Joint Programme: Viet Nam Joint Programme on Gender Equality

Thematic Window: Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment

1. Introduction

On 25 November 2010, on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, the results of the first ever National Study on Domestic Violence against Women in Viet Nam were released at an event in Ha Noi. The dissemination of its findings has contributed to raise awareness on the extent of domestic violence in the country and presented evidences to policy makers and civil society actors to design and implement evidence-based policies and interventions to prevent and address domestic violence against women. The Viet Nam Government plans to carry out a new study in 2015 to assess the progress made since 2010 to eliminate domestic violence. Although the Viet Nam Joint Programme on Gender Equality adopted a holistic strategy to promote the rights of women, the present report concentrates on the methods and results of the national survey.

The study found that 34 per cent of ever-married women reported that they had suffered physical or sexual violence from their husbands at some time in their lives. Ever-married women who were experiencing either of these two types of violence amounted to nine per cent at the time of the survey. When all three main types of partner violence—physical, sexual and emotional—were considered, more than half (58 per cent) of Vietnamese women reported experiencing at least one type of domestic violence in their lifetime. The study findings also show that women are three times more likely to be abused by their husband than by any other person.

2. Initial Situation

Viet Nam’s commitment with gender equality is evident in its efforts to improve the national legal and policy frameworks to advance women’s rights and end violence against women. Domestic violence was, for the first time, officially recognized as an obstacle to national development in the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy approved in 2002. In 2006, the Law on Gender Equality was passed. It was followed by passage in 2007 of the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control.

However, despite important legislative advances, there is a gap between the theory and the practical implementation at all levels. Major contributing factors include domestic violence being considered a private family matter, in which society should not interfere, violence being accepted as normal behaviour, and limited knowledge about domestic violence among both the population and the duty bearers. Before 2010, there was also a lack of reliable data on this issue. While some small-scale quantitative and qualitative studies had been undertaken before, available data was not nationally representative and the actual extent of the problem was not fully known. With limited data on and understanding of domestic violence, there had been insufficient response to address gender-based violence in Viet Nam.

There was, therefore, a real need for more sound evidence for policy advocacy and design, as well
as for baseline data against which the impact of the Law on Domestic Violence could be measured. Specific and in-depth research was identified as a priority to learn more about the prevalence, causes and consequences of domestic violence in the country.

There was also a need to promote collaboration among different institutions responsible for addressing domestic violence. While the state management agency for the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control is the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, a number of other ministries and government agencies have also important roles to play, including the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Public Security and the General Statistics Office. However, information exchange and collaboration among different agencies were limited.

In this context, the National Study on Domestic Violence against Women in Viet Nam was implemented in 2009-2010, within the frame of the United Nations-Government of Viet Nam Joint Programme on Gender Equality.

3. Objectives

The 2010 National Study on Domestic Violence against Women in Viet Nam aimed to contribute to the elimination of domestic violence in Viet Nam, by ensuring availability of regularly generated data to be used as a basis for formulating and implementing interventions to prevent and respond to violence against women and for monitoring and evaluating progress.

The objectives of the study were to:

- Estimate the prevalence, frequencies and forms of violence against women;
- Assess the extent to which domestic violence against women is associated with a range of health and other outcomes;
- Identify the factors that may either protect or put women at risk of domestic violence; and
- Document and compare the strategies and services that women use to deal with domestic violence, perceptions about domestic violence against women and how much women know about their legal rights.

The study also had the following indirect objectives:

- Improve understanding about violence against women in Viet Nam;
- Increase national capacity and collaboration among researchers and women’s and other civil society organizations working on domestic violence;
- Increase awareness about and sensitivity to domestic violence among researchers, policy makers and health care providers; and
- Contribute to the establishment of a network of people committed to address domestic violence.

4. Key Actors

The General Statistics Office (GSO) was responsible for the overall management of the survey and the implementation of the fieldwork. The GSO was considered the key institution, due to its extensive experience in data collection and analysis, its nationwide network of local statistical offices and the capacity to mobilize field workers.

The World Health Organization (WHO) was responsible for providing technical assistance and for the overall coordination of the study.

The Sub-Working Group on Gender-Based Violence integrated experts from the United Nations agencies participating in the Joint Programme: UNFPA, WHO, ILO, UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women, FAO, IOM, UNESCO, UNIDO, UNODC and UNAIDS. This Group was used to discuss the substantial contents of the study, such as the questionnaire, training materials and the list of stakeholders to be involved.

The National Survey Steering Committee was established in mid-2009 to take the overall responsibility for the implementation of the survey fieldwork. The Vice General Director of the GSO led the Committee. Members included high-level representatives from the GSO, the Ministry of Health (MOH), the Gender
Equality Department from the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MOCST).

The research team consisted of seven core members, including two experts from the GSO, one expert from MOH, two national consultants, one international consultant and one staff member from WHO Viet Nam. This diversity brought different views into the study and ensured technical soundness. National and international NGOs, the academia, mass organizations and bilateral cooperation were also involved.

5. Strategy

The process around the elaboration and dissemination of the Study consisted of the following steps:

1. Data collection
2. Report writing
3. Dissemination of results
4. Feedback from field workers

STEP 1: DATA COLLECTION

The research included a quantitative component (a population-based survey) and a qualitative one (in-depth interviews and focus group discussions).

Quantitative component

The quantitative component followed the methodology developed for the WHO Multi-country Study on Women’s Health and Domestic Violence, with a few modifications in terms of the sample and the questionnaire. From December 2009 to February 2010, a nationally representative sample of 4,838 women of 18-60 years old women was interviewed throughout the country. The response rate of the survey was 78.2 per cent. The refusal rate was low compared with other surveys carried out in Viet Nam, with only 1.6 per cent refusing to participate.

Preparation of the questionnaire and other survey tools

The process of adapting the WHO Multi-country Study survey questionnaire Version 10 to the Viet Nam context involved many stakeholders from different technical backgrounds who had interest in the survey. There were numerous requests to include additional questions to collect data on other issues, such as child abuse and HIV/AIDS. After long negotiations, the final contents of the questionnaire were decided, taking into consideration the following factors:

- Safety of respondents;
- Focus: adding many questions on different topics may weaken the focus of the study;
- Resources: more questions means longer time to complete one questionnaire and, therefore, more working hours to complete the field data collection; and
- Ethical considerations involved in adding questions on specific topics.

The adapted questionnaire was pre-field tested in Ha Noi and Tien Giang. Respondents were asked to answer questions, as well as to provide feedback on the clarity and acceptability of the questions and the way in which the questionnaire was delivered.

LESSONS LEARNED AND CHALLENGES

It is not advisable to include various topics in efforts to capture a lot of information, since each topic requires specific steps, questions and set-up to collect reliable data. It may appear feasible and appropriate to include some topics (e.g. questions on child abuse). However, new topics can create a new set of issues, which may not be appropriately addressed (e.g. what an interviewer should do when a case of child abuse is disclosed during the interview).

Selection and training of field workers

Field workers were selected from among women aged 30-60. Previous experience in survey work was required, so the field workers were selected from the staff from Provincial Statistics Offices.
(75 women) and the GSO (seven women). Important skills sought were the ability to interact with all classes of people, a nonjudgmental attitude, maturity and life experience, good interpersonal skills to build a rapport with the respondent and experience in dealing with sensitive issues.

Selected field workers were trained during two weeks in November 2010. Data entry designers also attended the training, so that an appropriate data entry system could be developed. All staff signed a confidentiality agreement on the final day of training as part of their work contract.

Since interviewers already had survey experience, it was possible to develop a shorter two-week training curriculum based on the standardized programme from WHO, which is normally three weeks. Two days were dedicated to gender sensitization, followed by training in interview techniques, discussion of the questionnaire and role-playing. One day in the second week was dedicated to practice in the field (pilot study). The site for the pilot was selected to represent an average site in Vietnam. Seventy-eight women completed the pilot interview. The answers were analyzed and the data for key indicators, such as rate of women who suffered from different types of violence, was generated.

LESSONS LEARNED AND CHALLENGES

• Many field workers expressed that they did not have enough training on how to handle difficult situations, especially when interviewing survivors of domestic violence, and they had been left with feeling of regret for not being able to provide greater support. Training should better prepare the field workers to know what they could do and could not do when interviewing domestic violence survivors. Knowledge of referral services is essential, and should be standard practice.

• Although the percentage is not known, some interviews with women with disabilities were discontinued when the field workers felt that they were not adequately equipped to continue. However, women with disabilities should not be excluded. Special considerations and resources are required to ensure that women with disabilities are not excluded from the survey.

• It is critical to recruit more field workers than the exact number required in the actual survey. The Vietnam experience recommends 20 per cent more field workers to be trained and be available than the number required to carry out the field work.

• It is advisable to have a large enough sample size when carrying out a pilot test, since results from the pilot may act as a reference point for data checking. In the case of Vietnam, the key indicators (e.g., rates of physical, emotional and sexual violence) showed similar rates, both in the pilot test and in the national survey. Therefore, when rates from a certain site were very different from those of the pilot site, the survey team was able to ask questions for quality assurance (e.g., were the questionnaires completed appropriately?) and for potential need for further investigation in the qualitative component (e.g., what are possible reasons for certain areas to have much lower/higher rates of violence?).

Conducting field data collection

Fieldwork was conducted between December 2009 and early February 2010, with 4,838 women interviewed. To prevent burnout, gender violence studies recommend a maximum of 100 interviews per interviewer. Further, experience from other studies has shown that it is advisable to finish one cluster in one day, so that safety and confidentiality are not compromised. As each interviewer was expected to conduct three interviews in one day, and since each cluster consisted of 12 households, it was decided to organize teams of five members, with three interviewers, one team leader and one field editor. For the fieldwork to be completed in two months, 14 field teams were formed. Team leaders were responsible for overseeing all activities of the team in each cluster. Field editors ensured that questionnaires were completed and correctly filled out, and interviewers conducted the face-to-face interviews.

Because of the sensitivity of the subject, the Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on
Domestic Violence with Women\textsuperscript{17} were strictly applied. One example is the name assigned to the field survey. To avoid jeopardizing interviewees and interviewers, pre-judgment among the interviewees and potential interventions to prevent disclosure of information, the survey did not use the word “violence.” Instead, “National Study on Women’s Health and Life Experience” was used as the safe name. This was the title used to inform the Provincial Statistics Offices and to ask for their support to send invitations to potential participants and arrange for the interviews.

As recommended in the WHO guidelines, women were not interviewed in their homes but received a letter of invitation in advance and were interviewed in a central neutral location, usually the commune centre. This modification was decided on due to the common living style in Viet Nam, where many generations live together, which may not be ideal to maintain privacy and safety during interviews. Although the interviews were conducted in one room with three to four women being interviewed at a time, allowing sufficient space between tables and chairs preserved privacy.

At the end of the interview, which usually took around 85 minutes, the interviewed women were given a pocket-sized booklet containing general information on domestic violence and available services for survivors. These materials were mixed with leaflets on other general health issues, so that whoever viewed the materials did not identify the real purpose of the survey (domestic violence). The aim was to avoid any potential violence against the interviewed women by her partner or husband after participating in the survey.

At the end of the interview, women were asked how they felt, better, the same or worse compared with before the interview. Eighty per cent of interviewed women reported feeling better. What is striking is that women who experienced violence by partners were more likely to feel better than those who did not experience violence, even more for women who had suffered more severe levels of violence. Among those who reported both physical and sexual violence, almost 90 per cent stated they felt better after the interview.

LESSONS LEARNED AND CHALLENGES

- Due to the sensitive nature of the survey, the guidelines on ethical and safety considerations must be applied strictly in all actions. Appropriate words (e.g. avoid the word “violence”) should be decided and used in all the official documents and communications.

- Field workers sometimes expressed feelings of depression after interviewing women suffering from domestic violence. In these cases, other team members provided support to comfort each other. However, it would be more helpful to have additional support systems during and after the field data collection.

- Good cooperation among the survey teams, the Provincial Statistical Offices and communal offices is the key for the smooth operation of the fieldwork. To establish a good relationship, all relevant offices need to be aware of the survey plan in advance.

Processing and analyzing data

A central data entry system was created in the Census and Survey Processing System (CSPRO 2.5), with an extensive error check programme. All data were double entered to minimize data entry errors. Dummy tables, a data dictionary and analysis syntax in Data Analysis and Statistical Software (STATA) were adapted and created for conducting data analysis. Weighting was done to correct for the effect of sampling. Univariate, exploratory and descriptive analyses of the results from the questionnaires were performed.

Qualitative component

After completion of the quantitative component, the qualitative research was carried out in April 2010. It sought to contextualize the violence and to provide a better understanding of perceptions about the violence by community members and authorities,

perceived causes of violence, risk factors, how violence escalates, consequences of violence and how family members, neighbors and other people may intervene in cases of violence.

Selecting participants, sites and research tools. Based on the above-mentioned specific objectives, the following target groups were identified:

- Women survivors of violence;
- Village leaders, chairs and vice-chair of the Communist Party, police officers, officers from the Women’s Union and a Health Care Provider at the local level;
- Women from the community; and
- Men from the community.

The selection of women suffering from domestic violence was thoroughly discussed. After analysing different options, it was decided to select and contact women participating in projects on domestic violence or receiving services. The option of going back to the quantitative component to identify the respondents suffering from domestic violence was also discussed, but not selected, for ethical reasons and to maintain confidentiality of the study.

In terms of sites, it was decided to select communes not targeted in the quantitative component, so that the safety of the women who participated in the quantitative interviews was not jeopardized. Three provinces, representing northern, central and southern Vietnam, were finally selected.

The research tools (e.g. guidelines for interviewing women suffering from domestic violence, guidelines for men in community, etc.) were tested by completing five interviews with women suffering from domestic violence, interviews with one man and one local leader and two focus group discussions (one with women and one with men). Based on the results and feedback from the pilot test, the questions and guidelines were fine-tuned and finalized.

Conducting field data collection and analysing data. The field data collection was conducted during March-April 2010 by three teams composed, each of them, of four senior researchers and one assistant researcher who had undergone specialized training. To ensure homogeneity in the application of the guidelines, all researchers attended a one-day preparation workshop.

In total, five women survivors, five key informants (a staff member from the Women’s Union, a health care provider, a policy officer, a village leader, a chair and vice-chair of the Communist Party), ten women and ten men per province, underwent in-depth interviews. Two focus group discussions for women and two for men were also conducted in each province.

**STEP 2: REPORT WRITING**

Upon completion of the field data collection and the subsequent data processing, the research team gathered in a five-day intensive writing workshop, where they could focus on report writing without any distractions from daily work. At the end of the workshop, a first draft of the report had been produced.

**STEP 3: DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS**

Since domestic violence is a sensitive topic, it had been envisaged that a sudden release of the results might provoke unfavorable reactions by some of the key stakeholders, particularly policy makers. Therefore, the process of findings dissemination was carefully planned and implemented involving the key stakeholders and promoting a shared understanding on the study. The key steps included:

- Finalization of the draft report by incorporating inputs from the key colleagues involved;
- Consultation meeting with the key stakeholders;
- Pre-launch meeting to present the study; and
- Official launch of the study report.

**Finalization of the draft report**

Copies of the draft report were distributed to the technical advisory members for review, prior to the closed consultative meeting. The copies were treated as strictly confidential and were sealed and hand-delivered to reviewers, to prevent information leakage and to assure confidentiality of the findings.
Reviewers were those who were closely involved in this study and who would be responsible to support the dissemination, communication and utilization of the data after the official launch. Reviewers were asked to provide feedback and raise questions regarding the study and its findings prior to the public view. This provided an opportunity for reviewers to discuss and anticipate issues that might arise during the release of the findings.

**Consultation with the key stakeholders**

The first consultation workshop took place on 24 June 2010. It had a twofold objective: to collect comments to improve the draft report and to develop strategies to communicate the results in an effective way, by anticipating concerns and questions from the public. The participants were technical experts, including representatives from the GSO, key line Ministries, the Viet Nam Women’s Union, national NGOs, academic institutions and the UN.

The consultation workshop highlighted some issues that needed to be addressed before the official launch:

- Some participants did not have a comprehensive understanding of the survey methodology, and thus questioned the methodology as well as the credibility of the data.
- There were questions related to the sampling technique and sample size, questioning the national representativeness of the findings.
- Some participants were concerned that this study excluded men from the picture.
- There were some interests to see data from similar surveys conducted in other countries.
- There was a call for relevant agencies to be present at the launch, in an attempt to address questions related to mechanisms and services in place to respond to domestic violence.

**Pre-launch meeting**

Prior to the official launch of the study, a half-day pre-launch meeting was organized to explain the study objectives, scope and methodology, present the findings and discuss and clarify any issues necessary for endorsing the findings. The meeting was co-chaired by the Deputy General Director of the GSO. The participants were representatives, directors of departments, decision makers and technical experts from key Ministries. The participants shared their comments and endorsed the report for the official launch.

**Lessons learned and challenges**

It is important to obtain support from the leadership and management of the relevant ministries and institutions prior to the official launch, by clearly explaining the study methodology and the findings.

**Launch of the report**

The report *Keeping Silent is Dying: Results from the National Study on Domestic Violence against Women in Viet Nam* was officially launched on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, 25 November 2010, in Ha Noi. More than 200 colleagues participated, representing government institutions, national and international NGOs, academic institutions, mass organizations, media, donors and UN agencies.

Presentations were made on the methodologies and scope for the quantitative and qualitative components, the key findings and recommendations for further research, followed by a questions and answers session. The agenda included presentations by the key duty bearers, such as the MOCST, to support the key findings and to share their view in responding to domestic violence. The launch also included a media briefing session. With support from the One UN Communications Team, the launch was featured in many media outlets, including newspaper, online news and TV.

**Lessons learned and challenges**

- It was essential to count on the representation and interventions of the key line ministries, such as the GSO and MOCST. This showed the ownership of the data by the government of
Viet Nam, meaning that the findings were credible and could be used for further work on prevention and response to domestic violence.

- It is fundamental to provide clear explanations on the study methodology to prove credibility of the results. There were many interventions from the public saying that the results may be high due to the study methodology, but the research team was able to present a strong case for the methodology.

- It is necessary to arrange a separate briefing and Q&A session specifically for media, so that they can receive comprehensive and accurate information to use in their articles, even if they do not stay for the whole event.

- For wider dissemination of the findings, the launch at the central level may be followed by launches in other major cities and provinces of the country.

- The launch does not mark the end of the communication and advocacy. A strategy is needed to continuously disseminate and communicate the study findings to various stakeholders. It is important to continue addressing the questions of the data use, influence on policies and programmes, to what extent the recommendations were realized and how to sensitize policy-makers and the general public about the consequences of the violence to the family, the society and the country.

**STEP 4: FEEDBACK FROM THE FIELD WORKERS**

Immediately upon completion of the fieldwork, it was decided to acknowledge the contribution of the field workers and to seek their feedback to learn to what extent the training had been useful and how they addressed difficult situations, as well as to identify possible areas for improvement. An appreciation letter and a feedback questionnaire were sent to all field workers. In total, 45 questionnaires were returned.

Overall, the feedback showed that the training had been useful in terms of providing sufficient knowledge on domestic violence, asking questions in ways that were easily understood by respondents, completing the questionnaire, keeping confidentiality and addressing unexpected interference. The field workers also expressed that the field data collection had proceeded well in terms of ensuring safety of respondents and field workers and emotional well-being of field workers. Logistical preparation and support was highly appreciated. The feedback indicated that the study also had some impacts on the field workers in terms of their level of awareness and understanding of domestic violence issues.

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"Participating in the survey was an important change for me. From conducting the survey, I realized that domestic violence was a big issue for women."

"I realized that all cases of emotional violence are extremely painful, though they do not leave visible injury or marks on a body, like physical violence does. A pain in one's heart is no less serious."
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The feedback also identified areas for improvements, especially the need to better prepare the field workers for dealing with depressing feelings after interviewing a woman suffering from domestic violence:

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"I had an interview with a female teacher who told me that she had a harsh life and her teardrops kept falling down on her face and soon we began our conservation. The interview ended late but successfully. That night I could not sleep. In my mind, I still remembered the image of the woman who suffered from physical violence. Her husband even offended her dignity and spiritual well-being."
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6. Progress and Results

The National Study on Domestic Violence against Women in Viet Nam filled the data gap on the issue of domestic violence against women in Viet Nam. Its findings are being used to:

- **Present concrete evidence to policy makers** and development practitioners to develop and implement evidence-based policies, programmes and interventions to address violence against women.

- **Measure progress.** Data collected in the survey can be used as a baseline to measure changes brought about by policies, programmes and interventions addressing violence against women. The General Statistics Office plans to repeat the study again in 2015, with the aim of assessing progress made to eliminate domestic violence since 2010.

- **Increase awareness of domestic violence.** The findings from the study were used when developing key messages and communication materials for further awareness among general public. With advocacy backed up by evidence, there has been increased attention to domestic violence by parliamentarians, communist party members, and leaders of relevant ministries and local authorities. In all advocacy events, leaders of the key government agencies played an active role, such as a co-chair, to enhance the advocacy efforts. Gender-based violence, which was absent from the past gender strategy, is now one of the priorities in the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2011-2020 (Objective 6) and the National Programme on Gender Equality 2011-2015 (Project 4).

- **Further knowledge of different gender violence issues.** The study has led to the initiation of additional research utilizing raw data from the survey, e.g. domestic violence and HIV/AIDS, by UNAIDS, and the cost of domestic violence, by UN Women and UNFPA.

Officials involved in the implementation of the study have increased their knowledge and strengthened their capacity to carry out surveys on domestic violence, so that they are expected to play an important role in conducting the foreseen 2015 study.

The high credibility of the study is due to the fact that the preparation, implementation and dissemination of the results were all done with the involvement of key officials from the relevant ministries and institutions. This was possible as the Programme brought various institutions to work together and regularly share information. Prior to the Programme, information exchange and collaboration among different institutions was limited, and research findings produced by one were often not fully utilized by others, as there was a lack of ownership.

In addition, the study had a significant **impact on those who were directly involved**, such as the interviewers and the respondents. Domestic violence is a sensitive topic, usually unspoken. Going through the questionnaire, the respondents gradually became aware of the issue of domestic violence, and received information on where to seek help in case of need. For most of those women suffering from violence, the interview was the first occasion to talk about their experience. Many of them expressed that they felt valued and thankful for being heard and that participating in the survey had changed their awareness:

> I feel a lot better having talked with you. I could not figure out why I told you all these secrets of my life that even my mother is not aware of. I thank you very much for listening to my unhappy stories. I’ll take your advice.

Many of the fieldworkers reported also being transformed through their participation in this study:

> I have gained more experience and understanding about life and society and developed a better sense of responsibility for myself and my community to deal with cases of violence ... also I have become more self-confident and gained more courage.