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Prevalence surveys on violence against women
Challenges around indicators, data collection and use

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Introduction

This paper deals with the following topics: 1) a brief overview of a classification and types of indicators on violence against women (VAW); 2) the indicators developed by the *Friends of the Chair on Statistical Indicators on Violence against Women* (FoC); 3) instruments currently available to collect data to compute the UN statistical indicators on VAW; 4) challenges around cross-national collection and use of data, including for prevention of VAW; and 5) recommendations for collection and use of data and suggestions for further methodological work around data collection for VAW, including for VAW prevention.

*The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations

1. Types of indicators on Violence against women

Indicators summarize complex data into a form that is meaningful for people working on programmes, for policymakers and the general public. Indicators on VAW could be used to create awareness, guide legislative and policy reforms, ensure adequate provision of targeted and effective services, monitor trends and progress in addressing and eliminating VAW and assess the impact of measures taken. With their associated benchmarks, indicators contribute to organizing data into a form, which facilitates the evaluation of policies and monitoring of progress in achieving goals.

The literature provides a number of different ways to classify indicators in general, including those on VAW. A useful classification also used in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of VAW programme implementation¹ is the division in outcome, process and impact indicators.

1) *Outcome indicators*: In programme M&E these indicators would show whether or not a programme target has been reached. In the context of monitoring global and local efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women, outcome indicators² are those that measure the scope, prevalence and incidents/frequency³ on VAW. When measured properly, they enable comparison of trends over time, as well as within and between settings and countries. Examples of these are: number of incidents of rape by others than partners experienced by women aged 15-49 in the past year; proportion of women aged 15 years and older who experienced physical abuse by an intimate partner at any time in their life; proportion of women aged 18-24 who were married before age 18.

2) *Process indicators*: These are indicators to measure the coverage of measures undertaken to address VAW. In programme M&E they would demonstrate how well a programme has been implemented, with focus on implementation and coverage. Examples of these are: proportion of health units that adopted a protocol for clinical management of rape survivors; proportion of prosecuted VAW cases that resulted in a conviction, or in the area of prevention: number of schools delivering violence prevention and respectful relationship education.

The report of the *Special Rapporteur on VAW, its causes and consequences* on ‘indicators on VAW and State response’ (A/HRC/7/6)⁴ proposes indicators covering State responses. Some of these are considered process indicators. The report introduces another category, namely *structural* (or *institutional*) indicators, for some measures of state response, in particular those reflecting the ratification/adoption of legal instruments.

¹ MEASURE Evaluation (2008). *Violence against Women and girls. A compendium of Monitoring and Evaluation Indicators*. <http://www.cpc.unc.edu/measure/publications/pdf/ms-08-30.pdf>

² For clarity it could be noted that these are called ‘outcome’ indicators even if there is no policy or programme in place. The indicator could provide the baseline against which to measure future change or programme achievements, and/or guide the design of evidence-based policy and programming efforts for prevention of and response to VAW.

³ ‘Prevalence’ refers to the proportion of persons that have ever experienced certain event in a specified reference period (e.g. ‘rate of physical partner violence among ever partnered women in the past 12 months’); it counts people rather than events. ‘Incidents’ and ‘frequency’ refers to the number of events in a specified population and a specified reference period (e.g. ‘average number of times an abused woman reported to have been slapped, beaten or kicked in the past 12 months’).

⁴ UN General Assembly Human rights Council (2008) A/HRC/7/6
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/7session/reports.htm>

3) *Impact indicators*: In the context of programme M&E these indicators attempt to measure how much of the observed change can be attributed to the program (such as reduction of VAW prevalence rates following an intervention to prevent violence). They have to be measured through evaluations that are complex and have special design requirements.

Worth mentioning is the Violence Evidence Base, a joint project of the Liverpool John Moores University Centre for Public Health and WHO. This project collates abstracts and information from published studies that have measured the effectiveness of interventions to prevent violence. Currently it includes 365 published studies from across the world.⁵

In many of the recent efforts to develop VAW indicators the focus has been so far to a large extent on outcome indicators. In the context of the discussion on indicators for measuring the outcome of prevention measures, it should be underlined that outcome indicators on prevalence, severity and frequency of violence are the only indicators that (provided they are measured accurately and consistently) can truly indicate whether levels of violence are going down (although they may not be able to be directly linked to specific prevention initiatives).

In this context, over the past decade, a number of proposals for VAW indicators have seen the light, across UN agencies, regional bodies, Governments and civil society organizations.⁶ Particular mention should be made of the UN Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on Indicators to Measure Violence against Women, organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW), the Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), in Geneva, October 2007.⁷

The EGM report proposed the following list of international indicators on VAW - all outcome indicators - to be collected through dedicated population-based surveys, namely:

- Physical violence
- Sexual violence
- Intimate partner violence⁸
- The following two harmful practices: early marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM).

The report of the above EGM suggested as a long-term objective to measure all forms of VAW and proposed further work on methodologies of data collection and indicator development for the following forms of VAW:

- Killing of women by intimate partners
- Female infanticide
- Threats of violence
- Economic and emotional/psychological violence as part of intimate partner violence

⁵ http://www.preventviolence.info/evidence_base.aspx

⁶ For a list of these efforts: see the before mentioned report of the *Special Rapporteur on VAW, its causes and consequences*.

⁷ Division for the Advancement of women, Economic Commission for Europe, United Nations Statistics Division. (2007) *Report of the expert group meeting on indicators to measure violence against women*. Geneva. http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/IndicatorsVAW/IndicatorsVAW_EGM_report.pdf . This report subsequently fed into the report of the *Special Rapporteur on VAW, its causes and consequences*.

⁸ Note that the first two indicators, physical and sexual violence, also include violence by intimate partners. A separate indicator on intimate partner violence was also proposed because in most contexts partner violence constitutes the largest part of a women's experience of violence, while at the same time it is the type of violence that is most stigmatized and hidden, with special challenges around measuring it.

- Crimes committed against women in the name of ‘honour’
- Conflict/crisis-related violence against women
- Dowry-related violence
- Sexual exploitation
- Trafficking
- Femicide
- Forced marriage
- Sexual harassment

These proposed indicators and recommendations fed into the work of the *Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences*⁹, and subsequently led to the establishment of the *Friends of the Chair on Statistical Indicators on VAW* who had to develop the work on indicators further (see below).

2. Indicators by the *Friends of the Chair on Statistical Indicators of VAW*

In December 2006, the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 61/143 on intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women¹⁰, requested the Statistical Commission to develop and propose a set of possible indicators on violence against women to assist States in assessing the scope, prevalence and incidence of violence against women. This work is done in consultation with the Commission on the Status of Women, and building on the work of the *Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences*.

To that end, the Statistical Commission at its 39th session in February 2008 established the Friends of the Chair group (FoC)¹¹ to develop the indicators and other methodological standards for implementation in national statistical systems (decision 39/116).

In February 2009 the FoC proposed to the UN Statistical Commission at its 40th session in February 2009 an interim set of 6 statistical indicators as a ‘starting point for initiating further work on identifying the most appropriate measurements’. The UN Statistical Commission adapted this set and requested the FoC to continue their work towards establishing indicators and accompanying guidelines for developing statistical surveys on violence against women.

During their meeting in Mexico, in December 2009 the FoC expanded the interim set of indicators, by including ‘severity’ to indicators 3 and 4 and adding indicators 7, 8 and 9.¹² They now constitute a core set of nine statistical indicators¹³ for measuring VAW as follows:

⁹ <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/women/rapporteur/annual.htm>

¹⁰ http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/A_RES_61_143.pdf

¹¹ The FoC consists of representatives of the following member States: Botswana, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Ghana, Italy, Mexico (the Chair) and Thailand, with the United Nations Statistics Division acting as secretariat of the group. In addition, the following international bodies agreed to act as observers: the Division for the Advancement of Women, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the World Health Organization.

¹² Conclusions and recommendations at:

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/vaw/docs/ConclusionsAndRecommendations.pdf>

¹³ This core set was presented and “noted with satisfaction” by the Statistical Commission in February 2011.

Current core set of statistical indicators on VAW

1. *Total and age specific rate of women subjected to physical violence in the last 12 months by severity of violence, relationship to the perpetrator and frequency*
2. *Total and age specific rate of women subjected to physical violence during lifetime by severity of violence, relationship to the perpetrator and frequency*
3. *Total and age specific rate of women subjected to sexual violence in the last 12 months by severity of violence, relationship to the perpetrator and frequency*
4. *Total and age specific rate of women subjected to sexual violence during lifetime by severity of violence, relationship to the perpetrator and frequency*
5. *Total and age specific rate of ever-partnered women subjected to sexual and/or physical violence by current or former intimate partner in the last 12 months by frequency*
6. *Total and age specific rate of ever-partnered women subjected to sexual and/or physical violence by current or former intimate partner during lifetime by frequency*
7. *Total and age specific rate of women subjected to psychological violence in the past 12 months by the intimate partner*
8. *Total and age specific rate of women subjected to economic violence in the past 12 months by the intimate partner¹⁴*
9. *Total and age specific rate of women subjected to female genital mutilation*

The FoC state that these indicators are meant to capture (intimate) partner violence regardless of age at which the violence started (as long as it was inflicted by the intimate partner). However, violence by perpetrators other than partners will only be included if the act(s) of violence happened at age 15 or older.

The work of the FoC around the statistical indicators on violence against women also include the development of Guidelines for Producing Statistics on Violence against Women using the nine core VAW indicators as essential framework for these guidelines. The guidelines are currently being finalized and are expected to be distributed, in the form of a background document, at the next session of the United Nations Statistical Commission in February 2013.

Comments on the core set of VAW indicators

While ultimately data should be collected on the full range of VAW, following the recommendations for a step-by-step approach, the selection of the initial six interim indicators was based on current state of methodological development, consensus and experience with measuring these in a comparable way across countries.

The indicators 7-9 were added, despite methodological issues around their measurement, to flag their importance in the spectrum of types of violence that women experience.

It may be relevant to point out that indicator 7 on *psychological partner violence* was on the 'long-term' list of the EGM 2007 because it does not benefit from the same consensus on measurement methodology as exist on measuring physical and sexual partner violence. For example, some of the issues are: Which acts should be measured as part of the phenomena?

¹⁴ The FoC formulated the indicators 7 and 8 for 'ever-partner women' thought the denominator is missing from the approved set; it is expected that this will be corrected in the forthcoming UNSD guidelines on statistical surveys to measure VAW.

Are they valid in all/most countries? How do we measure/include acts that occur only in certain contexts? Is one event enough to call it violence or do we need a threshold?

Indicator 8 on *economic partner violence* was not proposed at all by the EGM (though considered in some studies are part of emotional abuse and/or controlling behaviours).

The FoC in their deliberations considered the two indicators 7 and 8 important dimensions of intimate partner violence even if there is currently no consensus on content, boundaries and operationalization for cross-national measurability. Including them in the set of core indicators recognizes their importance and may help advancing methodological work on them.

Female genital mutilation (FGM), being a serious form of VAW, is included in the current set of core indicators, with the annotation that FGM should be measured in Demographic and Health Surveys where relevant.

Indicators that did not make it to the core set

During the December 2009 FoC meeting, there was no consensus about whether early marriage (before age 18) should be considered VAW, despite the fact that in the *Convention of the rights of the child*¹⁵ all persons under 18 are considered children. The FoC stated in their conclusions that age at marriage can indicate the degree of autonomy reached by women in a society. Further, they stated that in many cultures early marriage is not considered a form of VAW.¹⁶

At the same meeting the FoC also discussed the following indicators: *femicide* in general and *spousal homicide* in particular; *stalking*; *physical and sexual violence in childhood*; *discrimination and violence at work*; *trafficking of women*; *impact of sexual violence on sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS*; *extent to which women recognize they suffered violence as a crime*; *hidden violence unreported to authorities*.

These indicators were not included in the core set because they needed other sources of data than surveys (femicide, trafficking); because they were unclear or needed further methodological development (stalking, perception of violence as a crime); because they were not within the scope of the mandate (abuse in childhood); or were considered of doubtful value as standalone indicators (impact of sexual violence on sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS).

Reporting of physical and sexual violence however was considered a specific dimension of the indicators of physical and sexual violence in the core set (though it is not specifically mentioned in the set).¹⁷

¹⁵ United Nations, Treaty Series, Vol 1577, No. 27531

¹⁶ In: UN Economic and Social Council Febr 2009 E/ESCAP/CST/4/Corr.1
<http://www.unescap.org/STAT/cst/1/CST1-4E.pdf>

¹⁷ At the December 2009 meeting of the FoC it was also concluded that the work of the FoC should be extended beyond the first phase, ultimately until 2015. The FoC concluded that there is a need to continue the work in close coordination with other international initiatives aimed at improving administrative records. See:
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/vaw/docs/ConclusionsAndRecommendations.pdf>

3. Tools to collect data to estimate the UN VAW indicators

Without a full understanding of the scope, dimensions and correlates of VAW it is not possible to design appropriate response and prevention measures at any level of government or civil society. The United Nations General Assembly has urged States to ensure the systematic collection and analysis of data to monitor all forms of violence against women (A/RES/63/155).¹⁸ One of the five key outcomes of the United Nations Secretary-General's Campaign, 'UNiTE to End Violence against Women' is the establishment in all countries by 2015 of systems for data collection and analysis.¹⁹

Statistical sample surveys are relied upon to gather information on the extent of VAW. A methodological overview of 59 surveys on violence against women conducted in 2009 by the UNSD, acting as the secretariat of the FoC, showed that to date no existing survey was fully measuring or calculating the estimates according to the entire interim set of six core indicators. It was especially telling that only very few surveys generated information on frequency of VAW, for all the different types of violence.

This was also true for the two multi-countries studies that were going on since at least a decade and that have advanced methodological development on measuring VAW in a comparative way across countries: the *WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence*²⁰ and the *International Violence against Women Survey (IVAWS)*²¹. The same was the case for the optional VAW module in *Demographic and Health Surveys (MEASURE DHS)*.^{22 23}

Therefore, under the United Nations Development Account Project on 'Enhancing capacities to eradicate Violence against Women through networking of local knowledge communities' (a two-year project implemented by all five United Nations Regional Commissions in cooperation with the UNSD and UNDAW), the United Nations Economic Commission of Europe (UNECE), Statistical Division, developed a survey module to collect data on the before mentioned UN VAW indicators.²⁴ The questions in the module build on existing instruments that have been well tested and validated across cultures (in particular the WHO multi-country study) and enable comparability with other international initiatives (WHO, IVAWS, DHS). The outcomes of the development and testing of this survey module also informed the UNSD guidelines mentioned earlier.

The module fully addresses the first six indicators. It also collects data on psychological abuse and – to a more limited extent – on economic violence by partner under the understanding that more methodological work is needed on these indicators and that they

¹⁸ See: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/documents/ga63.htm>

¹⁹ See: http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/pdf/framework_booklet.pdf

²⁰ Garcia-Moreno C., Jansen H.A.F.M. et al. (2005), *WHO Multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence. Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses*, WHO Geneva.

http://www.who.int/gender/violence/who_multicountry_study/en/index.html

²¹ Johnson H., Ollus N., and Nevala S. (2008) *Violence against women: An international perspective*. New York. Springer. To be purchased <http://www.springer.com/sociology/criminology/book/978-0-387-73203-9>

²² See www.measuredhs.com/topics/dv/start.cfm

²³ Kishor S., and Johnson K. (2004). *Profiling Domestic Violence: A Multi-country Study*. Calverton, MD: ORC Macro.

²⁴ Commissioned by UNECE to the author of this paper

may not be used in the same way in all countries.²⁵ ²⁶ FGM questions have not been included in the module and countries that want to measure this are referred to the DHS FGM module.²⁷

Despite the above being a “module” (the minimum set of questions needed to be able to compute the indicators), one of the recommendations following the field test was that the module should preferably be used as part of a specialized dedicated surveys rather than as a module to surveys on other topics. This is because dedicated surveys provide the most reliable and comprehensive statistics for several reasons, one of which is that it can fully address ethical and safety issues, including specialized interviewer recruitment and training.²⁸

Another current development is related to the WHO multi-country study which now is accepted best practice for national population-based studies of intimate partner violence with a standard questionnaire and a set of accompanying training and field manuals and materials. The methodology, which uses mixed methods, enables besides capturing details on magnitude and patterns of violence, identifying causes and consequences and the analysis of risk and protective factors for the different levels of the ecological framework as presented in the *World report on violence and health*.²⁹ Since the first WHO report on ten countries in 2005³⁰, the number of countries using the method has multiplied, including, by 2011, six Pacific island countries (Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu). The involvement in these studies was a transformative experience for the fieldworkers and the stakeholders involved and had impact on legislation and plans of action.³¹

In 2012 five new UNFPA supported/AusAID funded national studies have started in the Pacific region (Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, and Republic of Marshall Islands). For these new studies the generic WHO questionnaire (version 10) has been slightly adapted, in particular to collect more details on the types of violence, frequency and the sex of the (non-partner) perpetrators, both for lifetime and the past 12 months, to enable full computation of the UN VAW indicators, while at the same time also enabling full comparability with the results of the previous countries that used the original questionnaire.³²

²⁵ Accompanying materials as prepared by the author include a manual with detailed question by question description, a training facilitator’s manual, an interviewer manual, a codebook, analysis framework and SPSS analysis syntaxes available at

<http://www1.unece.org/stat/platform/display/VAW/Survey+module+for+measuring+violence+against+women>. The materials have been translated into Arab, Spanish and Russian.

²⁶ A 3-week e-tutor course followed by an 8-week global e-training course on measurement of VAW through statistical surveys, developed around the indicators and the UNECE module has subsequently been implemented by ECLAC under the same development account project (2011). The course was designed by H. Jansen and D. Almeras; the first author was also the course instructor. This course is expected to be translated into regional languages.

²⁷ The DHS module is downloadable from: http://www.measuredhs.com/pubs/pub_details.cfm?ID=709

²⁸ Recommendations out of the testing are <http://www1.unece.org/stat/platform/download/attachments/24117336/VAW+Module+Recommendations+2011-07.pdf?version=1>

²⁹ Dahlberg & Krug (2002). *World report on violence and health*. World Health Organization.

³⁰ Garcia-Moreno C., Jansen H.A.F.M. et al. (2005), *WHO Multi-country study on women’s health and domestic violence. Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women’s responses*. WHO Geneva.

http://www.who.int/gender/violence/who_multicountry_study/en/index.html

³¹ Jansen H.A.F.M. (2010). *Swimming against the tide: lessons learned from field research on violence against women in the Solomon Islands and Kiribati*. UNFPA

³² The WHO questionnaire adapted for the UN VAW indicators and the updated manuals and materials are available from the author: henriette.jansen@gmail.com

These five new studies will probably be the first studies ever that will capture national estimates for the entire set and all dimensions of the UN VAW indicators 1-8.

4. Challenges collection and use of cross-national data on VAW

In the last decade there has been an enormous increase in the interest in VAW and its measurement, by donors, UN agencies, development partners and governments around the world; an area that traditionally to a large extent was the domain of researchers and activists working on VAW. The increased recognition of the problem, the interest and pressure of political agendas towards (periodic) measurement of VAW indicators at national and regional levels, together with the easy availability of existing instruments to measure violence, are positive advances that help monitoring and evaluating global and local efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women.

These positive advances, however, are not without risks. The sensitivity of the subject matter makes that its measurement is not only less amenable to quantification compared to people, birth and deaths, inventories or goods, but there is a real risk that measurement of VAW jeopardizes safety of participants. This risk may increase further when VAW studies are being conducted by agencies and institutions, which traditionally have not dealt with measuring sensitive subjects and who may not (yet) be fully aware of those risks.

Example of a study showing challenges around data collection

- A national 2006 survey conducted by a national statistics office measured 11 types of VAW (physical, psychological, rape, forced abortion, forced prostitution, other sexual violence, neglect, forced labour, prevented to work, other economic violence, human trafficking)
- The study found that 3% of women victimized (currently the national official rate)
- Issues with this survey: VAW questions were added to a socio economic status survey; use of the word 'violence' in the questions; women not interviewed in private; interviewers were both male and female and not trained to deal with sensitive issues
- These results are in stark contrast with a local study in the same country indicating for example 22% sexual and 11% physical partner violence among pregnant women attending antenatal services.

Sources: ³³ ³⁴

As above example shows, if not done rigorously and sensitively, surveys tend to result in misleadingly low rates of disclosure and produce findings that have extremely limited value for advocacy, programme development and monitoring.

³³ M. Sairi Hasbullah, Director of Social Resilience Statistics, Statistics Indonesia. Presentation given at Workshop on Strengthening National Capacities to Collect VAW Statistics in the Asean Region, Aug, 1202. Jakarta

³⁴ Hayati E.N., Hogberg U. et al. (2011). *Behind the Silence of Harmony: Risk Factors for Physical and Sexual Violence among Women in Rural Indonesia*. BMC Women's Health, 11:52, doi:10.1186/1472-6874-11-52.

Some of the aspects that should be done differently in VAW surveys compared to the operations for regular surveys traditionally done by national statistics offices:

- Special interviewer training is crucial for ethics, safety and data quality.³⁵ In practice in many countries there are often insufficient resources or budget allocations to this important aspect of VAW research. The pressure to undertake a VAW survey with limited resources may result in cutting down on interviewer training. This may result in lower response rates and disclosure rate.³⁶ While prevalence rates in surveys on sensitive issues generally already underestimate the real size of the problem, with poorly trained interviewers this will be more so. Furthermore, when interviewers are not sensitized sufficiently about the risks involved, they may put the respondents or even themselves in danger. For example this may happen when they have not been trained in how to react in situations where a husband interrupts an interview, or what to do if a respondent asks for help.
- With the demand for national statistics, large population based sampling may be desirable for statistical reasons (such as for regional and sub regional breakdowns). This brings with it additional challenges in terms of safety and data quality, because, among other things, adequate standards for support mechanisms for respondents and/or debriefings of interviewers cannot be maintained; further each interviewer may have to conduct many interviews per day or during a prolonged period which may be draining and even desensitizing with subsequent consequences for data quality.
- The legislation around statistical surveys in a country may prescribe the use of the official survey name that may include ‘violence against women’ on all documents and public announcements related to the study. This poses a real danger to the safety of women, because participating in a survey that is known to focus on domestic violence may provoke retaliatory violence, and it may further result in many women not wanting to participate. Therefore surveys must have a name that does not include ‘VAW’ or any mention of ‘violence’.
- Because prevalence figures are responsive to methodological and context issues (for example, the way questions are framed, interviewer training, the level of awareness in the society), a fluctuation in the prevalence rates over time may not always directly reflect a real change in the levels of violence. This should be realized when interpreting the estimates for the indicators.

It cannot be underlined enough that measuring VAW raises important ethical challenges. WHO has developed ‘Putting Women First: Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Domestic Violence against Women’.³⁷ These guidelines lay out some of the key principles that should guide research on domestic violence, such as ensuring absolute privacy when doing the interview and maintaining absolute confidentiality of information provided by respondents. It gives examples of safe ways to name the survey and to explain the content to the community without revealing the topic of interest (which will only be explained when the interviewer is alone with the respondent). It also describes how a high refusal rate and consequently a low prevalence estimate could potentially be used to question the importance of VAW as a legitimate area of concern.

³⁵ Ellsberg M. and Heise L. (2005) *Researching Violence Against Women: A Practical Guide for Researchers and Activists*. PATH/WHO. A training curriculum has been developed with this guide

³⁶ Jansen H.A.F.M., Watts C., et al. (2004). *Interviewer Training in the WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence*. Violence Against Women, Vol. 10 No 7, 831-849

³⁷ WHO (2001). *Putting women first: Ethical and Safety recommendations for research on domestic violence against women*. <http://www.who.int/gender/violence/womenfirtseng.pdf>

For building the evidence base for violence prevention a major constraint is the relative long time scale that needs to be considered before a change in levels of certain types of violence is measurable. Moreover, a time series based on several surveys over a longer period is needed to ensure that any programme effects are sustained.

From the before mentioned UN VAW indicators the prevalence rates violence during lifetime (also referred to as “ever violence”) will not be sensitive enough to be used to measure change on short or medium term (these rates however have an important role in advocacy). Users should realize that prevalence rates of violence in the past 12 months (‘current violence’) are best suited to measure change. The indicators for violence in the past 12 months are also the most relevant indicators to inform programs and services.

In terms of use of data for policy and programming there are huge challenges into making data accessible and properly understood, for different audiences. For example recent visits to Solomon Islands and Kiribati to support strengthening of programmes to address VAW, revealed that the results of the recent VAW studies conducted in these countries are not accessible to health staff struggling to set up systems to effectively prevent and respond to violence women and girls are facing.³⁸

5. Recommendations

Recommendations on data collection

All data collection on VAW should be undertaken in a way that respects confidentiality and woman’s human rights and does not jeopardize their safety. They should be undertaken in accordance with the WHO ethical and Safety guidelines for researching VAW.

For findings to be comparable between countries as well as across time, it is important that all studies use the same criteria and methods, such as definitions of the various types of violence, age groupings, modes of interviewing, and so on.

United Nations entities and intergovernmental bodies and the donor community, within their respective areas of competence, should take note of the international core indicators on VAW, but also all the issues around their sensitivity, so that when encouraging and supporting countries to collect data to support indicators they can direct them to appropriate sources of material and technical assistance. The importance of a ‘safe name’ that does not reveal the content of the questions/subject of interest cannot be underlined enough.

With the upcoming increase in national and cross-national data collection activities, combined with the still limited capacity and experience to carry out VAW surveys in a safe and effective way on the ground, the UN system and development partners should provide technical support and capacity building in this area and promote existing methodologies and good practices to ensure that existing standards of excellence on data collection are met. Linkages and coordination with NGOs are also crucial in this.

³⁸ Source: Maha Muna (2012, personal communication)

The interest in measuring violence against children (VAC) and in particular against girls (as in: 'VAWG') may lead to the desire to add questions on violence against children on a questionnaire on VAW. A useful method that is used in many survey methods, including in the WHO study is to ask about experiences of violence in childhood retrospectively. Moreover women below 18 are considered children/adolescents by the international definitions and if the sample is large enough data can be analysed separately for adolescents and young adults. However it is not recommended to ask the respondent questions about her children, or to ask questions direct of children (below 15 years old) in the same survey. Without wanting to question the importance of violence in children as a human right issue in itself, as well as a potential risk factor for violence later in life (for victimization or perpetration), it should be realized that different methodological, legal and ethical issues apply to VAC compared to VAW, and thus separate measurements activities with different methodologies are needed for both these types of violence and they should not be combined for the sake of convenience.³⁹

A number of initiatives, such as a separate working group led by UNICEF, WHO and others are developing methodologies for this in response to recommendations of the Secretary General's study on Violence against children.⁴⁰ Discussion of these initiatives is beyond the scope of this paper.

A word of caution is also in place here for using statistical *indicators on attitudes on VAW*, as an alternative for asking direct, possibly painful, questions about women's own experience with violence. Surveys in many countries (also in the WHO study) show that women report that violence is justified under certain conditions. These are often referred to as attitude questions. Where attitude questions may have a use in some local contexts, they have no place in cross-national data collection. This is because they measure different things in different settings. For example, in situations of day-to-day struggle to meet their family's basic needs, and in cultures where people accept what is happening to them as their 'fate', women may not be used to think of a reality different than their own experience, and the answers to attitude questions will directly reflect their own situation and experience, rather than community norms - hence it is not surprising that they closely correlate with violence prevalence. In more developed contexts attitude are most likely reflecting socially desirable answers and norms in the community and rates are highly responsive to for example awareness campaigns. Norms and attitudes are best measured in qualitative research.

Recommendations on use of data

It is important that existing survey findings are properly interpreted, correctly reflected, understood and used to feed into advocacy, policy and programmes. Too often findings never reach the attention of advocates and policy makers who are best positioned to use them. But even if, for example through the involvement of consultative stakeholders committees in the data collection and dissemination phase, the accurate results get in the hands of the relevant users, researchers and statistical offices also have the responsibility to ensure that users, including the media properly understand and communicate the findings.⁴¹ No matter how

³⁹ Jansen H.A.F.M. (2010). *Swimming against the tide: lessons learned from field research on violence against women in the Solomon Islands and Kiribati*. UNFPA

⁴⁰ For this report see: <http://www.unviolencestudy.org/>

⁴¹ It is for example crucial that the terms prevalence, incidence and frequency are properly used, that lifetime and current (past 12 months) are properly explained and understood as well as their value and limitations for

robust the data are, if the results are wrongly understood and presented, a possible impact of prevention activities may be misinterpreted. Capacities of national statistics offices and other partners should be strengthened not only to collect and analyse, but also to correctly reflect and interpret the data enabling it to better feed in national planning and monitoring.

Example of presentation of VAW statistics in the recent media

Which of these 3 statement best reflect the situation of women in the Pacific?

1. Two out of every three women are affected by violence across the Pacific...[*Amnesty International*]
2. Studies (...) have found that in Kiribati 68 per cent of women aged 15 – 49 have experienced physical and or sexual violence. In Solomon Islands the figure was 64 per cent and in Samoa it was 41 per cent. These figures are considered indicative of the scale of the problem across the region. [*SPC*]
3. Women in the Pacific suffer (...) the highest incidence of domestic violence (...) in the world.... [*The Australian*]

See footnote for comments on these statements⁴²

Finally, more efforts are needed to bridge the gap between evidence building and programming, to translate results of studies into programming for prevention. Donors should make sure that large studies, such as national prevalence studies are formulated as a first step in a longer term programme, including also a process to develop interventions.

Recommendations for further methodological work

Without attempting to be exhaustive below follow a number of recommendations related to the development and measurement of VAW indicators⁴³:

Improve measurement of psychological and economic violence. With psychological and economic violence currently in the core set of VAW indicators, it is important to realize that these indicators do not benefit from the same level of consensus and methodology that exist on measuring physical and sexual violence. More methodological work is needed to establish content, boundaries and operationalization of the measures and we may need to recognize that some of them may never be captured in the same way across cultures.

monitoring change. Furthermore, violence statistics should always clearly indicate which type of violence is reflected.

⁴² The best answer is Statement 1, even if it is not providing much detail: in the Pacific countries where studies have been done with the same (WHO) methodology about 60-80% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence by partners or non-partners in their lifetime. While the overall prevalence for lifetime violence may be similar, when broken down by type and perpetrator, patterns of violence are very different around the Pacific region. Statement 2 is inaccurate because it does not specify that the statistics given in this statement are for partner violence only. Statement 3 is incorrect because of the use of 'domestic' violence (which is often, incorrectly, used as synonym for partner violence). Tonga and Samoa have relatively low levels of partner violence but very high levels of non-partner violence. Graphs to illustrate this will be presented at the EGM.

⁴³ Data collection in conflict and emergency setting is even harder and other initiatives are underway to develop guidelines and recommendations for this.

Research on under-documented forms of VAW. Further work should be supported on the development of unified methods and standards for data collection on all forms of VAW that are under-documented and collaborative work in refining the list of indicators.

Strengthening comparability of indicators across widest possible range of countries.

Further work is needed towards a consensus on world-wide common standardized survey methodology to systematically collect comparable data on core and possibly upcoming VAW indicators as they are being developed. This work should bring together the wealth of knowledge and experience of the community of researchers, advocates and others.

Intervention research. While we are improving methods to measure VAW, there are still enormous gaps in the understanding what works to prevent VAW.^{44 45} In particular rigorous evaluations are largely lacking on how effective programs have been in reducing violence. Mixed method intervention research is needed to support development of interventions and to strengthen the evidence base of what works.

Improve collection and use of administrative data. Efforts should also be made to strengthen and improve the collection and use of administrative data, such as health, police, judicial and social services data. Case reports are seemingly the ‘easiest’ data to get but are misleading as a measure for success in terms of prevention of VAW, because they are affected by the level of service provision and sensitive to service coverage and access, and changes in quality, often funding related. They are also affected by the paradoxical effect that success in addressing the issue results in a rise in the statistics. As mentioned before for survey data, also for administrative data it is important that users of the data understand what the data tell them and what they do not tell them. For example police statistics are sometimes wrongly used to reflect the magnitude of the problem in the population, while they only reflect the tip of the iceberg (surveys show that in most countries less than 10% of women ever sought help for partner violence from police or health services).

Violence against men, and men as perpetrators. Questions may be raised about the exclusive focus on violence against women relative to men and future work should also look into the relative importance of both and into better understanding of risk factors for perpetration.

Conclusion

Sound data have been and will continue to be important in the global recognition of the problem, in the development of strategies to combat VAW and in monitoring progress towards the goal to eliminate all forms of VAW. The development of appropriate indicators, guidelines and tools to achieve internationally comparable statistics on the various types of VAW, while always putting ethics and safety first, are important efforts in the way forward. It remains a global and local challenge to ensure that all forms of violence are measured.

Although urgent, the need for sound evidence and further methodological and evaluation research should not inhibit taking action now to prevent violence against women and girls. It

⁴⁴ Heise L. (2011) *What Works to Prevent Partner Violence? An Evidence Overview*

http://www.dfid.gov.uk/R4D/PDF/Outputs/Gender/60887-Preventing_partner_violence_Jan_2012.pdf

⁴⁵ WHO/LSHTM (2010) *Preventing intimate partner and sexual violence against women: taking action and generating evidence*. World Health Organization.

is only by taking action and generating evidence along the way that the work on evidence-based prevention of violence against women can be advanced.