize prevention and support services to address this urgent public health issue."

To effectively combat IPV, the WHO calls for comprehensive measures including prevention programs, support services for survivors, and policy changes that promote gender equality. By investing in education, challenging harmful gender norms, and protecting the rights of adolescent girls, it is possible to create a safer future for millions of young women.