

# **How to Systematically Measure and Monitor Violence Against Women (VAW)**

Background Paper  
Expert Workshop on VAW – Disabling Development

25-26 March 2010  
Domaine de Penthes  
Geneva, Switzerland

---

## **Acknowledgements**

This paper was prepared by Elisabeth Gilgen and Jasna Lazarevic from the Geneva Declaration (GD) Secretariat. Ms. Gilgen and Ms. Lazarevic work as associate researchers at the Small Arms Survey, a Geneva-based research institute that hosts the GD Secretariat. This paper is based on technical notes written by Henrica A.F.M. (Henriette) Jansen (Independent consultant on Violence against Women research) and Claudia Garcia Moreno (WHO). Substantive inputs were provided by Tiina Luige (UNECE).



## Introduction

The Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development (GD) represents a high-level diplomatic initiative designed to support states and civil society actors to achieve measurable reductions in the global burden of armed violence and improvements in human security by 2015 (and beyond). The GD was signed in June 2006 and is now supported by 108 states<sup>1</sup>. The signatory states highlight that the changing nature of armed violence over recent decades has blurred the line between armed conflict and crime, and between politically and economically motivated violence. As such, the concept of armed violence encompasses a wide spectrum of conflict, post-conflict, crime-related, and interpersonal forms of violence.

In its 2008 Global Burden of Armed Violence (GBAV)<sup>2</sup> report, the GD Secretariat estimates that more than 740,000 men, women, and children die each year as a result of armed violence. The majority of these violent deaths—an estimated 490,000—occur in non conflict settings. For every person killed, there are many more non-fatal injuries due to armed violence, with significant long-term costs, which increase the global burden of armed violence.

In order to design effective prevention and reduction strategies against all forms of armed violence, the GD calls upon states to invest in gathering clear evidence of armed violence and its underlying risk factors. Moreover, the GD notes that by setting clear and unambiguous benchmarks and targets, the outcomes of specific initiatives can be compared across countries, cities and communities. The need for clear evidence has been repeated by the UN Secretary-General in his recent report on the relationship between armed violence and development where he calls for the 'improvement of the effectiveness of armed violence prevention and reduction policies and programmes through investments in the production, analysis and use of evidence.'<sup>3</sup>

Today, the problem of armed violence is recognized as a serious obstacle to development and to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Armed violence can trigger forced displacement, erode social capital, and destroy infrastructure. It can impede investment in reconstruction and reconciliation and can undermine public institutions, facilitate corruption, and foster a climate of impunity. Armed violence contributes to and is sustained by transnational crime, including the trafficking of persons, drugs, and arms. When associated with interpersonal and gender-based violence it unravels the fabric of families and

---

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.genevadeclaration.org/the-geneva-declaration/who-signed-it.html>

<sup>2</sup> GD Secretariat (2008).

<sup>3</sup> UNSG (2009).



communities and leaves lasting psychological and physical scars on survivors. Violence against women (VAW), and in particular sexual and intimate-partner violence, does not necessarily involve the use of weapons. However, even when weapons are not used directly, VAW is often linked—either psychologically or socio-economically—to the indirect effects of armed violence.<sup>4</sup>

Armed violence is highly gendered in both its causes and consequences. Across all affected societies, young males are the most common perpetrators, as well as immediate victims, of armed attacks. Women, on the other hand, suffer disproportionately from sexual and intimate-partner violence. The potential risk of sexual violence, abuse and exploitation of women increases dramatically during armed conflicts.<sup>5</sup>

The human suffering of women affected by VAW is tremendous and the socio-economic impacts vast and far-reaching. In addition to being a serious human rights issue, VAW affects women's sexual and reproductive health and the health of their children and families, and exerts a considerable economic burden on families and often already stressed state systems and social spending.<sup>6</sup> VAW undermines development and if violence against women is not comprehensively addressed the achievement of several of the MDGs—not only MDG 3 on gender equality—will be jeopardized.<sup>7</sup>

Gathering and monitoring indicators of armed violence is politically sensitive and institutionally and practically challenging. Attempts to track global and regional trends of armed violence are routinely hampered by a lack of vital registration data, but also under-reporting and under-recording. In December 2009, the GD Secretariat and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched an initiative that addresses those challenges and sets out a roadmap to establishing a cross-national monitoring system on armed violence based on a core set of goals, targets and indicators on armed violence reduction.<sup>8</sup> The development of appropriate indicators and the establishment of cross-national data on VAW is an even more challenging task.

As part of its mandate to support the achievement of measurable reduction of the global burden of armed violence in conflict and non-conflict settings, the GD Secretariat invites a group of experts to a workshop on VAW to discuss how to

---

<sup>4</sup> GD Secretariat (2008).

<sup>5</sup> The International Rescue Committee and its partners have registered 40,000 cases of gender-based violence between 2003 and 2006 in DRC, which they say is just the tip of the iceberg. See Bastick, Grimm and Kunz (2007, p.41).

<sup>6</sup> Day, McKenna and Bowlus (2005).

<sup>7</sup> See WHO (2005) and Ellsberg (2006)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.genevadeclaration.org/measurability/indicators-of-armed-violence.html>



develop a research agenda that contributes to systematically measuring and monitoring VAW cross-nationally and that supports programming efforts that prevent and reduce VAW. This paper sets out the framework of the workshop. The first section focuses on existing initiatives to develop indicators on VAW – including the description of a set of nine core indicators proposed by the UN Statistical Commission Friends of the Chair (FoC) group on Statistical Indicators on Violence against Women. It then looks at existing data-gathering systems and describes a survey module that has been developed to address the above-mentioned core indicators. In the concluding section, the paper addresses the challenges of gathering data on VAW and formulates questions to be discussed during the workshop.

## Indicators of VAW

Indicators summarize complex data into a form that is meaningful for policymakers and the public. In general, indicators need to be reliable (easy to measure and interpret), representative, comparable, and based on easily available data. They should enable comparison of trends over time, both within and between countries. Benchmarks attributed to indicators help organize data into a form that contributes to the evaluation of policies and monitoring of progress in achieving goals. Ideally indicators are collected at regular intervals (5 – 10 years, for example) and provide information on whether a situation has improved, worsened or remained constant.

Indicators to measure VAW could be used to create awareness, guide legislative and policy reforms, ensure adequate provision of targeted and effective services, monitor trends and progress in addressing and eliminating VAW, and assess the impact of measures taken. The literature provides a number of different ways to classify indicators in general, including those on VAW. A commonly used classification, also used in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of VAW programme implementation<sup>9</sup>, is the division of outcome, process and impact indicators:

- 1) *Outcome indicators*: In programme M&E they would show whether or not a programme target has been reached. Indicators to measure the scope, incidence and prevalence on VAW are outcome indicators. Examples of these are: the incidence of rape of women aged 15-49 in the past year by people other than intimate partners; the proportion of women aged 15 years and older who experienced physical abuse by an intimate partner at any time in their life; the proportion of women aged 18-24 who were married before age 18.

---

<sup>9</sup> Bloom (2008).



- 2) *Process indicators*: indicators to measure the effectiveness of steps taken to address VAW. In programme M&E they would demonstrate how well a programme has been implemented, with a focus on implementation and coverage. Examples of these are: the proportion of health units that adopted a protocol for clinical management of rape survivors; the number of service providers trained in counseling and referring rape survivors; the proportion of prosecuted VAW cases that resulted in a conviction.
- 3) *Impact indicators*: in the context of programme M&E they attempt to measure how much of the observed change in outcome indicators can be attributed to the programme. These have to be measured through evaluations that are complex and have specialist design requirements.

The 2007 report of the UN Special Rapporteur on VAW, its causes and consequences<sup>10</sup> proposes additional 'structural' (or institutional) indicators covering State responses. Structural indicators address measures of state response, in particular those reflecting the ratification/adoption of legal instruments.

Outcome indicators dominate when analyzing VAW, particularly studies on the prevalence of different forms of VAW. Little attention has been paid to monitor trends in intimate partner femicide and the indicators for reducing risk factors for violence. The analysis of attitudes towards VAW on the other hand, has been included in many questionnaires.

In October 2007, a UN Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on Indicators to Measure Violence against Women was organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women (UNDAW), the Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD). The meeting report provided a detailed overview of current initiatives and indicators used by various states, the options and recommendations for developing indicators to measure VAW.<sup>11</sup>

In February 2008, the Friends of the Chair (FoC)<sup>12</sup> group was established by the Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session (decision 39/116) to develop the indicators and other methodological standards for implementation in national

---

<sup>10</sup> UN Human Rights Council (2008)

<sup>11</sup> UNDAW, UNECE, UNSD (2007).

<sup>12</sup> The FoC consists of representatives of the following member States: Botswana, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Ghana, Italy, Mexico (the Chair) and Thailand, with the United Nations Statistics Division acting as secretariat of the group. In addition, the following international bodies agreed to act as observers: the Division for the Advancement of Women, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the World Health Organization.



statistical systems. The FoC based their deliberations on the 2007 EGM as well as the February 2008 report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences.<sup>13</sup> In February 2009 the FoC submitted a report to the UN Statistical Commission at its 40th session that proposed an interim set of six statistical indicators as a 'starting point for initiating further work on identifying the most appropriate measurements.'<sup>14</sup> During a December 2009 meeting, the FoC expanded the list of indicators and included psychological and economic violence by intimate partners and female genital mutilation. The current core set of nine indicators is as follows:

- 1) Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to physical violence in the last 12 months by severity of violence, relationship to the perpetrator(s) and frequency.
- 2) Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to physical violence during lifetime by severity of violence, relationship to the perpetrator(s) and frequency.
- 3) Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to sexual violence in the last 12 months by severity of violence, relationship to the perpetrator(s) and frequency.
- 4) Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to sexual violence during lifetime by severity of violence, relationship to the perpetrator(s) and frequency.
- 5) Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to sexual or physical violence by current or former intimate partner in the last 12 months by frequency.
- 6) Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to sexual or physical violence by current or former intimate partner during lifetime by frequency.
- 7) Total and age specific rate of women subjected to psychological violence in the past 12 months by the intimate partner.
- 8) Total and age specific rate of women subjected to economic violence in the past 12 months by the intimate partner.
- 9) Total and age specific rate of women subjected to female genital mutilation.

At this stage, all the indicators proposed are outcome indicators and no consensus about an indicator on early marriage has yet been found.<sup>15</sup> The FoC continues to discuss a set of core and additional statistical indicators on VAW and are working on developing international guidelines for conducting statistical surveys on violence against women. The first phase is expected to be finalized by submitting the final draft of the Guidelines for Producing Statistics on Violence against Women, together

---

<sup>13</sup> UNGA (2008).

<sup>14</sup> UN Statistical Commission (2008)

<sup>15</sup> UN Statistical Commission (2009).



with the report from the December 2009 meeting,<sup>16</sup> which presents the required sets of indicators, to the United Nations Statistical Commission in February 2011.

There are plans to extend the work beyond the first phase, ultimately until 2015, to undertake work related to collecting data on VAW from administrative and civil society records, and possibly including some indicators based on data from these sources in the core set (e.g. femicide).

Parallel to the work conducted by the FoC, there are a number of initiatives that specifically develop indicators or data collection methodologies on VAW.

The UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict (UN Action)<sup>17</sup> aims to end sexual violence in conflict settings. It is a concerted effort by the UN System to improve coordination and accountability, amplify programming and advocacy, and support national efforts to prevent sexual violence and respond effectively to the needs of survivors. While the importance of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict settings is recognised as a serious security, health and social problem, so is the research and data gathering in such a context difficult given security and logistics concerns. The UN Action is working to respond to these difficulties through a variety of channels. First, on 18 – 19 December 2008, WHO organized a meeting on behalf of UN Action in collaboration with UNICEF and UNFPA on 'Sexual Violence in Conflict: Data and Data Collection Methodologies'. Second, UNICEF is leading a group to develop proposals to better monitor and report the UN's response. Finally, UNHCR, UNFPA and IRC have developed the Gender-based violence information management system (GBVIMS) for improving the collection and analysis of service-based data on reported cases.

The Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI), an initiative of the Global Forum for Health Research, together with WHO, are developing a research agenda which builds on the issues identified at the 2009 SVRI Forum held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in July 2009.<sup>18</sup>

On 26 June 2008, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) organized a conference on Identifying Research Priorities to Inform More Effective Interventions against sexual violence in armed conflict.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> UN Statistical Commission (2009).

<sup>17</sup> UN Action consists of 12 UN entities (DPA, DPKO, OCHA, OHCHR, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIFEM, WFP, and WHO). For more information see: <http://stoprapenow.org>

<sup>18</sup> See <http://svriform2009.svri.org/>

<sup>19</sup> It focused on understanding the motivations behind sexual violence in armed conflict, including the nature, scope and motivation for sexual violence against men and boys: <http://ochaonline.un.org/AboutOCHA/GenderEquality/tabid/1188/Default.aspx>



Finally, in September 2009, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1888 on Women, Peace and Security, which recognizes the links between sexual violence and sustainable peace and security, and recommends to the Secretary-General to ensure systematic reporting on trends, emerging patterns of attack and early warning indicators of violence against women in conflict settings.<sup>20</sup>

Challenges to capturing and interpreting indicators are manifold. Armed conflict settings and other humanitarian situations complicate data collection because of insecurity, lack of services and marginalization of the victims.

## Data on VAW

Over the last decade there has been an enormous increase in the interest in VAW and its measurement—an area that traditionally was the domain of researchers and activists working on VAW—by donors, UN agencies and governments around the world;.

The increased recognition of the problem, the interest and political pressure for (periodic) measurement of VAW indicators at national and regional levels, and the easy availability of existing instruments to measure violence are positive advances, but also pose some challenges.

Initiatives to collect data on VAW must be accompanied with relevant capacity building,<sup>21</sup> including ethical and safety standards for collecting, measuring or researching VAW. The safety of the interviewee as much as of the interviewers should not be jeopardized at any moment. Ethical and safety standards and challenges are a non-negotiable element of any data collection effort and therefore represent an important challenge. If data collection is not done properly and ethical and safety standards are not respected, women can be put at risk and the reliability of the data gathered compromised.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> See UNSC (2009)

<sup>21</sup> Jansen et al. (2004).

<sup>22</sup> Measuring VAW through surveys raises important ethical challenges. The WHO has developed guidelines that lay out some of the key principles that should guide research on domestic violence, such as ensuring absolute privacy when doing the interview and maintaining absolute confidentiality of information provided by respondents. It gives examples of safe ways to name the survey and to explain the content to the community without revealing the topic of interest (which will only be explained when the interviewer is alone with the respondent). It also describes how a high refusal rate and consequently a low



International data collection initiatives on VAW include the WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence, and the international violence against women Survey (IVAWS). These are both multi-country studies that have been ongoing for at least a decade and have advanced methodologies for comparative, cross-country measuring of VAW.

Several surveys assessing the status of women have developed special modules on sexual and intimate-partner violence and there is increasing political will to monitor more systematically incidences of sexual and intimate-partner violence systematically. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)<sup>23</sup> conducted by UNICEF assumes a high correlation between attitudes and incidents and asks about attitudes to domestic violence. The Demographic and Health Survey (DHS)<sup>24</sup> questions the incidence of domestic violence and attitudes towards it, and also includes a Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) module for countries that want to measure this. Currently, in both surveys these are optional modules not asked in all countries. The International Crime Victim Survey (ICVS)<sup>25</sup> also includes questions on sexual incidents, such as rape, threats, and other sexual assaults.

Following the adoption of the six interim indicators, the UNSD—acting as the Secretariat of the FoC—undertook a methodological overview of surveys on violence against women conducted in recent years. This was designed to evaluate whether these surveys were able to provide statistics as requested by the interim set of indicators and to guide the further work of the FoC in developing more specific recommendations. The inventory of 59 surveys by the FoC showed that most surveys collected and estimated only a subset of the interim indicators, and to date no existing survey was fully measuring or calculating the estimates according to the entire interim set of the 6 core indicators. Statistics for only one indicator—prevalence of physical violence during lifetime, by relationship to the perpetrator—were generated by over 80% of the total number of surveys, and in most cases this was only for partners, not for non-partners. Data for all other indicators were generated by a fewer number of surveys. Only few surveys generated information on the frequency of all types of VAW.<sup>26</sup>

At the December 2009 meeting, the FoC stressed the need to ensure that statistical data collection for which administrative and civil society records (such as crime

---

prevalence estimate could potentially be used to question the importance of VAW as a legitimate area of concern. WHO (2001)

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/statistics/index\\_24302.html](http://www.unicef.org/statistics/index_24302.html)

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.measuredhs.com/>

<sup>25</sup> <http://rechten.uvt.nl/ICVS/>

<sup>26</sup> For the full overview of these surveys on violence against women see UN Statistical Commission (2009)



statistics) are a source are adjusted to provide source data for gender statistics in general and violence against women in particular.<sup>27</sup>

The United Nations General Assembly has also urged States to ensure the systematic collection and analysis of data to monitor all forms of VAW.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, one of the five key outcomes of the United Nations Secretary-General's Campaign "UNiTE to End Violence against Women" is the establishment of a data collection system for data on VAW in all countries by 2015.<sup>29</sup>

UNECE was assigned by the UNSD to develop a survey module to collect data on the six above mentioned core indicators.<sup>30</sup> The module fully addresses the six interim indicators, but also collects data on psychological abuse and – to a more limited extent – on economic violence by partner on the understanding that more methodological work is needed on these indicators and that they may not be used in the same way in all countries. The UNECE survey module has been conceived to enable countries to collect a minimum set of information to measure the VAW indicators through other appropriate surveys such as the one described above. It can be used as a part of another appropriate survey, or as a core module of a dedicated survey on VAW.

As the next step, UNECE envisages testing the survey module in ten countries, preferably involving all five UN geographical regions. The focus of testing will be on the effectiveness of a module for collecting data on VAW and on the associated procedures, such as interviewer training. Depending on the sample size used in the test setting, some countries might attempt to generate statistics for the core indicators.

## Conclusion

The establishment of the MDGs has boosted the support to build up cross-national databases that systematically measure and monitor trends in social, economic, humanitarian or development policies. The statistical offices in many countries make publicly available and national statistical information often includes information on armed violence on a local and national level. Still, national surveillance and data gathering capacity on VAW remains rare. In addition to enormous social, cultural and economic pressures not to report sexual or intimate

---

<sup>27</sup> UN Statistical Commission (2009)

<sup>28</sup> UNGA (2009)

<sup>29</sup> See UNSG (2008).

<sup>30</sup>The UNECE module and accompanying materials are downloadable from:  
<http://www1.unece.org/stat/platform/display/VAW/Measuring+violence+against+women>



partner violence, VAW is often not considered as a crime. Victims are often discouraged to report domestic and intimate partner violence when there are weaknesses in the state judicial system and a general feeling exists of impunity of perpetrators.

Local officials often do not have sufficient information about the scale of VAW in their communities. In such circumstances, it is difficult to design effective evidence-based programmes and policies to prevent VAW and improve the safety of women. Additional work needs to support the development of unified methods and standards for data collection on all forms of VAW that are under documented. More methodological work is needed to establish content, boundaries and operationalization of the core indicators identified by FoC on VAW, as well as future additional indicators on all forms of VAW, to make them applicable cross-nationally and cross-culturally.

In order to promote evidence-based programming, efforts must also be undertaken to develop and improve data on the type of lethal or non-lethal instruments that are used, on the perpetrators involved, and on the underlying risk factors that shape VAW. Last but not least, questions need to be asked about expanding the focus in the future to include gender-based violence against men.

The Expert Workshop on VAW aims to address those challenges. It will bring together over 30 participants from governments, academia, international agencies and NGOs with expertise in statistics, quantitative and qualitative research and concrete programming. The participants will look at ways to use research and evidence for programming purposes. The aim of the workshop will be to discuss how to foster a systematic global, regional and national measuring and monitoring system on VAW that supports programming efforts to prevent and reduce VAW and to enhance development perspectives.

## **Bibliography**

Bastick Megan, Karin Grimm and Rahel Kunz. 2007. *Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict – Global Overview and Implication for the Security Sector*. Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF).

Camarasa M. 2009. *Proposal of new indicators to measure the effects of gender violence*. By SURT (ed). Barcelona: Fundacio de Dones.



Day Tanis, McKenna Katherine and Audra Bowlus. 2005. *The economic cost of Violence against women: an evaluation of the literature*. Expert brief compiled in preparation for the Secretary-General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women. Ontario: University of Western Ontario.

Ellsberg, Mary. 2006. *Violence against women and the Millennium Development Goals: Facilitating women's access to support*. International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics. Vol. 94. Pp. 325–32.

Garcia-Moreno Claudia et al. 2005. *WHO Multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence. Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses*. Geneva: WHO.

GD (Geneva Declaration) Secretariat. 2008. *The Global Burden of Armed Violence Report*. Geneva: Geneva Declaration Secretariat.

Jansen H.A.F.M. et al. 2004. *Interviewer Training in the WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence*. Violence Against Women, Vol. 10, No. 7, pp. 831-49.

Johnson Holly., Ollus N., and Nevala Sami. 2008. *Violence Against Women: An international perspective*. New York: Springer.

Bloom, Shelah S. 2008. *Violence against Women and Girls. A compendium of Monitoring and Evaluation Indicators*.

UNDAW (United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women), UNECE (Economic Commission for Europe), UNSD (United Nations Statistics Division). 2007. *Report of the expert group meeting on indicators to measure violence against women*. Geneva: UNECE.

UNGA (United Nations General Assembly). 2008. *Promotion and Protection of All Human Rights, Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Including the Right to Development*. Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences. UN High Commissioner of Human Rights A/HRC/11/6/Add.6

—. 2009. Resolution on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women (A/RES/63/155).

United Nations Human Rights Council. 2008. Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its costs and consequences (A/HRC/7/6/Add.5).



UNSG (United Nations Secretary General). 2008. Roadmap – UniTE to end violence against women, Programme of United Nations Activities and Expected Outcomes, 2008 – 2015.

–. 2009. Promoting Development through the Reduction and Prevention of Armed Violence (A/64/228).

UNSC (United Nations Security Council). 2009. Resolution 1888 (S/RES/1888).

UN Statistical Commission. 2008. Friends of the Chair of the United Nations Statistical Commission on the indicators on violence against women (E/CN.3/2009/13).

–. 2009. Meeting of the Friends of the Chair Group on Statistical Indicators on Violence against Women. 9 – 11 December 2009. Different Documents available at: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/vaw/>

Walby Silvia. 2004. *The cost of economic violence, DTI Women and Equality Unit.*

WHO (World Health Organization). 2001. *Putting women first: Ethical and Safety recommendations for research on domestic violence against women.* Geneva: WHO.

–. 2005. *Addressing violence against women and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.* Geneva: WHO.