

**Meeting of the Friends of the Chair of the United Nations  
Statistical Commission on Statistical Indicators on  
Violence against Women  
9 - 11 December 2009  
Aguascalientes, Mexico**

**Notes on the Violence against Women indicators<sup>1</sup>**

By ISTAT<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Issued without formal editing.

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## How to measure violence against women

1. As I said in New York at the 52nd Commission on the Status of Women organized with the Statistical Commission, Violence against women is a widespread phenomenon occurring in every continent, country and culture. It is a very complex phenomenon, difficult to measure as it is hidden in many countries: women don't report to the police the violence. If we use police statistics, we will have strong biases in estimates. These facts emerge in all violence against women surveys.
2. I think we need an international hard work to define standards and methodologies, and I also think that in order to know well violence against women, we need to design a survey on violence against women possibly carried out in the context of Official Statistics: we have to assure that data are collected according to UN principles of official statistics which include equal dissemination to all users and confidentiality. The involvement of NSI increases the credibility and quality of the studies, as NSI are perceived to be independent and competent in all aspects regarding the samples.
3. The proposed indicators provide a simple summary of a complex picture, particularly useful for policy makers. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to synthesize the complexity of violence against women in few indicators. For this reason I think that the set of proposed indicators can't be the final list of indicators to measure violence against women, but it is the best starting point at the moment in the process of providing indicators useful to monitor trends and progress in addressing and fighting violence against women, in terms of the impact of the taken measures. It's the best starting point because it takes into account the actual results of researches and surveys carried out by National Statistic Institute or research centres.
4. Now, I think we have to focus in specifying the conceptual and methodology framework to collect sounded and meaningful data, but first of all I think we have to add, in the core set of indicators, the percentage of hidden physical and sexual violence.
5. Firstly, I want to focus on two questions.
  - 1) First of all, since the selected indicators are especially relevant, how is possible to calculate internationally harmonized indicators?
  - 2) Second: should we limit the investigation only at the area of physical sexual violence or should we open to other areas?
6. In the following notes, I will focus on these two points.

### **1. First point: how to build harmonized indicators**

7. In order to harmonize the indicators we need common definitions and an accurate and appropriate methodology to collect data. In the following, I give you my suggestions.

- **1.1 Violence definition**

8. I think that to carry out the indicators' subsets, the violence definition have to be shared at an international level, both for physical and sexual violence.
9. Accordingly to our experience it's important to introduce the threat in the concept of physical violence, because its impact on victims' life is strong. Often they are not separated violent forms but they are part of a more wide violent context, and are helpful in defining it. Also considering the consequences of violence, it arises that victims suffering threats present a very severe framework.
10. In our experience physical violence is defined by different behaviours as to be threatened to be physically hurt in a way that frightened the woman, to be hit, pushed or grabbed or twisted the arm or pulled the hair in a way that hurt or frightened the woman, to be slapped, kicked, bitted or hit with a fist, attempts to strangle or to suffocate the woman, to be burned or scalded on purpose, to use or threaten to use a knife or gun or to be physically abused in any other way not already mentioned.
11. To compare indicators on physical violence we should agree if these are the fundamental aspect of the definition.
12. For sexual violence we considered rape, defined as to be forced into sexual intercourse by being threatening, holding down, or hurting in some way, or forced into other types of sexual intercourse, for example anal sex also using hands or objects, or oral sex, that is using mouth; attempted rape; to be forced into sexual activity with someone else, including being forced to have sex for money or in exchange for goods, to be sexually abused in other way not already mentioned.
13. Furthermore, for not underestimating partners violence, we tested it is very important to ask more questions regarding sexual violence in intimate relationship. In our survey, as already in WHO VAWS, two questions were added: one regarding sexual intercourses women had with own partners, also when they did not really wanted it, because she feared his reaction; the other one regarding situations in which partners forced into some sexual activities women found degrading or humbling.
14. Considering sexual harassment by a non-partner, our definition concerned to be touched sexually when women did not want it in a way that was distressing for her.
15. In this case, it is also opportune to decide if these aspects have to be part of sexual violence or not.

- **1.2. Important aspects to be defined that need more reasoning about**

- **1.2.a What about violence repetitiveness**

16. About repetitiveness, as discussed in Geneva expert meeting group (October 2007), incidence indicator is not the best way to address this aspect. I think we need to better define the meaning of what we call "1, few, many times of violence". We should not leave to victims the decision regarding which is the difference between few and many times. This is too much subjective: common

parameters and examples have to be found to express the concept. Anyway, I think this issue requires a really deeper reasoning about.

- **1.2.b. How to define violence severity (moderate/severe)?**

17. It is not an easy task to define violence severity and to assess the best way to collect it. Many indicators can be created, many variables can be used. Furthermore, different indicators often do not go in the same directions. Different countries use different tools, the conflict tactic scale, the number of times violence occurred, or the injuries and above all the graduation of the type of injuries, or the feeling of being in danger, the severity perceived, or the use of medicines and other kind of therapies to cope with violence.
18. Pros and cons can be underlined for each of them. The feeling of life in danger is very good for policy issues, it could be considered as a predictor of more at risk situations. The injuries and their typologies seems to be more objective measures of severity, but sometimes there aren't, also in very serious situations as, for instance, in attempted strangulation. Perhaps the best is to use a combination of the above indicators. However, I think this is one of the aspects that surely requires a deeper reasoning.

- **1.3. How to collect data**

- **1.3.a Contents**

19. To survey behaviours and the screening technique. Surveying violence means to choose the best questions and their wording and sequence to guarantee valid estimates. To help disclosure the best way is to ask behaviours, asking women through different questions, one for each violence form, organized in a screening, where questions are ranked from the lowest to the highest severity.
20. In Italy, we had seven questions for physical violence and eight questions for sexual violence.
21. The battery on sexual violence, unlike the physical violence one, started with the most severe form, rape, because women otherwise can wrongly report it in any other form of sexual violence.
22. How many screenings. According to me, the best is to ask the screening violence questions both for actual and former partner, to help women in focusing on their present and past intimate relationship, but if space and costs need to reduce the questionnaire length at least two screenings have to be provided, one for partner and one for non partner. Different experiences are found in the international studies.
23. If a separate screening for violence by partner is not planned domestic violence is very underestimated.

24. Who is a partner?. Another critical point is how to define the partner. Also in this case the meaning is not shared between countries. It is easy to answer an husband or a cohabitant, but it's already less clear when we speak of a boyfriend or a fiancé. In addition, what to say regarding a date?
25. When we say a partner, do we mean the same concept? Do we refer to the same situation in all cultures?

- **1.3.b. Methodology**

26. Who has to be interviewed?. Regarding the population target, I think all women of 16teen years old and older.
27. The sample. Attention may be paid to the sample; random and representative samples have to be designed to assure data quality, and their sizes have to be adequately numerous.
28. The survey mode. The interview technique is very important and has a big impact on data results, but it's not easy to harmonize, since countries have different situations. The telephone mode is good because it is cheaper and guarantee more women's safety. However, it can be used only in industrialized countries or where telephone lines are widespread over population.
29. However, beside the interviewing mode chosen, attention must be give to women's safety, as a priority.
30. Which kind of survey?. Ad hoc survey as well as module survey can be planned? The ad hoc surveys are preferable, but also well-designed model can be suitable. This means a deep reasoning regarding the main important survey topics, the appropriate methodology, the necessary balance between the module and the ongoing survey and which is the best survey to add the module on VAW. Our experience shows that victimization surveys are not the best to add the VAW module, while health or demographic surveys, surveys on women conditions, where the attention is not on crime, are better.
31. What about the interviewer. Female interviewers are the best, but since in some countries some difficulties can arise, for problems of acknowledgement or of safety, a man can come with them in the case of face to face interviews, but the interview have to take place in a private setting. Many importance must have done to recruitment and training.
32. Other methodological aspects. Right because the topic sensitiveness, guidelines regarding women safety and ethical issues have to be prepared. Best practices have to be proposed for these crucial aspects.

## **2. Second point: more proposals on indicators**

33. The proposed violence indicators set is a good starting point, but I think we need to measure more information, not only physical, sexual and intimate partner violence. I'm asking myself if there is the possibility of extending the proposed indicators set and if this is the right moment for doing it; if yes, I think there are some important new areas that should be investigated throughout new relevant indicators. If you agree, the indicator's list has to be updated and we have to decide who is going to do that.
34. Briefly, I think we can consider the proposed indicators as a core set to be implemented, with the addition of the hidden violence indicator and I suggest that a wider number of relevant indicators should be considered by the countries which can afford them.
35. Here is my proposal about the new areas. I would like to point out the importance of studying also the psychological and economic violence and stalking. In Italy we collect all of the above, but I think stalking can be the priority, because in many cases it is a precursor of much more serious violence and homicides.
36. Psychological violence is instead fundamental because it is strongly associated with physical and sexual violence.
37. Good indicators for psychological violence and stalking could be:
- % of women who suffered psychological violence on women with a current or former partner;
  - % of women who suffered at least one stalking episode on women with a former partner.
38. I believe there are sets of reliable questions to collect both psychological violence and stalking, and many of them are already used in international researches. Of course shared definitions have to be pointed out too (if you want I can make a proposal).
39. Another important topic is violence in childhood, but as it is very difficult to carry out surveys regarding violence in childhood and to survey young people and children at the time violence occurred, retrospective strategies can be used. An indicator can be the percentage of women sexually abused before 16teen years old.
40. This indicator is used in the official Italian survey, but also in other countries, because it's easier to tell ex-post the childhood violence experience, rather than to speak about it at the time of occurrence.
41. Violence in childhood is also an important topic to study, because it is a significant predictor of violence suffered in adult life.
42. Other very important topics to be considered relevant for policy issues, but not present at the moment in the basic indicators set, are:

- assessing risk factors;
- assessing the extent to which women recognize the suffered violence as a crime, in particular when intimate partner violence is considered - this indicator is particularly useful to monitor social and cultural change;
- the percentage of hidden violence.

### **3. Further notes regarding regional indicators**

43. Regarding regional indicators, I think that “bride kidnapping” could be added to complete the list, since it is very important for some countries, as it emerge in the Kyrgyzstan experience; while the age limit for “early marriage”, could be better assessed at less than 16 years.

### **4. Conclusions**

44. The proposed indicators are already calculated in my country, as well as it is possible to calculate the ones suggested by me. In Italy, we carried out a survey in 2006 on VAW, that allow the calculation of these indicators. The survey has been planned in accord with the main international violence researches and answers to the political needs came up from the Italian government. The survey was possible thanks to the Department of Rights and Equal Opportunities funds and to the main Institutions support.
45. Looking at the UNECE VAW inventory, it seems to me that data allow the creation of the most proposed indicators, but it is important to study the underlined methodology of each research.

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## Comments by Linda Laura Sabbadini

The Friends of Chairs Group (FOC) should not limit their task in approving the proposed indicators to be presented by the Statistical Commission to the General UN Assembly, also limiting the number of such indicators.

The Friends of Chairs Group should express the need to improve indicators regarding also other types of violence, as it was underlined by the many contributors by email.

We can distinguish three strategic areas

1. The first is the one regarding more established and well defined indicators, that is indicators already used and experimented in many countries, already reviewed in the Geneva Meeting, and approved by the many contributors received by email. Such indicators measure physical, sexual and intimate partner violence. Such indicators can be approved and inserted in the proposal, after having considered the needed adjustments and improvements
2. The second area regards some topics as psychological and economic violence in intimate partnerships, stalking, FGM indicators, early marriages indicators and femicide by partners or relatives. There is already a know-how in various countries and International Organization, but FOC should make more efforts in topic's definition and consequently in defining the corresponding indicators. We can consider these indicators in a second moment, after a more deeper study. Italy is interested in contributing to such area.
3. The third area regards more difficult to address phenomenon, as there is not enough experience in collecting the corresponding data. The corresponding topics need deeper study and future long term work. They are: women and human trafficking, childhood violence, etc.

Considering the first set of indicators, here are some remarks to be inserted:

1. regarding paragraph 7: 'The Friends of the Chair subjected these proposed indicators to a rigorous technical evaluation, taking into account national experiences in collecting, processing and disseminating statistics pertaining to the violence against women, bearing in mind that most of the current national statistical systems ~~are not able to~~ don't routinely capture this phenomenon ~~in a reliable manner~~. The Friends of the Chair are also suggesting ways of how the compilation of the various indicators may be improved, for instance by proposing ~~more~~ rigorous concepts and definitions or by developing the appropriate sources, generally population surveys. Administrative records can be useful to collect data on femicides.'  
*I changed the last sentence to underline the importance of surveys as the only way to measure and know the unreported violence.*
2. regarding paragraph 9 the term easy should be changed in feasible
3. as regards the draft preliminary report paragraph 15 and the proposed set of indicators: it is not possible to cancel intimate partner violence from the basic indicators, as it represents the main type of violence against women in every countries. Such indicator needs a specific visibility. Only having a specific indicator on it, it's possible to measure it. It's not a problem of overlapping, indicators measure different things and don't need to be mutually exclusive, notwithstanding they are included in the overall indicators of physical and sexual violence by any author. We need a global indicator on intimate violence (physical or sexual)
4. considering paragraph 16 and 17: ' list of behavioral items **incidents**.'  
*The problem here is to define physical or sexual violence identifying different violent behaviours and not incidents.*

5. paragraph 17: I do not agree in measuring sexual harassment, indeed for comparability purposes the indicator must focus on the main and serious form of sexual violence, that is rape and attempted rape. Indeed I think it is not possible to collect sexual harassment, as their perceived importance is so different between countries. They are also less significant than the others and less important from a policy point of view. If we decide to insert sexual harassment we need to consider two separate indicators: one for sexual violence, as described in the draft document, and the other on rape and attempted rape only.
6. considering paragraph 20 in proposed set of indicators:
- The indicator on intimate partner violence should be reinserted, because it is a global indicator on physical and sexual violence.
  - Sexual violence indicators: following the above point 4, these indicators should be split in an indicator of sexual violence and another on rape and attempted rape one.
  - I don't agree that 'number of occurrences' is a good measure of intensity, it should be changed with 'frequency'.  
Issues exist as well with the counting of repeat victimizations. Data show evidence that people tend to round estimates of the number of times victimized to a number ending in 5 or 10 or corresponding to a fraction of the reference period, such as daily, weekly, or monthly. For frequency we mean the result of asking to the victim if they suffered violence "1, 2, a few, many times" and we should give in advance common parameters of what we consider few and many times.
  - indicators on physical and sexual violence should not be by type.
  - For each collected indicators, the percentage of reporting/unreporting to police behaviour should be asked.
7. Considering paragraph 21: point c) the list of behaviours regarding physical violence should not be divided in 'moderate' and 'severe', but there are some of these type of incidents that can result in very severe injuries. According to me, I have to ask the simple behavioural and then ask the injuries or severity. For example in our data survey some victims consider slaps very serious and suffered in a situation in which they feared for their life. Furthermore I do not agree on the table by type of violence and severity, because we need not such details about severity by type of violence. Different types of violence are needed to build the overall indicator of physical violence, while severity is measured considering at least one severe event. Regarding the definition of physical violence I agree that it is an act that inflicts physical harm and I agree with the following list:
- i. Hit with something
  - ii. Kicked, bit or hit
  - iii. Slapped
  - iv. Pushed, grabbed, shoved
  - v. Threatened to hit
  - vi. Beat
  - vii. Chocked
  - viii. Threatened with knife, gun, other weapon
  - ix. Assaulted with knife, gun, other weapon
  - x. Other

Considering paragraph 21: point d) I do not agree with your point xiii and xiv, as I think this aspect doesn't concern this indicator, but the different modalities violence can happen.

Considering paragraph 21: point e) I think that "Immediate former intimate partner" and "Former intimate partner" (xx and xxi points) have to be joint together in a unique point.

8. The topic of severity needs a deeper reasoning. There are some aspects of severity that have not yet considered: the graduation of the type of injuries, or the feeling of being in danger, the severity perceived, or the use of medicines and other kind of therapies to cope with violence. As underlined in our previous comment, pros and cons can be individuated for each of them. I think the best is to use a combination of the above indicators.
9. regarding the end of paragraph 21, in the draft document we read: 'The Friends of the Chair point to specialized surveys at national level as the most appropriate vehicle towards achieving this goal'. *I think that due to resources problems, also well designed module survey should be considered a good tool too. Consequently the sentence should be modified as follows:* 'The Friends of the Chair point to specialized surveys at national level as the most appropriate vehicle towards achieving this goal. Nevertheless due to resources problems well designed module survey can be considered a good tool too. This means an deep reasoning regarding the main important survey topics, the appropriate methodology, the necessary balance between the module and the ongoing survey and which is the best survey to add the module on VAW'.
10. considering paragraph 23, 'possible' is to be changed in 'fundamental'

#### **Future work**

The first step is to present to the Statistical Commission this document of the Friends of the Chair Group as the first report, and not as the final one. The first report provide meaningful and strategic indications about sexual, physical and intimate partner violence against women.

The Statistical Commission can present the set of indicators on sexual, physical and intimate partner violence to the General UN Assembly with the warning it is an initial set that is to be enriched in the future, following the actual work in progress.

The second step is to propose to the Statistical Commission to maintain the FOC in supporting the UN Statistical Division (UNSD) in working on indicators related to the second and third area we indicated at the beginning of this document. The FOC goes on in working identifying topics by subjects and attributing the corresponding work to its members, accordingly to their specific skills. Furthermore FOC should organise a meeting when the work regarding the second indicators area defined above produces significant results.

#### **The document structure**

To a better understanding of the FOC document I propose to re-organise the structure of it as follows: in the first part of it, as it was already done, results of Geneva Expert Meeting are to be presented. In the second part, before the comment on indicators, fundamental types of violence to be measured are to be identified (they are indicated in the first area defined above) and defined. In the third part it should be underlined that surveys are the strategic tool to collect data on violence. Such surveys are to be methodologically described and accurately planned in the manual, but some methodological notes are to be inserted also in the FOC document (as for example point 22).

The fourth part of the document should underline quality characteristics indicators, as point 9-12 of the draft FOC document. Furthermore it should identify indicators as described in the first area, with the corresponding notes and warnings provided by the FOC member (for example details by age, frequency, severity, un-reporting behaviours, etc).