
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

Indicators to measure violence against women
Set of proposed international indicators on all forms and manifestation of
violence against women
Comments and suggestions¹

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¹ Issued without formal editing.

Introduction

1. Currently Bulgarian official statistics on violence against women relies on the service-based data provided by the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Justice. Apparently service-based data collection does not reveal the whole magnitude of the phenomenon due to the victim's reluctance to report these crimes to the police. In response to the growing public attention to the violence against women as a form of discrimination a number of studies on violence against women have been carried out by a variety of institutions, including NGOs, universities, international agencies and women's rights organizations. Many of these studies have been conducted for the institution's own purposes and the data collected cannot be meaningfully comparable. However, the experience accumulated so far enables us to provide comments on the proposed set of international indicators on all forms and manifestations of violence against women and to put forward suggestions on its extension and methodological improvement. Moreover, currently Bulgarian NIS is working on the organization of a regular data collection on violence against women based on population surveys, which would allow changes over time to be measured, thus strengthening the knowledge base to inform policy and strategy development.

1. General comments

2. In general, Bulgaria strongly supports the proposed set of indicators on violence against women and views it as a significant step towards establishing an easily collected and internationally comparable set of information measuring the scale, prevalence and severity of violence against women.
3. General versus specific indicators on violence against women: There are many different forms of violence against women – physical, sexual, psychological and economic. Some of them are experienced by women globally (in most of the countries) such as domestic violence; others are pertinent to harmful traditional practices, including early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting. Having in mind that some forms of violence against women are more universally prevalent, while other forms may be more prevalent in some geographic regions than in others, we support the proposal to focus firstly on physical and sexual violence as the most common forms of violence against women and then as a long-term objective, to work towards measuring all forms of violence against women.
4. Reference period: In our opinion two reference periods should be used for measuring the prevalence of violence against women: over the respondents' lifetime and over the last year. For

the sake of methodological clarity and consistency, we recommend defining the last year as “the last 12 months”. As regards measuring the prevalence of violence over lifetime, we consider this information extremely valuable in assessing risk factors of violence. In this respect, it seems important to get estimates of the both violence over entire lifetime and violence since adulthood. Life-time measures are important for revealing the magnitude of the problem, and for awareness-raising and advocacy purposes. This measure is particularly pertinent to those forms of violence against women that occur only once in a life-time, or are unlikely to occur more than once in a life-time. This measure has certain advantages for use in a survey, and in the early stages of development of data collection methodologies.

5. Data collection: NSI of Bulgaria supports the view that population-based surveys, dedicated ones or embedded in general social surveys are more useful in terms of exhaustiveness compared to the service-based data collection. Administrative sources as Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Justice can be used only in the cases of registered act of violence and convicted perpetrators. In this way, those sources usually underestimate the prevalence of the phenomenon due to the low rate at which women report to the police the cases of violence. Another administrative source that could be used for this purpose is the population register that contains data on deaths and divorces by causes, but they constitute an insignificant part of all cases of violence against women. In sum, both population-based and service-based data collections should be considered complementary in measuring violence against women.
6. Target population: In Bulgaria, population surveys usually target persons aged 15 years and older and this seems to be the most often defined target population in social surveys over the world.

2. Specific comments (by indicator)

2.1 Physical violence

- The percentage of women (over the total number of women) who have experienced physical violence during the last year.
7. According to various surveys conducted by different institutions, physical violence is one of the more common forms of violence against women in Bulgaria. Therefore, from Bulgarian perspective, physical violence is relevant topic and there should be a key international indicator measuring its prevalence. We suggest to disaggregate this indicator further by severity (moderate/severe); perpetrator (intimate/other relative/other known person/stranger/state

authority); and frequency (one/few/many time(s)). In our opinion, it is necessary to elaborate further the definition of severity in order to make it operational one. For example, the respondent should be asked whether the case of violence has resulted in any injury such as cuts and broken bones or to make reference to the national definition of injury stipulated in the legal framework.

- The percentage of women (over the total number of women) who have experienced physical violence during lifetime.

8. From our perspective it is a valuable indicator but it also should be disaggregated further by severity (moderate/severe); perpetrator (intimate/other relative/other known person/stranger/state authority); and frequency (one/few/many time(s)). There is no definition of physical violence in the report probably because the preferred approach by the authors to measure the prevalence of violence is to provide a list of behavioral items rather than asking simply whether the victims have been subject of violence. We also share the view that the list of behavioral items helps to disclose information which women are naturally reluctant to share.

2.2 Sexual violence

9. This form of violence against women is especially difficult to measure by the official statistics because of its sensitivity. Many women do not report or even talk on the acts of domestic violence or sexual abuse inside and outside home. Although NSIs have the mandate to collect and produce official statistics, very often NGOs are more appropriate to carry out population-based survey in this field. NSIs could provide methodological support to NGOs but given the sensitivity of the survey subject, the latter might be more successful in the interviewing of women on their sexual problems at home and work. If women do not want to report the violence against them to the authority it would be better for them to talk to an ordinary woman than to a NSI official. The wording and consequences of questions in the interview aimed at measuring sexual violence are crucial in order to get unbiased estimates of the phenomenon. For example, the experience from Bulgaria indicates that the women tend to report rape as a different form of sexual violence if it is at the end in the list of items of sexual violence. Therefore, it is crucial to develop a manual (guidelines) or at least a collection of good practices considering the issues of preparing questionnaires in order to help countries in carrying out surveys on violence against women.

- The percentage of women (over the total number of women) who have experienced rape/sexual assault during the last year.

10. This indicator should be disaggregated further by perpetrator (intimate/other relative/other known person/stranger/state authority); and frequency (one/few/many time(s)).
- The percentage of women (over the total number of women) who have experienced rape/sexual assault during lifetime.
11. This indicator should be disaggregated further by perpetrator (intimate/other relative/other known person/stranger/state authority); and frequency (one/few/many time(s)).

2.3 Intimate partner violence

12. Intimate partner violence, usually referred to as domestic violence, is the most common form of violence experienced by women in Bulgaria. As the intimate partner violence is a part of the physical and sexual violence against women, the critical issues here are to define intimate partner and to specify the reference period for the relationship. Data on the indicator could be collected only through population-based survey. Another important aspect concerning measuring intimate partner violence is to guarantee that there is no overlap and double counting having in mind that it is a type of physical or sexual violence disaggregated by perpetrator.
- The percentage of women (over the total number of women who have ever had an intimate partner) who have experienced physical or sexual violence by current or former partner during the last year.
13. This indicator should be disaggregated further by frequency (one/few/many time(s)).
- The percentage of women (over the total number of women who have ever had an intimate partner) who have experienced physical or sexual violence by current or former partner during lifetime.
14. This indicator should be disaggregated further by frequency (one/few/many time(s)).

2.4 Harmful practices

- The percentage of women (over the total number of women) subjected to female genital mutilation/cutting.

15. This indicator would not be relevant indicator of violence against women in Bulgaria.
- The percentage of women (over the total number of women) whose age at marriage is below 18 years.
16. In Bulgaria, the marriages between 16 and 18 are allowed with parents' permission. Data on such marriages are collected by the population register. Concerning marriages below 16, they are not allowed in the country. Such marriages are common in Roma communities living in certain areas in Bulgaria.
17. All indicators on the violence against women require age limits for the interviewed women.
18. At the end, we would like to stress that for a country as Bulgaria where commonly agreed set of indicators on violence against women do not exist will benefit a lot in developing such a system and in establishing an organization for a more systematic data collection.

3. Uncovered issues

19. Human trafficking and in particular trafficking in women for sexual and other exploitation is gaining importance as a form of violence in Bulgaria. The survey "Trafficking in Human Beings – the Bulgarian Reply" funded by USAID analyzes the international conventions and Bulgarian legislation concerning trafficking in human beings, the role of state institutions in combating trafficking, Bulgarian NGOs against trafficking, categories of data collected by NGOs, methodological commentary on the data provided by NGOs, trafficking articles in the national print media, etc. According to the survey results, most victims of trafficking are women between 18 and 25 years of age. It cannot be claimed that the distribution of victims per ethnicity is different from the country average but it is more often the case for Roma among victims to have been recruited in trafficking by relatives and it is more difficult, if not impossible, for them to get away. All described instances are cases of sexual exploitation and at this stage, the term trafficking is synonymous with forcing into prostitution; in about one third of the instances described the trafficking is 'domestic'. NGOs that provide data on this issue indicate a 20–50 percent ratio of instances of domestic trafficking; as a rule, the victims are taken out of the country forcefully although with regular documents which are taken away from them by the people accompanying them.
20. The educational and economic status of the victims does not differ significantly from the country average. A considerable number of the victims have secondary (34 percent), vocational or even

21. Statistics in this area is notoriously unreliable and the data reported by various NGOs, the media or international organizations are not comparable and even with great discrepancies among them. Developing a reliable methodology for measuring prevalence of trafficking in women and girls remains to be a serious challenge for the statistical community.