

## Chapter 5

# Violence against women

**“Violence against women both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms.”**

Beijing Platform for Action

In all societies, to a greater or lesser degree, women and girls are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse that cuts across lines of income, class and culture, impeding their right to participate fully in society. Violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.<sup>1</sup> Some groups of women, such as those belonging to minority groups, indigenous women, refugee women, women migrants, those living in poverty, those in institutions or in detention, those with disabilities, elderly women, displaced women and those in situations of armed conflict, are particularly vulnerable to violence. Women may also be vulnerable to violence perpetrated by persons in positions of authority in both conflict and non-conflict situations.<sup>2</sup>

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993 defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, violence against women encompasses the following:

- a. violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;
- b. violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution; and
- c. violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.

The goal of combating and eliminating violence against women and trafficking in women was set out and elaborated as early as 1985 in the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women.<sup>4</sup> This goal has been reiterated in many international instruments thereafter, such as the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights,<sup>5</sup> the Beijing Platform for Action<sup>6</sup> and the United Nations Millennium Declaration.<sup>7</sup>

However, efforts to elaborate programmes, design intervention strategies and monitor changes to fulfil the stated objectives have been hampered by the absence or lack of adequate statistics. Recognizing the importance of data for the aforementioned purposes, the Platform for Action called on national, regional and international statistical services to develop improved data by sex and age on the victims and perpetrators of all forms of violence against women. It also called on Governments and relevant organizations to promote research, collect data and compile statistics relating to the prevalence of different forms of violence against women.<sup>8</sup> The United Nations Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality has suggested that an indicator on the prevalence of intimate partner violence be added to assess progress towards Goal 3 (promote gender equality and empower women).<sup>9</sup>

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women, as a result of national and international resolve to improve data concerning violence against women, there have been considerable improvements in statistics on intimate partner violence, that is, violence perpetrated by an intimate partner (whether married or cohabiting), a boyfriend or a former intimate partner or boyfriend. However, reliable statistics on many other forms of violence against women, including trafficking in women and girls and violence against women by agents of the State, remain scarce. This lack of data continues to be a concern at the national, regional and international levels.

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There is currently no official international data collection on violence against women

Most countries do not have an official or established system of statistics on violence against women, and there is currently no official international data collection on violence against women. However, some of the official statistics on crime and the operations of the criminal justice system regularly collected by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime from national authorities have some relevance to the study of violence against women. For example, one of the types of crime for which statistics are collected is rape; however, those statistics are not collected by sex of the victim.

## Current state of statistics

Data on violence against women may be obtained from two broad sources: surveys and administrative records

At the national level, data on violence against women may be obtained from two broad sources: surveys and administrative records (for a general description of surveys and administrative records, see “National sources of data” in the Introduction). Data may be obtained from specialized surveys that are conducted specifically to collect detailed information on violence against women, or from a general or multipurpose survey, typically through the inclusion of a module on violence against women. Data may also be obtained from administrative records, which refer to data that are generated by organizations or agencies in the exercise of their regular functions and that form the basis of administrative statistics. The most organized of the administrative statistics are those generated by the criminal justice system (in the form of police and court statistics). Other administrative records include those collected by the health sector and by various types of organizations that provide services to women who are victims of violence.

The first part of this section describes the above-mentioned sources of data for violence against women. The second part focuses on data issues relating to trafficking in women, the complexity of which demands separate consideration.

## Sources of data on violence against women

### Surveys

Population-based specialized surveys collecting detailed information on violence against women, when properly designed and conducted, provide reliable statistics on the prevalence of various forms of violence against women and girls, including those occurring in the family or within the general community. Most surveys examine in detail a woman's experience of violence, such as its nature, history, causes and consequences, thereby providing a wealth of information on the character and dynamics of the

form of violence being studied and allowing the identification of risk factors and correlates of violence. Some of the surveys are designed, in addition, to obtain a better understanding of ways in which women use the criminal justice system and social services in their communities.<sup>10</sup>

In general, specialized surveys dedicated to studying violence against women are relatively expensive. Few countries can afford to carry them out annually or at frequent intervals (i.e. every five years or less). An alternative to a specialized or full-fledged survey on violence against women is to obtain data on the issue through an existing general survey, such as a social or other multipurpose survey. This involves adding a number of questions or a module on violence against women to those surveys. The statistics on prevalence of violence obtained with this approach may not be as reliable as those obtained using specialized surveys since the relatively smaller number of questions in the former does not allow as many opportunities for disclosure of violence. However, the lower cost of that approach makes it a practical solution in many settings.

Surveys on violence against women may focus on just one type of violence, such as intimate partner violence, or cover multiple types of violence including those that occur in the household (for example, abuse of girl-children, elderly women and domestic workers and other non-spousal violence) as well as those occurring in the general community. The latter may include rape, physical assault, sexual assault and sexual harassment. The violence measured may be limited to physical violence or include sexual and/or psychological violence as well.

The extent to which surveys capture the actual prevalence of a given type of violence can vary considerably and may depend on factors such as the following:

- the type of survey, that is, whether it is designed specifically to measure one or more forms of violence against women (specialized surveys) or designed for other purposes but including some questions on violence against women as a small section or a separate module.
- the number and type of questions used to identify victims of violence (multiple questions or a single question).
- the order and wording of the questions.
- the approach for administering the survey, for example, face-to-face interview, telephone interview or self-administered questionnaire.

A problem observed in connection with statistics on violence is the considerable range of prevalence statistics obtained from different surveys, even within the same country. That is to be expected when surveys use different approaches or designs. In addition to the factors stated above, surveys may also differ in the types and forms of violence covered, the reference period used, the range of victim-perpetrator relationships included (e.g. married partners only, all intimate partners, household members only, etc.), the survey population (i.e. the target population covered, in terms of geographic, demographic and social characteristics) and other characteristics.<sup>11</sup>

The adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action has led to an increase in the number of surveys on violence against women. Several countries, including Australia, Canada and the United States, regularly conduct population-based crime victimization surveys that include questions on violence against women. Many other countries have also conducted population-based surveys that collect information on one or more types of violence against women. In all, at least 68 countries in the world have carried out a survey on violence against women since 1995, and at least 38 of those countries had a survey that covered the entire country (chart 5.1)

At present the most widely collected information from surveys on violence against women relates to intimate partner violence. Prevalence studies on intimate partner violence have now been conducted in more than 50 countries.<sup>12</sup>

Population-based surveys have also been utilized in research on female genital cutting (FGC)<sup>13</sup>, a

practice known to have harmful effects on girls and women and common in many societies in the northern part of sub-Saharan Africa, some societies in the Middle East and some diaspora communities in the West.<sup>14</sup> Data on FGC has, for example, been collected in Yemen and 15 countries in Africa between 1989 and 2002 through a module in the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)<sup>15</sup> (for a description of the DHS, see box 2.4 in chapter 2). In societies where female genital cutting is practised, sample surveys conducted at regular intervals can show changes over time in its prevalence and practice, as well as changes in individual perceptions. This information is important to programme specialists designing interventions to eliminate this harmful practice.

### Police and court statistics

Another important source of statistics on violence against women is administrative records kept by the police and the criminal justice system as part of regular administrative processes. When a victim comes before the police to report a crime, or when that action leads to a charge filed in court, a record is made containing factual information on the crime. However, police and court records are necessarily based on the law, such as the penal or criminal code, family violence law, domestic violence law and trafficking law. If there is no law that qualifies or specifies acts of violence against women as a crime, then there is no basis for filing a complaint.

Even where a law exists, it is widely recognized that only a small proportion of the crimes of violence against women makes their way into the administrative records of criminal justice systems and that police or court statistics grossly understate the levels of violence against women. This is true of violence against women both in the home and in the general community.

Violence against women and girls that occurs within the family or within the home is tolerated in many contexts.<sup>16</sup> Incidences of spousal abuse, including marital rape, and physical and sexual abuse of girl-children and women by family members are seldom reported to the police for this and other reasons, including a fear of reprisal, stigma, distrust of the police or legal system, fear of putting the offending family member in trouble and a lack of knowledge of legal rights. In addition to the reluctance of victims to come forward, there may be some uncertainty on the part of the police and courts in pursuing the charges brought before them owing to the lack of legislation or strategies to enforce existing laws.

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Chart 5.1

**Number of countries or areas that have conducted at least one survey on violence against women, 1995 – 2004**

Geographic region	At least one survey	At least one survey with national coverage
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>38</b>
Africa	13	4
North America	11	10
South America	8	5
Asia	15	8
Europe	17	8
Oceania	4	3

**Source:**

United Nations regional commissions; Demographic and Health Surveys; International Violence against Women Survey; and WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence.

Although the situation is changing in some contexts with the enactment or better enforcement of legislation to combat domestic violence, in others the process is slow or has yet to be initiated.<sup>17</sup>

Violence against women in the general community is likewise subject to underreporting. Many women victims of rape, physical and sexual assault and sexual harassment do not report those crimes to the criminal justice system for some of the same reasons cited above, in addition to the fear of not being believed or even of being blamed. This state of affairs reflects the lack of a supportive environment within which women and girls can report, free from embarrassment or the fear of retaliation, acts of violence against them.

Thus, police and court-based crime statistics are of limited value as far as reflecting the overall magnitude of violence against women. Nevertheless, administrative records systematically kept by the police and by criminal and civil courts are a valuable source of data for tracking victims' use of their services and the system's response to the problem. Criminal justice systems have regular government budgets and the advantage of being highly organized, with an established mechanism for regular statistical reporting. Most countries already regularly disseminate statistics on national crime and crime rates by type of crime. The additional cost to produce statistics on crimes involving violence against women, therefore, is relatively low.

However, the way in which the data are currently collected in many countries often omits the recording of the victim's sex and age and the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, making it impossible to identify information specific to violence against women or to distinguish violence by intimate partners, family members or acquaintances from that perpetrated by strangers. At present, the most common types of crime statistics produced and disseminated by countries that relate to violence against women are those on rape, physical assault, sexual assault, intentional homicide and non-intentional homicide. Often, however, the statistics are not disaggregated by the sex or age of the victim.

To obtain statistics specific to violence against women and girls, information on the sex and age of the victim needs to be recorded for all such crimes. In addition, information on the relationship between offender and victim is needed to identify intimate partner violence and other violence within the home. Where such information is recorded, police and court statistics can provide the number of cases of different forms of violence against women that come

before or are processed by them, including violence occurring in the home, insofar as they are identifiable. Examples of statistics that can be produced are the number of incidents involving different forms of violence against women (in totality or by type) reported to the police; the number of persons charged; the number of legal complaints filed; and the number of civil injunctions, restraining orders and similar injunctions<sup>18</sup> applied for. In many countries, police and court systems are now sensitized to the issue of violence against women: for example, police stations may have special women's units or family protection units. In such cases, a more gender-sensitive system of record keeping could result in better information on victims, perpetrators and the circumstances of the violence reported.

In addition, since police and court statistics are usually available over time, they may be used to analyse changes in the way society views violence against women. For example, an increase in reported cases may reflect a heightened awareness of the unacceptability of domestic and other forms of violence against women, leading to increased willingness on the part of victims to report an incident to the police. It could also indicate more sensitivity and increased responsiveness on the part of the police and the justice system to violence against women.

A very different but useful set of administrative data from the police, prosecution and court systems that have some relevance to violence against women are the statistics on the sex composition of their personnel. Gender balance within police, legal and judicial personnel, especially at the higher levels, often has an impact on, and is a reflection of, the sensitivity or responsiveness of the criminal justice system to crimes against women, including different forms of violence against women.

### Administrative statistics from the health sector

The health sector is another source of statistics on various forms of violence, since women who sustain injuries or otherwise require treatment may go to hospital emergency rooms, family clinics, or physicians and other health-care providers. However, in the case of intimate partner violence or other forms of violence by family members, some women may not identify such violence as the underlying cause of their injury; even if they did, the health-care provider may not always record that fact. Obtaining and recording such information is complicated by issues of privacy and confidentiality, as well as by ethical considerations.<sup>19</sup>

Crime statistics produced by countries such as those on rape, physical assault and sexual assault are often not disaggregated by the sex or age of the victim

Whereas the criminal and civil justice systems may be obligated to record, classify and report statistics of violence against women, it is often not mandatory for the health-care system to record and report cases of violence. Moreover, the types of information kept by health providers are very diverse and often not comparable across institutions or over time owing to the lack of a standardized system for recording and processing the information. However, efforts to improve injury surveillance are underway in some countries, including documenting the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator.

As with the police and legal systems, the cases that become known to health services are but a fraction of all cases of violence against women, in all likelihood limited to violence that resulted in serious physical injuries. In addition, health services are not accessible in many developing countries, especially in rural areas.

One source that can potentially be tapped for some information on violence against women is statistics on deaths by sex, age and cause. Those statistics are already produced by countries as vital statistics and are based on information from death certificates.<sup>20</sup> Where death registration is complete and reliable, statistics on deaths by sex, age and cause (in particular, external causes), or even just deaths by sex and age, can potentially provide information on certain forms of violence against women and girls.

For example, infant deaths or infant mortality rates broken down by sex from vital statistics systems or derived from other sources may be examined to detect evidence of the practice of female infanticide or discrimination against girls. In general, male babies are more susceptible to death than female babies. Thus, when statistics show more baby girls than boys dying in a population or subpopulation, there is reason to suspect that female infanticide, or at least son preference manifesting itself in the neglect, deprivation and discriminatory treatment of infant girls, is being practised. Based on the number of countries that have reported infant mortality by sex, it is possible to examine the statistics for 114 countries of the world (see chapter 2).

Where death statistics by sex, age and cause are reliable, they can also provide an indication of the presence of dowry deaths or so-called “honour” killings, although those events are known to be grossly underreported.<sup>21</sup> Deaths of women in the age groups most susceptible to such deaths can be examined, focusing on deaths reported as caused by homicide, suicides, accidents and the like. However, several problems present themselves with the use of

this source. First, the cause of such deaths may be recorded as something entirely different. Second, in countries where such forms of violence are more likely to be practised, vital statistics on deaths are often inadequate.

### Administrative records from other types of service providers

Public and private agencies, including non-governmental organizations, provide a wide range of support services to women victims of violence, including emergency shelters or refuges, crisis centres, sexual assault phone lines, and legal counsel and legal aid services. As in the case of the police and health-care providers, the persons seeking support services are likely to be a tiny fraction of all women who have experienced violence.

Although providers of the services collect information about the women they assist and, to various degrees, their clients' experience of violence, the type of information collected is very diverse. Provision of statistics is generally not a priority of service providers, so information is seldom systematically collated, processed or reported. In the absence of a mechanism to consolidate information from the various organizations in a meaningful way over time and across type of service provided, the information often remains fragmented and accessible only within the confines of the individual organizations.

### Grappling with statistics on trafficking in women and girls<sup>22</sup>

The wide range of activities and the multiplicity of actors involved in the process of human trafficking, coupled with the clandestine and undercover nature of the activities and their possible links to organized crime and corruption, make the measurement of trafficking complex and problematic. At present, comprehensive and reliable statistics on trafficking in women and girls are not available.

Estimates on the volume of trafficking may be derived by combining information from several sources, or may be based solely on statistics pertaining to a particular stage in the trafficking process that is the area of responsibility of the organization or programme producing them. Data on trafficking in women may be collected by organizations with responsibility for crime prevention, prosecution and law enforcement or by those providing protection and assistance to victims, among others. The quality and focus of the data vary according to the financial resources and priorities of the organizations producing them and the concepts, definitions and methods

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employed. In short, statistics are being produced by numerous agencies with an interest in the area of human trafficking, but there is no single body to systematically gather, harmonize and effectively utilize them.

The adoption by the General Assembly in November 2000 of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, provided the international community with an agreed definition of human trafficking. The definition, given below, provides a broad and inclusive framework for studying trafficking in women and girls.

Trafficking in persons means “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation”.<sup>23</sup>

However, using the definition for the purpose of data collection is still a problem. Thus far, only a few countries have begun to systematically collect data on trafficking, and it is still common in many countries to mingle data relating to trafficking, smuggling and irregular migration.

In general, data on human trafficking can originate from (a) source or origin areas, where data on missing people can be used; (b) different stages of the process of movement, where for example border crossing statistics and border apprehension data provide a basis for estimates; and (c) the destination, where law enforcement agencies, health professionals, researchers or intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations assisting victims may collect and provide useful data.

Some source, transit and destination countries collect some of the types of data listed above; however, data collection is seldom systematic. The lack of adequate and specific legislation on trafficking in women results in the absence of official criminal justice statistics on trafficking cases, in terms of both the number of crimes recorded by the police and the number of persons prosecuted or convicted. Registers kept by authorities and organizations of the victims that they assist tend to be fragmentary and not coordinated. Given the fragmentary and non-repre-

sentative nature of the available data, researchers and trafficking experts find it difficult to provide reliable national, regional or global estimates of the number of women and girls trafficked.

There are, however, several initiatives to gather global data on human trafficking, of both women and men, and they are described below. Among the most frequently quoted global numbers of human trafficking are those published by official United States sources. Since 2001, the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons has published annual reports providing country narratives that describe the scope and nature of the trafficking problem in the respective countries, as well as government efforts to combat trafficking. The Protection Project at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies also collects and disseminates information about trafficking, especially of women and children.

A global database on trafficking trends, established under the Global Programme against Trafficking in Human Beings of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, systematically collects and collates information on trafficking in persons. A broad range of sources is scrutinized for information on trafficking trends and routes, characteristics of victims and offenders, and criminal justice responses. The main sources include official reports from Governments, information disseminated by intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, research reports, conference material and media reports.

The International Organization for Migration's *Counter-Trafficking Module* database is a compilation of information from the Organization's counter-trafficking programmes. The database draws on detailed interviews of victims who were assisted through the Organization's counter-trafficking activities worldwide. The quantitative and qualitative data collected contribute to a better understanding of the socio-economic profile and background of victims, their recruitment and trafficking process and their exploitation in the destination countries.

## Progress in statistics

Considerable progress has been made in the past ten years in the development of methodology and procedures for data collection on violence against women, particularly on intimate partner violence. While comparing data across countries and regions is still a problem, the situation is also improving. The years following the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, have witnessed multiple initiatives to develop and collect internationally com-

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The lack of adequate and specific legislation on trafficking in women results in the absence of official criminal justice statistics on trafficking

parable statistics on violence against women through standardized survey methods.

The World Health Organization (WHO) spearheaded the effort through its Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence (see box 5.1). Launched in 1998, the study has been implemented in at least 10 countries.

Another international initiative is the International Violence against Women Survey (IVAWS), coordinated by the European Institute for Crime

#### Box 5.1

##### WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence

The World Health Organization launched the Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence in 1998. The study aims (a) to obtain reliable estimates of the prevalence of different forms of violence, particularly those inflicted by intimate partners; (b) to document the association of intimate partner violence with health outcomes and other aspects of women's lives; (c) to examine factors that may protect women from or make them vulnerable to intimate partner violence; and (d) to document the strategies and services that women use to deal with such violence. In carrying out the study, WHO made use of both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, allowing the qualitative findings to inform the development of the core questionnaire for the study's quantitative component. In most countries, the quantitative component consists of a cross-sectional, population-based household survey conducted in two sites: the capital or other large city and a province with rural and urban populations.

The WHO Multi-Country Study has been implemented in at least 10 culturally diverse countries in Africa, Asia, Oceania and South America. Domestic violence research projects based on the WHO study methodology have also been conducted in several other countries.

Prevention and Control, affiliated with the United Nations (HEUNI) (see box 5.2). So far, IVAWS has been administered in 11 countries, both developed and developing, and funding assistance is being sought to ensure the participation of additional developing countries and countries in transition.

The Demographic and Health Surveys, supported by Macro International Inc., collect data on violence against women through a domestic violence module. The module includes in-depth questions

#### Box 5.2

##### The International Violence against Women Survey (IVAWS)

The European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control affiliated with the United Nations, with inputs from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute and Statistics Canada, initiated the International Violence against Women Survey project in 2001. IVAWS is an international comparative survey specifically designed to study men's violence against women, especially intimate partner violence and sexual assault. It aims to promote and implement research on violence against women in countries around the world and to assess the level of victimization of women in those countries using a standardized methodology and questionnaire, making possible cross-cultural comparisons on the subject.

The IVAWS is conducted within a crime victimization framework and has relied largely on the network, infrastructure and methodology of the International Crime Victim Survey.<sup>a</sup> The information it provides is expected to provide inputs for the development of specific criminal justice approaches.

<sup>a</sup> The International Crime Victim Surveys (ICVS) provide information on crime and victimization through a standard questionnaire, the results of which are internationally comparable. To ensure this, all aspects of the methodology have been standardized to the maximum possible extent (See [http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/research\\_icvs.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/research_icvs.html)).

to enable the assessment of the prevalence and inter-generational consequences of domestic and other violence against women in the household context. Since 1995, at least 11 countries implementing the Demographic and Health Surveys have included the domestic violence module.

Both the WHO Multi-Country Study and the International Violence against Women Survey brought together international agencies, national researchers and statistical offices experienced in conducting surveys on violence against women to develop and design the study protocol and questionnaire, to support the country teams and to facilitate the analysis. Carrying out the research in culturally diverse countries gave the World Health Organization and the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control a better understanding of the realities of conducting surveys on violence against women in various contexts. By participating in research on violence against women under the

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Efforts should be made to promote the implementation of surveys on violence against women within the framework of official statistics

Researchers need to find methods to improve the disclosure of violence in generalized surveys

umbrella of an internationally coordinated study, countries gained valuable experience in all aspects of survey planning and operations on this sensitive subject and improved their technical capacity for collecting internationally comparable data on the subject.

An important development in recent years relating to surveys on violence against women is the increased attention paid to ethical and safety issues associated with research on intimate partner violence. The World Health Organization emphasizes the importance of ensuring the safety of both respondents and field staff and has developed safety and ethical guidelines for conducting research on domestic violence.<sup>24</sup> The guidelines have been adopted by other organizations carrying out surveys in this area. The World Health Organization has also produced ethical and safety recommendations for interviewing trafficked women.<sup>25</sup>

A positive trend that has emerged in relation to research on violence against women is the building of partnerships and strong consultation processes among policy-setting institutions, service providers and development cooperation entities. For example, in the case of the WHO Multi-Country Study, country research teams included national organizations that have been addressing violence against women, as well as a multi-stakeholder consultative committee to guide the study's implementation. The committees comprise individuals from key government departments and from non-governmental organizations. The ongoing process of consultation created a sense of commitment among the participants and contributed to the data being linked to advocacy and policy making. In Latin America, dialogue between the users and producers of information was instrumental to the success of various studies on violence against women in the region, and to the effective use of the study results.<sup>26</sup>

## Challenges

### Strengthening statistical capacity

Countries need to develop their capacity to collect, process and disseminate quality data on violence against women. Many countries that lack knowledge of the scope and extent of domestic and other violence against women do not have the capacity to carry out a specialized national survey on the issue. For those countries, the possibility of collecting data on violence against women through an existing multi-purpose survey can be considered. However, where international support can be secured, it is

desirable to implement a baseline specialized survey with technical assistance provided by external sources. The WHO Multi-Country Study and the International Violence against Women Survey present good opportunities for such collaboration.

More importantly, efforts should be made to promote the implementation of surveys on violence against women within the framework of official statistics: in other words, to mainstream them into the country's regular statistics programme.

For many countries, records kept by the police and the courts are often weak and uneven. There is a need to strengthen their recording and processing systems to enable them to produce reliable statistics with comprehensive national coverage. However, in many countries, the required financial and human resources may not be available.

### Improving survey methods

The relatively lower cost of collecting data on violence against women through existing multi-purpose national surveys has made that approach an attractive option for many countries, and it will no doubt continue to be used. Its main disadvantage is that the disclosure of violence is not as high as in the case of specialized surveys. One of the ways to improve disclosure is to include a separate module—with an adequate number of well-tested questions—rather than just to add a few questions. Another is to provide additional training to the interviewers normally engaged in large-scale surveys, including training on ethical and safety issues related to this type of research. Such training can be very costly, however, and not always practical owing to the large number of interviewers involved. Researchers need to find other innovative methods to improve the disclosure of violence in generalized surveys.

In general, research is also needed on how other factors, such as the approach used for administering the survey, the order and wording of questions, the number and type of questions asked, interviewer characteristics and the like affect disclosure or otherwise have an impact on the survey findings.

### Improving administrative data

As mentioned above, police and court data collection systems in many countries do not always record the sex and age of the victim or the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim, making it impossible to identify cases of intimate partner violence or other violence against women or girls within the family. Attention has to be paid to the collection of informa-



tion so that the records include all information necessary to identify the various types of violence against women. That, however, can be accomplished only if legislation exists that clearly specifies violence against women as a crime and that punishes and redresses the wrongs done to women and girls who are subjected to any form of violence, whether in the home, the workplace, the community or society.

Administrative records kept by other types of organizations (for example, non-governmental organizations) providing victim assistance are particularly problematic. In most cases, information is dispersed and is not subject to standardized collection procedures or inter-institutional cross-checking. Furthermore, there is no single institution to consolidate the information. The lack of an integrated information system makes it difficult to know, for instance, how many times the same woman has sought care, what kind of care was received, who provided it, where and when it was provided and whether such visits were associated with the same act of violence or the same aggressor. As a result, it is impossible to trace either the history of violence affecting each woman who seeks help or the assistance that was actually received.

For the information to be useful for statistical purposes, an integrated database or information system linking data from the various organizations has to be in place. Information from the organizations must be systematically and consistently transferred to the database and periodically processed and disseminated. This is easier said than done, however, as there is no institution that governs all of the different types of service providers. Moreover, the types of data collected are very diverse.

To improve the coverage of administrative data on violence against women, there has to be an enabling environment for victims of violence to seek help. This includes creating or strengthening institutional mechanisms so that women and girls can report acts of violence, file charges or seek refuge in a safe, confidential and supportive environment that is easily accessible. Women victims of violence will also be encouraged to seek help if they know that they will have access to the mechanisms of justice and to just and effective remedies as provided by law for the harm they have suffered. In that connection, law enforcement officers, police personnel and judicial, medical and social workers need to be given training to increase their understanding and knowledge of the causes, consequences and mechanisms of violence against women so that fair treatment of female victims can be assured.

### Complementary use of data sources

Surveys and a variety of administrative data together can provide a more complete picture of violence against women. Surveys provide comprehensive information on various aspects of such violence, while administrative statistics from the criminal justice system can be regularly produced and disseminated at the national level. Other administrative statistics produced by various organizations shed light on women's use of their services and the response of those organizations to specific aspects of violence against women. The main challenge to the complementary use of survey data and administrative records is the absence of a common language among different sources. Concepts, classifications, time frames and many other aspects of the data gathered differ across sources. Finding a way of harmonizing concepts used in specialized surveys, criminal justice statistics and other administrative records requires time and innovation, but it is not impossible.

A holistic and multisectoral response to the problem of violence against women at the State level is the best route to the integration, harmonization and utilization of data sources. Such an approach would bring together the various actors—in law enforcement, the judiciary, education, health and social services, and community and women's organizations—to design and implement a holistic response that addresses both the prevention and treatment of violence from the perspective of the victim, including addressing information needs in an integrated way. Such response is particularly urgent in the case of trafficking in women and girls owing to the multiplicity of actors involved.

### Areas requiring more attention

Statistics on most types of violence specified under the three general classes of violence against women (see definition at the beginning of the chapter) are still either not available or inadequate. In the first class, violence occurring in the family, areas for which reliable statistics are not available or are limited in coverage include sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, "honour" killings, female genital cutting and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation. There is a need to find effective methods of collecting those data, for example through population-based surveys. For dowry-related violence and "honour" killings, other methods have to be explored because the relatively rare occurrences of those forms of violence among

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the general population may not be captured in a sample; in addition, many of the victims would no longer be alive to be sampled. Methods that might be explored include the analysis of police records or homicide reports, if available.

Population-based surveys on violence against women may not adequately cover women belonging to minority groups, indigenous women, refugee women, women migrants, elderly women or other groups of women who are particularly vulnerable to violence. Since they are a relatively small proportion of the population and tend to be harder to reach, those groups of women are often not present in big enough numbers in the sample to allow separate analysis to be made of them. In some surveys, the specification of the target population intentionally excludes certain groups. For example, many surveys of intimate partner violence have focused on women of reproductive age (15-49) because they are the group most likely to be exposed to violence and are most frequently the targets of ongoing surveys such as the DHS. Such surveys, therefore, do not capture the experience of older women who also experience violence, including from intimate partners. In order to study violence against the above-mentioned groups of women, researchers have to ensure that those groups are included in adequate numbers in the sample.

For the second general class, violence occurring within the general community, statistics on certain areas are still scarce. Sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions, in prisons and in other institutions are forms of violence that have existed for a long time but are only beginning to be publicly or seriously addressed. Statistics on those issues therefore tend to be scarce and limited in scope. Methods for collecting comprehensive data on sexual harassment need to be developed.

Much more also has to be done to find better methods of data collection related to trafficking in women and girls for sexual exploitation, forced marriage and forced labour. Integrating data on human trafficking produced by various organizations presents a huge challenge, as by definition those sources of data often include different subsets of trafficked women. The introduction of national rapporteurs on trafficking, a measure that has been taken in several countries in the European Union, may help in coordinating data collection on trafficking and in integrating and utilizing the information from the various sectors.

With respect to the last class of violence against women, that perpetrated or condoned by the State, reliable statistics on the extent of violence are particularly difficult to obtain. This is especially true where armed conflict, foreign occupation, wars of aggression and civil wars are present. Obtaining statistics on those forms of violence continues to be a major challenge.

Methods for collecting comprehensive data on sexual harassment need to be developed

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## Notes

- 1 See *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II, paras. 112 and 117.
- 2 Ibid., paras. 116 and 121.
- 3 General Assembly resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993, article 1.
- 4 *Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi, 15-26 July 1985* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.85.IV.10), paras. 231, 245, 258, 271 and 287-291.
- 5 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 14-25 June 1993 (A/CONF.157/23), para. 18.
- 6 *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II, sect. D, "Violence against women".
- 7 See General Assembly resolution 55/2 of 8 September 2000, para. 25.
- 8 See *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II, paras. 206(j) and 129(a).
- 9 Millennium Project, *Taking Action: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women*, Task Force on Education and Gender Equality (London, Earthscan, 2005).
- 10 For example, Statistics Canada included this feature in its Violence against Women Survey, 1993, and its General Social Survey on Victimization, 1999.
- 11 "Report of the expert group meeting on violence against women: a statistical overview, challenges and gaps in data collection and methodology and approaches to overcoming them" (Geneva, 11-14 April 2005, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Europe and the World Health Organization). The report elaborates on the characteristics of population-based surveys carried out to date.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Female genital cutting or female genital mutilation refers to all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for cultural or other non-medical reasons (from Female Genital Mutilation. A Joint WHO/UNICEF/UNFPA Statement, Geneva, World Health Organization, 1997).
- 14 See "Integration of the Human Rights of Women and the Gender Perspective: Violence against Women", Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (E/CN.4/2002/83), para. 15.
- 15 P. Stanley Yoder, Nouredine Abderrahim and Arlinda Zhuzhuni, "Female genital cutting in the Demographic and Health Surveys: a critical and comparative analysis", DHS Comparative Reports No. 7 (Calverton, Maryland, ORC Macro, 2004).
- 16 See *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II, para. 117.
- 17 In her 1994-2003 review (E/CN.4/2003/75.Add.1), the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, highlighted some problems of law enforcement in almost all of the reviewed States, citing a total of 79 countries that have no (or unknown) legislation against domestic violence. Marital rape is recognized specifically as a crime in only 51 countries in so far as information is available (see "Violence against women: new challenges – Beijing at 10: putting policy into practice", International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, INSTRAW progress report, available from <http://www.un-instraw.org/en/images/stories/Beijing/violenceagainstwomen.pdf>).
- 18 In some countries, civil injunctions – also known as peace bonds, restraining orders or domestic violence orders – bar partners from coming into contact with the victim. They can include other conditions such as drug and alcohol or weapons prohibitions. Other types of injunctions can have the violent partner removed from the home.
- 19 See "Report of the expert group meeting on violence against women: a statistical overview, challenges and gaps in data collection and methodology and approaches to overcoming them" (Geneva, 11-14 April 2005, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Europe and the World Health Organization).
- 20 See remarks on national data sources in the Introduction to the report and box 1.3 "Civil registration and vital statistics" in chapter 1.
- 21 See "Integration of the Human Rights of Women and the Gender Perspective: Violence against Women", Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (E/CN.4/2002/83), para. 23.
- 22 This section is based largely on the following three papers: "Human trafficking and statistics: the state of the art", paper prepared by Nicole Suter, Heikki Mattila and Frank Laczko, International Organization for Migration, Economic Commission for Europe Work Session on Gender Statistics, Geneva, 18-20 October 2004, Working Paper No. 15; Frank Laczko and Marco Gramigna, "Developing better indicators of human trafficking", *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, vol. X, No. 1 (Summer/Fall 2003); and Kristina Kangaspunta, "Collecting data on human trafficking", paper prepared for the panel on remaining challenges in relation to statistics and indicators, forty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, New York, 28 February-11 March 2005 (Geneva, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime).
- 23 General Assembly resolution 55/25 of 15 November 2000, annex II, article 3(a).
- 24 See, for example, World Health Organization, "Putting women first: ethical and safety recommendations for research on domestic violence against women" (WHO/FCH/GWH/01.1).
- 25 Cathy Zimmerman and Charlotte Watts, *WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Interviewing Trafficked Women* (Geneva, World Health Organization, 2003). The recommendations have been translated into Armenian, Bosnian, Croatian, Japanese, Serbian, Romanian and Russian.
- 26 See, for example, Diane Almeras and others, *Violence against Women in Couples: Latin America and the Caribbean - A Proposal for Measuring its Incidence and Trends*, Mujer y Desarrollo Series, No. 40 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.II.G.56).

