

Research, practice and evaluation: Making the links

Round Table

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Summary

Data on violence against women and family violence is generally lacking given that these problems are rather hidden since they mainly occur in private. Furthermore, gender bias in many societies often discourages women from reporting violence.

Short- and long-term objectives are required to increase data availability. This approach involves:

- Awareness-building and training to make institutions more responsive to needs identified by research.
- Skills training and micro-credit schemes to enhance women's economic independence, rights awareness, and confidence. Activities must also involve men to prevent violence against empowered women resulting from jealousy or fear.
- Complementing patriarchal values on which institutions are based with female values so that women can also be recognized and benefit.
- Re-socializing boys and men so as to break the cycle of violence perpetuated by socialized ideas of masculinity and femininity.

It is difficult to find victims who will share their traumatic experiences since such data must be collected in an environment that is often hidden and hostile to the issue of violence against women. Therefore most surveys cannot realistically have a truly representative population sample and are most useful as qualitative assessment tools.

Effective violence against women surveys require:

- Well-trained and supported fieldworkers and partners to provide proper legal, medical, and counselling assistance and ensure follow-up.
- Training researchers, police, and justice system workers on gender issues and gender-based violence.
- Improving data collection and maintenance of institutional data systems so that surveys can be repeated over time to assess the impact of policies and programmes.

Discussion

One participant raises the use of the word "survivor" instead of "victim".

The many values of data collection are discussed. NGOs can use questionnaires to assess what types of violence women face and use data to improve their services to assist these women. Schools can use data collected to educate children. Data can be used to demonstrate to the general public that a problem *does* exist and to women that they are not alone in their experiences of abuse. Data should also be used to lobby government decision-making.

Most of UN-Habitat's work is in urban centers. In South Africa, most NGOs are concentrated in only a few urban centers, failing to support women in more isolated communities.

The concern of "solving" violence in homes by removing women and putting them in shelters is raised. Such a reactive approach further removes women from their existing support networks. Furthermore, the state controls shelters and thus can require "economic eligibility" and decide which women stay where.

Conclusions

- Awareness-building needs to be done with women to make them re-examine their socialized definition and attitude towards "love" (ex., changing the acceptance of "he beats me because he loves me.")
- Problems must be addressed as problems for the whole community, rather than blaming or putting all of the responsibility on one group. Programs that only target men's behaviour or are forced upon men may cause backlash and only change the form of abuse used against women.
- We need new community-based approaches which focus on strengthening families and a sense of community by building on traditional values. This way, communities will come to share responsibility for problems that affect all citizens.
- Local leadership and mobilization are of vital importance in involving community members in reaching consensus on approaches and creating collective solutions to local problems.

Recommendations

- Government lobbying should be supported by data collected through local victimization surveys and safety audits.
- Work must involve both men and women and be community-based - ex., local residents should conduct victimization surveys in their own communities.

- Local community leaders must be sensitized to the issues of domestic violence and use their traditional leadership to influence community attitudes to no longer tolerate violent behaviour.
- Programs that seek to empower women need to be invested in rather than merely removing women from dangerous situations.
- Individual, parental, school, group, and community strategies must be developed which promote cultures of peace, rather than socialize cultures of violence.
- Public education and awareness-building should focus on cultural context and progressive parenting skills, partly through men's promotion of equal gender relations within the family.
- Children must be taught to be non-violent in ways that re-construct ideas of feminine and masculine identities and roles.
- Schools must do more to promote a peaceful society by working to end harassment, bullying, and intimidation.
- Alternatives to violent behaviour such as physical recreation need to be promoted.
- Local NGOs and national government must do more to address the needs of women in remote or isolated communities.