

Ethiopia



Violence Against Women

Submitted by: The Advocates for Human Rights & United Oromo Voices

MECHANISM

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Summary: Gender-based violence remains prevalent in Ethiopia and is rarely investigated or prosecuted. The Government of Ethiopia restricts NGOs that work on human rights, including violence against women and girls. Women in detention are at a particularly high risk for gender-based violence and have reported rapes by prison guards and police. Media outlets have reported cases of acid attacks against women, however perpetrators continue to act with impunity.

The legal system fails to protect women and girls from gender-based violence.

- Violence against women is normalized in Ethiopia. After one woman accused the man who had just sexually assaulted her in public, people around her criticized her in “astonishment for making a scene.”
- Ethiopia’s Constitution criminalizes rape, but the legal penalty is rarely enforced. Sexual harassment also remains prevalent and is rarely prosecuted. Martial rape is not criminalized.
- Media outlets have reported on several instances of acid attacks directed at women. Men taunt women verbally and threaten them with acid attacks when women reject their advances. Lenient and rarely enforced penalties allow men to continue these attacks and threats of attacks.
- Domestic violence against women and girls is widespread. With no comprehensive law against domestic violence, law enforcement rarely investigates or prosecutes reports of domestic violence.

Women in detention are at a heightened risk of gender-based violence.

- There is no transparent, independent mechanism to monitor the conditions for women in detention or human rights violations against women in detention. Additionally, the government has not published any publicly available data on numbers of detained women, reason for arrest and detention, or the average time women are held in prison.
- Detention centers lack adequate sanitary and medical facilities. They are also often overcrowded, with women and men often held together.
- There are many accounts of gender-based violence in detention, particularly torture and rape. During the 2016-2017 State of Emergency in Jail Ogaden, women reported being taken from their cells in the night, then repeatedly raped by prison guards and police. Currently, there are no mechanisms to report, investigate, or prosecute the rape and torture of women in prison.

Women and girls face abuse and discrimination in education and employment.

- Women and girls are often prevented from accessing education because they are expected to perform domestic duties.
- Women and girls who do attend school report widespread harassment and abuse in educational institutions. One client of The Advocates reported that when she rejected persistent comments and advances made by her high school principal, he sexually assaulted her and attempted to strangle her. She transferred schools, but her former principal stalked her and threatened her with a gun while she was walking home one evening.
- Women face frequent sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination in the workplace. A 2009 study of faculty and staff members at a university in Awassa, Ethiopia found that 86.3% of female-identifying respondents reported experiencing sexual abuse or harassment in the workplace within the previous year. Women are also frequently mocked and called names in professional settings.
- Discrimination is common for women who do not follow traditional gender roles. Assertive women can face discrimination both in the workplace and in the wider community.

The government of Ethiopia restricts freedom of expression and association.

- The 2009 Anti-Terrorism Proclamation (ATP) gives the government the authority to arrest perceived dissidents, including journalists and activists. Women associated with various NGOs have been arrested under the ATP.
- The 2009 Charities and Societies Proclamation (CSP) restricts NGOs that work on legal or human rights issues, including violence against women and children. Authorities have used the CSP to target activists.
- The Advocates has had several female clients who have been arrested or detained for their political views without due process and formal legal charges.

Recommendations

- Develop and enforce comprehensive laws addressing all forms of gender-based violence, increasing penalties for domestic violence, acid attacks, gang rape, and marital rape, with functioning oversight and accountability mechanisms.
- Implement programs raising public awareness about all forms of gender-based violence against women.
- Train legal and health service providers on best practices for supporting victims and survivors of gender-based violence.
- Investigate and prosecute past allegation of gender-based violence.
- Encourage the inclusion and participation of women in non-governmental organizations and civil society by committing financial resources to initiatives that raise awareness about women's rights and providing assistance for victims of gender-based violence.