

Domestic violence in Japan

1. The situation

To date, there has been little social comprehension of violence against women in Japan and the problem has therefore remained invisible, sometimes being trivialized as an individual problem. However, violence against women is a social issue that

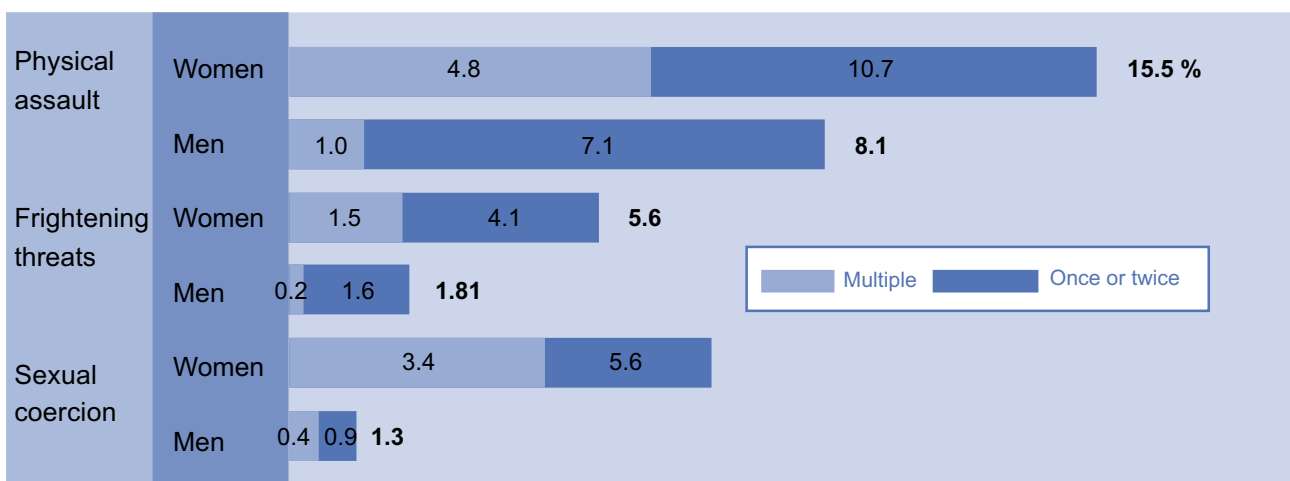
One in every 20 women surveyed felt her life was in danger due to violence from her spouse or boyfriend.

should be apprehended and tackled as a structural problem rooted in the circumstances into which women and men are placed by society, such as hierarchical relations, disparities in economic power, and a fixed division of roles.

Statistics

According to the Cabinet Office's *Survey on Domestic Violence (2002)*, 15.5 percent of women have suffered physical assault from their spouse or boyfriend, 5.6 percent have suffered frightening threats from their spouse or boyfriend, and 9 percent have suffered sexual coercion from their spouse or boyfriend in their lifetime. In total, almost one out of five (19.1 percent of) women has experienced one or more of these types of violence.

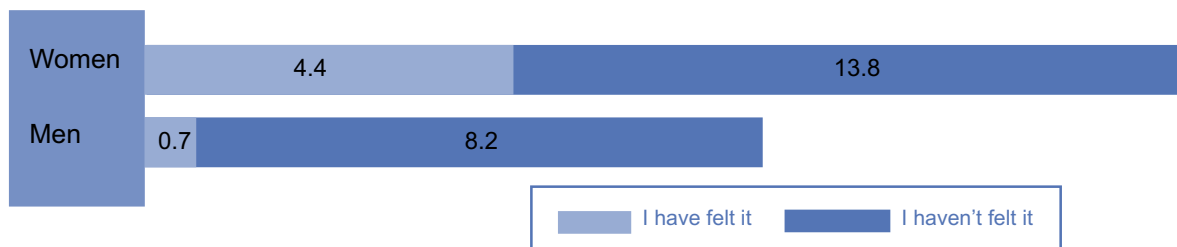
Chart 1: Experience of domestic violence



From Cabinet Office *Survey on domestic Violence (2002)*.

According to this survey, 4.4 percent of female respondents “felt their lives were in danger” due to violence from their spouse or boyfriend. This means one of every twenty women suffers severe domestic violence.

Chart 2: Life-threatening violence



2. Existing policies and law

Policies

One policy established to protect women from violence is the creation of the Specialist Committee on Violence Against Women. This committee, under the Council for Gender Equality, conducts studies on possible future measures, taking into consideration such fields as spousal violence, sexual crimes, prostitution, sexual harassment, and stalking behavior. The committee has submitted reports to the Council for Gender Equality on 3 October 2001 and 2 April 2002.

Japan's law on domestic violence was enacted in April 2001.

Law

The Law for the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims was enacted in April 2001. This is the first such law in Japan. It stipulates the function of Spousal Violence Counseling and Support Centers, which provide victims with consultations, counseling, temporary protection, and information. The Law also has provisions for protection orders to be issued by the court against the perpetrator on the petition of the victim. Two types of protection orders can be provided: the Order to Prohibit Approach, which prohibits the spouse from approaching the victim for a six-month period, and the Order to Vacate, which requires the spouse to vacate the domicile that the spouse shares as the main home with the victim for a two-week period. Individuals who violate these protection orders are subject to imprisonment with labor of up to one year or a fine of not more than 1 million yen.

3. Current status of the Domestic Violence Act

The Research Committee on Society for a Cooperative Way of Life of the House of Councilors drew up a bill for the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims. The bill was enacted in April 2001 and took effect in October of the same year. A total of 50,496 people visited Spousal Violence Counseling and Support Centers from April 2002 to the end of July 2003, and 1,571 protection orders were issued by the court from October 2001 to the end of March 2003.

(The law-making process in Japan is shown in the chart on the next page.)



4. Availability of services

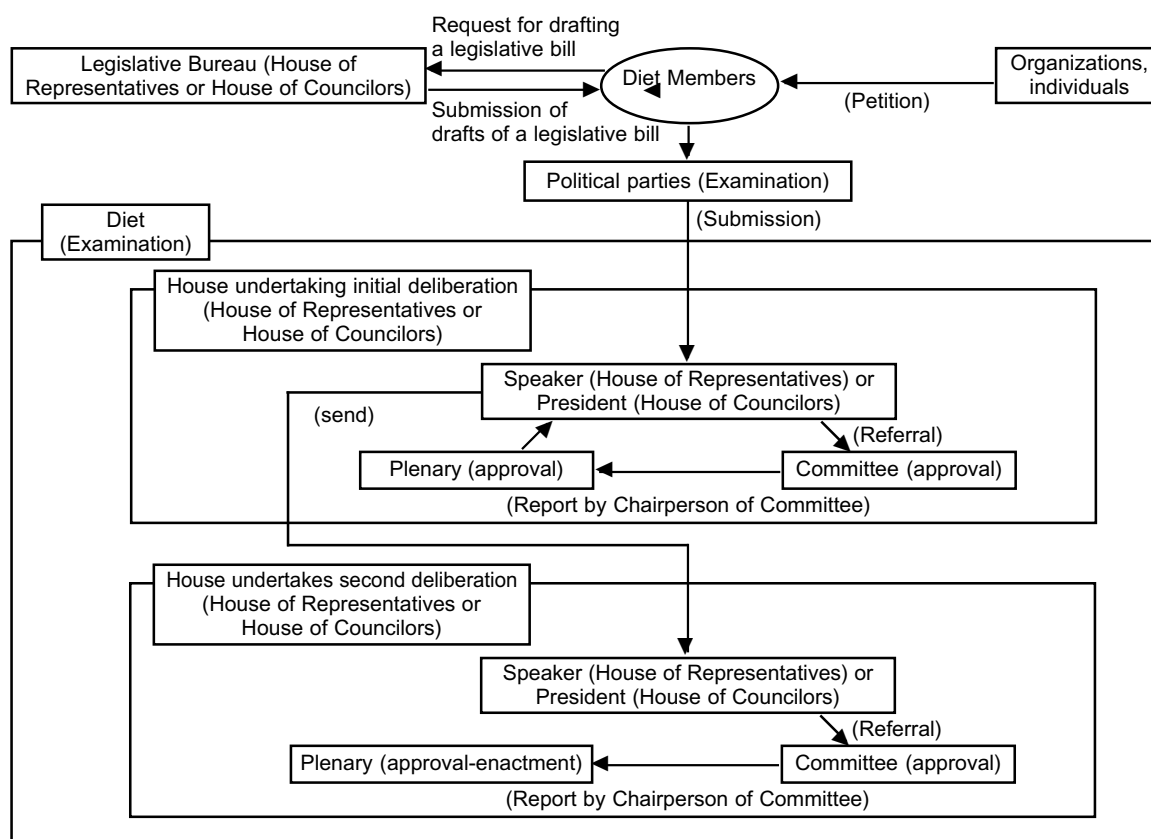
• Spousal Violence Counseling and Support Centers

In April 2002, all prefectural governments started to provide spousal violence counseling and support services at women’s counseling offices and other facilities. Currently, 103 facilities are providing counseling services, temporarily protecting spousal violence victims, and providing related information. All of the operational costs of these centers are provided at public expense.

• The website of the Cabinet Office

The Cabinet Office has been collecting information on laws, schemes, and facilities that would support victims of spousal violence, and it has also been providing related information on its website (www.gender.go.jp/e-vaw/index.htm) since April 2002.

The law-making process in Japan (legislative bills introduced by Diet members)



5. Activities of the EVAW network

- **Conducting the Movement to Eliminate Violence Against Women**

Recognizing that violence from husbands or partners, sexual crimes, prostitution, sexual harassment, and stalking behavior are grave violations of women's human rights, it was decided that, every year, the two weeks from 12-25 November, the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, are designated as the period for the Movement to Eliminate Violence Against Women.



This movement aims to further strengthen the measures to combat violence against women, including social awareness-raising activities, conducted in cooperation and collaboration with local governments, women's groups, and other related organizations. The movement is also aimed at increasing awareness and improving education for the respect of women's human rights. The Headquarters for the Promotion of Gender Equality makes efforts to promote education, including making use of mass media such as newspapers and radio, including a symbol for elimination of violence against women created in 2002 (*above, right*). Other actions include:

- **Enacting the Law for the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims**
- **Establishing Spousal Violence Counseling and Support Centers in all prefectures**
- **Establishing the Specialist Committee on Violence Against Women**
- **Establishing the Special Committee of Managers from Ministries and Agencies Concerned Relating to Violence Against Women**

In August 2000, the Special Committee of Managers from Ministries and Agencies Concerned Relating to Violence Against Women was established under the Headquarters for the Promotion of Gender Equality. Through close cooperation among relevant administrative organs, this committee intends to actively advance measures relating to violence against women.

6. Japan's needs and recommendations for the future

The Specialist Committee on Violence Against Women of the Council for Gender Equality compiled a report entitled Regarding the Enforcement Situation of the Law for the Prevention of Spousal Violence and the Protection of Victims, Etc. in June 2002. The committee argued for a re-examination of the law, including an extension of the object of the protection order to ex-spouses and an extension of the period of 'Orders to Vacate' to one month.