



**Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-ninth session**

Building the evidence and monitoring results: gender statistics and indicators

PANEL DISCUSSION

**Lessons learned on measuring and monitoring violence against women from
the case of the National Study on Domestic Violence against Women in Viet
Nam, 2009-2010**

**by
Nguyen Thi Viet Nga*
Statistician – Social and Environmental Statistics Department,
General Statistics Office, Viet Nam**

**Tuesday, 17 March 2015
10:00 am to 1:00 pm**

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

On 25 November 2010, the results of the first National Study on Domestic Violence against Women in Viet Nam were released at an event for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women in Ha Noi. The results of the study confirmed the prevalent incidents of domestic violence against women in Viet Nam, indicating that overall, 32 per cent of ever-married women reported having experienced physical violence in their life. The study also showed the extent to which women suffered from domestic violence in Viet Nam, which was not fully known prior. The launch of the study results was successful in raising awareness on domestic violence among the general public and to present concrete evidence to policy makers and development practitioners to reaffirm commitment to eliminate domestic violence by designing and implementing evidence-based interventions.

Behind the successful launch was a long and careful preparation and implementation process supported by many colleagues from the government, mass organizations, national research institutions, civil society organizations, and the UN agencies. Every step was planned and implemented carefully in close consultation with the key stakeholders to ensure their commitment and support, as well as relevance and validity of the study.

In this context, I would like to share some key lessons learned from the preparation and implementation of the national study.

Because of the sensitivity of the subject, the *Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Domestic Violence with Women*¹ was strictly applied to all survey procedures from the preparation through the launching of the results and disseminated data.

Preparing for the fieldwork –

'Safe name' for the study: For women experiencing violence, the mere act of participating in a survey may provoke further violence or place the respondent or interviewer at risk. That is why the innocuous title (or 'safe name') of the survey (*National Survey on Women's Health and Life Experiences*) does not refer explicitly to violence. This title also would enable the respondents to explain the survey to others without raising suspicion. Wording has been carefully considered in all survey documents and transactions (internal documents of the General Statistics Office (GSO), supporting documents, questionnaires, and manuals). This title also was used by the researchers and interviewers to describe the survey from the GSO to outside partners and local authorities.

Confidentiality agreement: All staff signed a confidentiality agreement on the final day of training as part of their work contract.

Informed consent: The invitation letter sent to selected women explained the elements in the informed consent: confidentiality, voluntary participation, right to refuse to answer, etc. Once the respondent and interviewer were alone, further information on the real scope of the study was provided as part of the consent procedure.

¹ WHO. *Putting women first: Ethical and safety recommendations for research on domestic violence against women*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2001. Available at http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2001/WHO_FCH_GWH_01.1.pdf

Confidentiality: Only the team leader had access to the list with the women's names. Interviewers used a confidential code for each respondent to mark in each questionnaire, so that respondents could be identified.

Interviewers' training: Fieldworkers were trained to terminate or change the subject of discussion if an interview was interrupted by anyone, including children. Fieldworkers also had practice in reducing any possible distress caused to respondents by the interview and creating a safe, gentle and trustworthy environment where the women could feel comfortable.

During the fieldwork –

Support for interviewers: Two counselors with specific experience on research with women who suffered violence were available to support and counsel interviewers where needed. They also were involved in the supervision visits to the field.

Support for respondents: A pocket-sized booklet containing general information on domestic violence and available services for survivors in Viet Nam was especially prepared and printed to give to all of the women after the interview ended. To minimize suspicion and distraction from the topic in the event the materials fell into the wrong hands, together with the booklet, a number of other leaflets with health information relevant to women also were distributed. It was necessary to discuss the risk for women if they brought the material home, because in some cases a woman may not realize the risk.

One woman per household: In selected households with more than one eligible woman, only one respondent would be selected randomly, so no one else in the household could be aware of the contents of the interviews.

Venue for the interviews: It was suggested in the first consultation workshop that interviews be conducted in a private room in a communal location (such as health centres, cultural houses or a commune's People's Committee building) instead of in the households, as done in other countries. In Viet Nam, it can be challenging to find privacy and maintain confidentiality. Asking women to leave their homes for the interviews would ensure the safety of the respondents and would avoid unwanted interruptions and uncomfortable questions. All selected respondents received invitations to one communal place such as a health centre or a cultural house for the interview at a specific time. While the interviews were conducted, the team leader also would ensure that no one would approach or interrupt the interviews, not even local authorities, who in some cases were too helpful and wanted to be around in case the interviewers needed their assistance.

One site, one day: To maintain confidentiality, survey teams were not permitted to spend the night in the same commune where interviews were conducted, especially in the rural areas. Locals could ask them many questions about the scope of the research and it could create tense situations.

With respect to face-to-face interviews, interviewers had been trained more carefully than usual, and support services and experts from outside had been brought on board, and preparations and implementation had been conducted with ethical and safety considerations. The GSO realized much more than ever before that the participants were more than a number and that this time they were dealing with emotions – both of the participants and of their own staff.

The struggles and emotions of the GSO interviewers who collected these results can be illustrated with the following words from one of the interviewers in her feedback about her experiences in the field:²

“When I encountered a case of abuse, sometimes I felt tense and ended up stopping the interview to invite the woman to take some water, give her a tissue and at the same time take a sip of water myself to restore my own psychological balance”.

The interviews were often a long and difficult journey for both respondents and interviewers. But, there is evidence from the data that it was not necessarily harder for women who had disclosed violence compared with those who had not disclosed violence. For example, the duration of the interview was long; the median duration among all women was 85 minutes. However, the median duration between those who did and who did not disclose violence differed by only 10 minutes.

The response to a question about satisfaction with the interview was very meaningful. Women were asked at the end of the interview how they felt – ‘better’, ‘the same’, or ‘worse’ compared with before the interview. Overall, most respondents found participating in the study to be a positive experience. Among all women who completed the interview, 80 per cent felt better after it. 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 so 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.

The respondents at the end of the interview often said they felt valued and thankful for being heard, and their awareness was changed by having participated in the survey:

“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. I will not kill myself”.

Many of the fieldworkers in the debriefing said they were also transformed through their experience in this study, making them rethink their own life and experiences:

“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”.

This impact on the lives of both fieldworkers and respondents demonstrates that, even before the results are known, this research can be regarded as an important social action.

Launching the result and disseminate data –

While the completion of the study, as well as dissemination of the study results, was a huge way forward in addressing domestic violence against women in Viet Nam, the study is not an end in itself. There is no doubt that more needs to be done to end domestic violence against women so that women,

² A debriefing questionnaire was distributed to all field workers three months after the fieldwork had finished.

men, girls and boys can have a healthy life, free from violence. This will contribute to the healthy development of Viet Nam.

The implementation of the study, as well as dissemination of the results, was a very meaningful first step in addressing domestic violence. It raised the awareness of many people involved, including the respondents, field workers, general public, policy makers, and colleagues from relevant organizations who learned about the survey and the key findings. The study also strengthened the capacity of officials and data collectors in carrying out a survey on domestic violence.

The study findings, as well as the raw data, should be further utilized by various partners in efforts to end violence against women in Viet Nam. Based on the lessons from this study, further research may be conducted to identify various factors or environments where women are more or less likely to suffer from domestic violence, or where women are more or less likely to seek support.

As Viet Nam strengthens its efforts in addressing domestic violence against women and gender-based violence, it is important to develop comprehensive and integrated policies and institutional frameworks that will enable Viet Nam to better respond to domestic violence and gender-based violence. This requires the strong leadership of the State Management Agency on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control, as well as strong collaboration among the relevant agencies in terms of implementing the laws, policies and programs, monitoring the progress by regularly collecting evidence-based data, and evaluating results.

Increased evidence generated through various research conducted within the Joint Programme was utilized to advocate for developing new policies and interventions to address gender inequalities and gender-based violence. The findings from the National Study on Domestic Violence, such as prevalence rates, were used when developing key messages and communication materials for further awareness raising and advocacy. With advocacy backed up by evidence, there has been increased attention on domestic violence prevention 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.

Research and secondary analysis from the raw data have been used to promote gender-based violence programming in Viet Nam in all related events. Intervention models on domestic violence prevention and response were developed based on the findings in selected provinces for nationwide application. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, in collaboration with the General Statistics Office, is planning to implement a repeat survey on domestic violence in the next few years to assess the progress in addressing domestic violence in Viet Nam.