

## **Violence against Women Surveys Practice, Implementation and Decision-Making**

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### **Summary**

Data on violence against women and family violence is generally lacking given that these problems are rather hidden, mainly occurring in private. Furthermore, gender bias in many societies often reduces women's 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/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 on gender issues and gender-based violence as well as 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.

### **The problem of violence against women**

Violence against women is a root problem in our societies that contributes to and causes crime and violence in the community at large and reduces social, economic and political opportunities for women. It is perceived to be the result of the subordinate

position of women in our patriarchal societies. Violence against women occurs in public places but most often in private spheres and has multiple forms. UN-HABITAT, Safer Cities Program, recognizes four main types of violence against women: physical, sexual, economic and emotional abuse. Tackling this problem is particularly crucial with regard to crime prevention as research has shown that children who experience domestic violence, either as witnesses or as direct victims, are at a much higher risk of becoming involved in violent and criminal activities themselves in later life, both as husbands/partners and in public life, which creates a cycle of violence that hampers national development in general and mainly the participation of women as well as the enjoyment of their rights.

### **Some interesting data**

I will now share some interesting data with you:

- 1) A Canadian study shows that males coming from homes with domestic violence are 10 times more likely to beat their own wives than those who come from families without such abuse. Specifically, being abused or neglected as a child increases the likelihood of arrest as a juvenile by 59%, as an adult by 28% and for a violent crime by 30%.
- 2) An international average of 10 to 15% of women report being forced to have sex with their intimate partner.
- 3) Forty to 60% of known sexual assaults within the family are committed against girls aged 15 years and younger, regardless of region or culture.
- 4) An estimated 60 million women are missing from the world population statistics due to sex-selective abortion, female infanticide and neglect of girl children.
- 5) In Canada, 29% of women report being physically abused by their partner. In Japan, 59% of women reported this. In India, 45% of men acknowledge physically abusing their wives. In Uganda, 41% of men report so.
- 6) Over 47% of all murder cases that occurred in Kenya in 2001 involved husbands murdering their wives as a result of domestic violence.

Furthermore, there are many important differences between countries in the South and those in the North, which I would like to highlight:

- 1) The subordination of women is much more profound in the South: the traditional role models for men and women are still much stronger. For instance, in Kenya and Papua, New Guinea, wife beating is normal and accepted behavior, and is often even expected both by women and men. Women perceive being beaten as a fact of life: it inevitably comes with being a woman. Many are convinced that it can't be changed. Another shocking but illustrative example from Papua, New Guinea: during a court case a man was known to be beating a particular woman, which therefore meant that she was his wife, according to the judge. This is to show you that many countries in the South have a much longer way to go.
- 2) Governments in the South mostly do put gender issues on their agenda, but often mainly to apply for funding from the donor community and not because they support and understand the issue. As a result, implementation and follow up are limited.
- 3) The definition of youth and children. Traditionally, youths as such are not recognized as a defined age group in many cultures. For instance, in the Eastern Highlands of Papua, New Guinea it is believed that the soul of a newborn child is taken away by the sun during the first sunset after the baby's birth. Therefore, children and youth do not exist. Upon the first menstruation, the girl child is given back to the community by the son as an adult woman. The boy child returns as an adult man after an initiation ritual. As a result, youth policies formulated under pressure from the donor community are not properly implemented and do not receive priority because the concept is not understood: it conflicts with their cultural background.
- 4) The high numbers of illiterate people and the low levels of education, as well as the extreme economic hardships and limited access to urban services in many countries in the South, create difficulties for rights awareness creation, women empowerment and participation.

- 5) Especially in the South, governments, police and the criminal justice system refuse to address domestic and family violence because they consider it as a private family matter in which public authorities should not interfere.

## **A hidden problem**

Tackling the problem of violence against women and domestic violence is a prerequisite for addressing community safety in general and women's safety in particular. Unfortunately, violence against women still remains a hidden problem. It mostly takes place in private circumstances, within families and homes, which prevents victims from reporting (fear of retaliation, shame, embarrassment, guilty feelings, and economic dependency). Most societies are furthermore characterized by a gender bias against women, which further reduces options for women to report and address the problem.

## **The long-term approach**

As a result, data on violence against women and family violence are lacking. A four pillared approach combining long and short-term approaches and objectives is required to ensure availability of these types of data. The approach for the long run involves:

- 1) The creation of awareness amongst men, women children, youths, through churches, NGO's, CBO's clinics, schools, the media and government in order to alleviate cultural and social norms that contribute to gender inequality, and to reduce social barriers to make it easier for people to report.
- 2) The training of and awareness creation amongst police, justice and government officials as well as decision makers to build capacity on how to prevent and address gender based violence, how to assist victims and offenders, to build data gathering and management capacity in order to make these institutions more responsive to the needs of the community.
- 3) The empowerment of women through skills training and micro-credit schemes to enhance their economic independence, rights awareness and self-confidence. These activities have to involve men, husbands and the

communities at large to prevent violence taking place against these empowerment women as a result of jealousy or feelings of fear amongst men, which I have seen happening in Burkina Faso and Kenya.

- 4) A re-assessment of economic, social, political and government institutions to complement the male values on which these are based with female values, so that women can thrive in them as well and are not chased away by the prevalence of masculinity that makes most affirmative action initiatives fruitless.
- 5) The re-socialization of men and boys, whom society teaches about masculinity and femininity in such a way that maintains a cycle of violence against women. Therefore, all strategies that aim to address violence against women have to include men and address their re-socialization to be successful.

## **Data collection**

The approach that can deliver quick results involves research and data collection. However, data collection should remain an important aspect of any long-term strategy as well. Research will take place in an environment that is often hostile to women's issues in general and especially to the issue of violence against women. As a result and because of the fact that most abuse occurs at home, it is difficult to find the target group and especially to have them talk about their often-traumatic experiences. To be effective and inclusive, violence against women surveys therefore, have to use well-trained fieldworkers, an exhaustive questionnaire capturing all forms of violence against women, follow a process that allows respondents to take their time to respond and go to counseling. This means that most violence against women surveys will not be able to approach a representative sample of the national or urban population. Interviewing a truly representative sample would in this regard exceed all reasonable budgets and timeframes. Violence against women surveys, are most effective as qualitative assessment tools.

## **Requirements of surveys**

In summary violence against women surveys require:

- 1) Well-trained and well-prepared fieldworkers that can offer basic emotional and practical support and counseling, as well as legal and medical referral;
- 2) The mobilization and involvement of local NGO's and CBO's as well as hospitals and the police and government for immediate referral of the respondents, to offer proper legal, medical and counseling assistance in case of need, and to ensure follow up to the recommendations of the study;
- 3) Adaptation of the questionnaire to the local culture, context and language;
- 4) Counseling support to the fieldworkers;
- 5) The training of local research institutions, the police and justice on family violence and data collection, as well as improving institutional data systems so that surveys can be repeated at a later stage to assess the impact of implemented policies and programmes and to build capacity for the maintenance of data systems.

## **Mobilization of partners and resources**

Furthermore, violence against women surveys raises expectations among women and especially the respondents. Therefore, it is essential that resources and partners be mobilized prior to the survey to ensure implementation of its recommendations. Partners that need to be sensitized and mobilized include: communities, schools, churches, NGO's, CBO's, police, justice, government and hospitals. Efforts that include short term and long term approaches simultaneously are most successful.

## **Options for immediate action**

- 1) Violence against women surveys;
- 2) Women's safety audits;
- 3) Media and awareness campaigns targeting men, women and youths;

- 4) Promoting and facilitating women's groups, improving the political as well as economic representation of women in societies;
- 5) Inclusion of gender issues, family violence and gender based violence issues in police training curricula, school curricula etc.;
- 6) Training of parliamentarians and local level representatives on gender issues, family violence and violence against women;
- 7) Strengthening, promoting and replicating successful initiatives of NGO's, CBO's nationally and internationally;
- 8) Women's wards in hospitals where abused women can turn to for medical, legal, police as well as counseling assistance.