

# Indicators to measure Violence against Women

In the context of efforts by the Friends of the Chair group on Statistical Indicators on Violence against Women and by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Invited Paper prepared by

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## Introduction

This paper is prepared for the **Expert Workshop on Violence against Women: Disabling Development**, on 25-26 March 2010 in Geneva, Switzerland, organized by the Small Arms Survey, in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development.

After a brief overview of a classification and types of indicators on violence against women (VAW) and some of the major initiatives in this field, this paper will focus mainly on the following: indicators proposed by the *Friends of the Chair on Statistical Indicators on Violence against Women (FoC)*, an overview of other VAW indicators currently not addressed by the FoC's work, follow-up work of the FoC, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) survey module developed to collect data for the indicators, and some of the challenges and recommendations for further development of cross-national data collection.

## Indicators on Violence against women – setting the context

Indicators summarize complex data into a form that is meaningful for people working on programs, policymakers and the public. Indicators on 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. They enable comparison of trends over time, as well as within and between settings and countries. With their associated benchmarks, indicators contribute to organizing data into a form which facilitates the evaluation of policies and monitoring of progress in achieving goals.

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 program implementation<sup>1</sup> is the division in outcome, process and impact indicators.

1) *Outcome indicators*: In program M&E they would show whether or not a program target has been reached. In the context of monitoring global and local efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women, outcome indicators<sup>2</sup> are those that measure the scope, incidence and prevalence on VAW. Examples of these are: number of incidents of rape by others than partners experienced by women aged 15-49 in the past year; proportion of women aged 15 years and older who experienced physical abuse by an intimate partner at any time in their life; proportion of women aged 18-24 who were married before age 18.

2) *Process indicators*: indicators to measure the effectiveness of measures undertaken to address VAW. In program M&E they would demonstrate how well a program has been implemented, with focus on implementation and coverage. Examples of these are: proportion of health units that adopted a protocol for clinical management of rape survivors; number of service providers trained in counselling and referring survivors; proportion of prosecuted VAW cases that resulted in a conviction.

3) *Impact indicators*. In the context of program M&E they attempt to measure how much of the observed change can be attributed to the program. These have to be measured through evaluations that are complex and have special design requirements.

In the context of the topic of the current **Expert Workshop**, *impact indicators* could measure the specific and multi-dimensional effects that VAW have on women, their families, communities, societies, and development outcomes or MDGs, for that matter.

Examples of work that feed into this:

- The development of indicators on the impact of VAW/gender violence in relationships (examples: percentage of victims who have suffered a permanent physical impairment as a consequence of suffering partner violence; percentage of

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<sup>1</sup> MEASURE Evaluation (2008). *Violence against Women and girls. A compendium of Monitoring and Evaluation Indicators*. <http://www.cpc.unc.edu/measure/publications/pdf/ms-08-30.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> For clarity it could be noted that these are called 'outcome' indicators even if there is no policy or program in place. The indicator could provide the baseline against which to measure future change or program achievements, and/or guide the design of evidence-based policy and programming efforts for prevention of and response to VAW.

victims who move and live hidden to escape from partner violence) and in workplace context (example: percentage of victims who do not have a personal source of income due to the job loss as a consequence of VAW at the workplace)<sup>3</sup>.

- Measuring the impact of partner violence on women's health and children's wellbeing as conducted in the *WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence*<sup>4</sup>. Impact on health can be direct injuries as well as associations with physical health, reproductive health, mental health and suicidality<sup>5</sup>. Impact on children includes associations with behavioural disorders (such as extreme aggressive behaviour) and dropping out of school.
- The development of indicators in the area of the economic cost of VAW (costs covered could include: medical costs, legal costs, lost earnings, death, justice, shelters and crisis agencies, income support, etc)<sup>6 7</sup>.
- Work on establishing the connections between VAW and MDGs<sup>8</sup>.

The report of the *Special Rapporteur on VAW, its causes and consequences on 'indicators on VAW and State response' (A/HRC/7/6)*<sup>9</sup> proposes indicators covering State responses. Some of these are considered process indicators. The report introduces another category, namely *structural (or institutional) indicators*, for some measures of state response, in particular those reflecting the ratification/adoption of legal instruments.

In the efforts to develop VAW indicators the focus is to a large extent on outcome indicators. A number of proposals for VAW indicators are underway across UN agencies, regional bodies, Governments and civil society organizations.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of existing cross-national data-collection initiatives mention could be made of two multi-countries studies that have been going on since at least a decade and that have advanced methodological development on measuring VAW in a comparative way across

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<sup>3</sup> Camarasa M. (2009) *Proposal of new indicators to measure the effects of gender violence*. Ed. By SURT. Fundacio de Dones. Fundacio Privada. Barcelona.

[http://www.epacvaw.org/IMG/pdf/GVEI\\_IndicadorsGender\\_Violence\\_2009\\_EN.pdf](http://www.epacvaw.org/IMG/pdf/GVEI_IndicadorsGender_Violence_2009_EN.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Garcia-moreno C., Jansen H.A.F.M. et al. (2005), *WHO Multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence. Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses*. WHO Geneva.

[http://www.who.int/gender/violence/who\\_multicountry\\_study/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/gender/violence/who_multicountry_study/en/index.html)

<sup>5</sup> Ellsberg M., Jansen H.A.F.M., et al. (2008). *Intimate partner violence and women's physical and mental health in the WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence: an observational study*. *Lancet*; 371(9619): 1165-72.

<sup>6</sup> Day T., McKenna K., and Bowlus A. (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. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/expert%20brief%20costs.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Walby S. (2004) *The cost of economic violence*, DTI Women and Equality Unit. <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/sociology/papers/walby-costdomesticviolence.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> WHO (2005) *Addressing violence against women and achieving the Millennium Development Goals*. Geneva <http://www.who.int/gender/documents/MDGs&VAWSep05.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> UN General Assembly Human rights Council (2008) A/HRC/7/6 <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/7session/reports.htm>

<sup>10</sup> For a list of these efforts: see the before mentioned report of the *Special Rapporteur on VAW, its causes and consequences*.

countries: the *WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence* (mentioned earlier) and the *International Violence against Women Survey (IVAWS)*<sup>11</sup>. The *Demographic and Health Surveys (MEASURE DHS)* have developed a VAW module that is being used in many countries<sup>12 13</sup>.

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), in Geneva, October 2007. The meeting report provides a detailed overview of current initiatives and indicators used by various states as well as options and recommendations for developing indicators to measure VAW<sup>14</sup>.

The EGM report proposes a list of international indicators on VAW - all outcome indicators - to be collected through dedicated population-based surveys, namely:

- Physical violence
- Sexual violence
- Intimate partner violence
- The following two harmful practices: early marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM).

The report suggests as a long term objective to measure all forms of VAW. In order to achieve this, it proposes further work on methodologies of data collection and indicator development of the following forms of VAW:

- Killing of women by intimate partners
- Female infanticide
- Threats of violence
- Economic and emotional/psychological violence as part of intimate partner violence
- Crimes committed against women in the name of 'honour'
- Conflict/crisis-related violence against women
- Dowry-related violence
- Sexual exploitation
- Trafficking
- Femicide

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<sup>11</sup> Johnson H., Ollus N., and Nevala S. (2008) *Violence against women: An international perspective*. New York. Springer. To be purchased <http://www.springer.com/sociology/criminology/book/978-0-387-73203-9>

<sup>12</sup> See [www.measuredhs.com/topics/dv/start.cfm](http://www.measuredhs.com/topics/dv/start.cfm)

<sup>13</sup> Kishor S., and Johnson K. (2004). *Profiling Domestic Violence: A Multi-country Study*. Calverton, MD: ORC Macro.

<sup>14</sup> Division for the Advancement of women, Economic Commission for Europe, United Nations Statistics Division. (2007) *Report of the expert group meeting on indicators to measure violence against women*. Geneva. [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/IndicatorsVAW/IndicatorsVAW\\_EGM\\_report.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/IndicatorsVAW/IndicatorsVAW_EGM_report.pdf) - this report subsequently fed into the report of the *Special Rapporteur on VAW, its causes and consequences*

- Forced marriage
- Sexual harassment

Taking into account different levels of capacity for data collection of VAW, data availability and development of indicators, the EGM recommended that the way forward to the development of international indicators is a step-by-step approach.

These proposed indicators and recommendations fed into the work of the *Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences*<sup>15</sup>, and subsequently led to the establishment of the *Friends of the Chair on Statistical Indicators on VAW* who had to develop the work on indicators further (see below).

## **Indicators proposed by the Friends of the Chair on Statistical Indicators of VAW**

In December 2006, the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 61/143 on intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women<sup>16</sup>, requested the Statistical Commission to develop and propose a set of possible indicators on violence against women (outcome indicators) to assist States in assessing the scope, prevalence and incidence of violence against women. This work is done in consultation with the Commission on the Status of Women, and building on the work of the *Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences*.

To that end, the Statistical Commission at its 39<sup>th</sup> session in February 2008 established the Friends of the Chair group (FoC) to develop the indicators and other methodological standards for implementation in national statistical systems (decision 39/116).

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.

The Friends of the Chair based their deliberations on the before mentioned proceedings of the EGM on Indicators to Measure Violence against Women (2007), as well as the discussions at the joint dialogue between the Statistical Commission at its 39<sup>th</sup> session and

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/women/rapporteur/annual.htm>

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/A\\_RES\\_61\\_143.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/A_RES_61_143.pdf)

the Commission on the Status on Women at its fifty-second session, including the report of February 2008 of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women (A/HRC/7/6/Add.5)<sup>17</sup>.

In February 2009 the FoC submitted a report to the UN Statistical Commission at its 40<sup>th</sup> session in February 2009 that proposed an interim set of 6 statistical indicators as a 'starting point for initiating further work on identifying the most appropriate measurements.' This set was adopted by the Statistical Commission.

### ***Interim set of indicators adopted by the Statistical Commission***

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 relationship to the perpetrator(s) and frequency.*
4. *Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to sexual violence during lifetime by 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.*

The UN Statistical Commission also requested the FoC to continue their work towards establishing indicators and accompanying guidelines for developing statistical surveys on violence against women. Therefore, the United Nations Statistics Division, acting as the secretariat of the FoC, undertook a methodological overview of surveys on violence against women conducted in the recent years, in particular 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 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 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. It is especially telling that only very few surveys generated information on frequency of VAW, for all the different types of violence<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/7session/A.HRC.7.6.add.5.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> For the full overview of these surveys on violence against women see:  
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/vaw/docs/Paper1.pdf>

During their meeting in Mexico, in December 2009 the FoC expanded the interim set of indicators, by including 'severity' to indicators 3 and 4 and adding 3 new indicators. They now constituted a core set of nine statistical indicators for measuring VAW as follows:

### **Current core set of statistical indicators on VAW**

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 and frequency*
2. *Total and age specific rate of women subjected to physical violence during lifetime by severity of violence, relationship to the perpetrator 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 and frequency*
4. *Total and age specific rate of women subjected to sexual violence during lifetime by severity of violence, relationship to the perpetrator and frequency*
5. *Total and age specific rate of ever-partnered women subjected to sexual and/or physical violence by current or former intimate partner in the last 12 months by frequency*
6. *Total and age specific rate of ever-partnered women subjected to sexual and/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*

### **Indicators of VAW currently not addressed by the core set**

It was mentioned before that the current work on indicators focuses on the scope, prevalence and incidence of VAW. At this stage no process or impact indicators on VAW are being proposed.

While ultimately data should be collected on the full range of VAW, following the recommendations for a step-by-step approach, the selection of interim indicators was based on level of methodological development, consensus and experience with measuring these in a comparable way across countries.

It may be relevant to point out that indicator 7 on *psychological partner violence* was on the 'long-term' list of the EGM 2007 because it does not benefit from the same consensus on measures and methodology as exist on measuring physical and sexual partner violence. For example, issues that exist are: Which acts should be measured as part of the phenomena? Are they valid in all/most countries? How do we measure/include acts that occur only in certain contexts? Is one event enough to call it violence or do we need a threshold?

Indicator 8 on *economic partner violence* was not proposed at all by the EGM (though considered in some studies are part of emotional abuse and/or controlling behaviours).

The FoC in their deliberations considered these two indicators (7 and 8) important dimensions of intimate partner violence even if there is currently no consensus on content, boundaries and operationalization for cross-national measurability. Including them in the set of core indicators recognizes their importance and may help advancing methodological work on them.

From both harmful traditional practices, only FGM, being a serious form of VAW, is included in the current set of core indicators, with the annotation that FGM should be measured in Demographic and Health Surveys where relevant.

During the December 2009 FoC meeting, there was no consensus about whether early marriage (before age 18) should be considered VAW, despite the fact that in the *Convention of the rights of the child*<sup>19</sup> all persons under 18 are considered children. The FoC stated in their conclusions that age at marriage can indicate the degree of autonomy reached by women in a society. Further, they stated that in many cultures early marriage is not considered a form of VAW<sup>20</sup>.

At the same meeting the FoC also discussed the following indicators: *femicide* in general and *spousal homicide* in particular; *stalking*; *physical and sexual violence in childhood*; *discrimination and violence at work*; *trafficking of women*; *impact of sexual violence on sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS*; *extent to which women recognize they suffered violence as a crime*; *hidden violence unreported to authorities*. These indicators were not included in the core set because they needed other sources of data than surveys (femicide, trafficking); because they were unclear or needed further methodological development (stalking, perception of violence as a crime); because they were not within the scope of the mandate (abuse in childhood); or were considered of doubtful value as a standalone indicators (impact of sexual violence on sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS). *Reporting of physical and sexual violence* however was considered a specific dimension of the indicators of physical and sexual violence in the core set.

## Follow-up work of the Friends of the Chair Group

The first phase of the work of the FoC, which is still ongoing, consists of identifying the set of core and additional statistical indicators on violence against women and adopting 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 with the report from December

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<sup>19</sup> United Nations, Treaty Series, Vol 1577, No. 27531

<sup>20</sup> In: UN Economic and Social Council Febr 2009 E/ESCAP/CST/4/Corr.1  
<http://www.unescap.org/STAT/cst/1/CST1-4E.pdf>



2009 meeting<sup>21</sup>, which presents the required sets of indicators, to the United Nations Statistical Commission in February 2011.

At the December 2009 meeting of the FoC it was also concluded that the work of the FoC should be extended beyond the first phase, ultimately until 2015. The FoC concluded that there is a need to continue the work on two fronts.

- The first front refers to investigating the inclusion of indicators that have the source of data in administrative and civil society records in the core set, such as femicide, for example.
- The second front is to ensure that the statistical data collections that have a source in administrative records, such as crime statistics, are adjusted to provide source data for gender statistics in general, and violence against women statistics, in particular.

In doing so, the FoC will coordinate closely with other international initiatives aimed at improving administrative records in the next several years.

The FoC will also explore the possibility of introducing a world-wide homogenous violence against women statistical data collection exercise, as initiated by the Chair of the Friends of the Chair.

## **UNECE Survey Module on Violence against Women**

The United Nations General Assembly has urged States to ensure the systematic collection and analysis of data to monitor all forms of violence against women (A/RES/63/155)<sup>22</sup>. One of the five key outcomes of the United Nations Secretary-General's Campaign, 'UNiTE to End Violence against Women' is the establishment in all countries by 2015 of systems for data collection and analysis<sup>23</sup>.

Under the United Nations Development Account Project on 'Enhancing capacities to eradicate Violence against Women through networking of local knowledge communities' (a 2-year project implemented by all five United Nations Regional Commissions in cooperation with the UNSD and UNDAW), the United Nations Economic Commission of Europe, Statistical Division, was assigned the development of a survey module to collect data on the six indicators approved by the UN Statistics Commission in February 2009. This activity is being led by the UNECE in collaboration with all regional commissions, UNSD and UNDAW.

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<sup>21</sup> Conclusions and recommendations at:  
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/vaw/docs/ConclusionsAndRecommendations.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> See: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/documents/ga63.htm>

<sup>23</sup> See: [http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/pdf/framework\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/pdf/framework_booklet.pdf)

The first draft of the module was further developed incorporating inputs and suggestions of an EGM in Geneva in September 2009<sup>24</sup>. The questions used in the draft module build on existing instruments that have been well tested and validated across cultures and would enable comparability with other international initiatives (WHO, IVAWS, DHS). The questions build in particular on those used in the WHO multi-country study.

The module was subsequently presented and discussed at the FoC meeting in December 2009, as the outcomes of the development and testing of this survey module will inform the development of the UNSD guidelines mentioned earlier. The module fully addresses the first 6 interim indicators. It also collects data on psychological abuse and – to a more limited extent – on economic violence by partner under 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. It has been decided not to include FGM in the module but to recommend using the DHS FGM module<sup>25</sup> for countries that want to measure this.

More recent work on the module included the development of a manual with detailed question by question description, a facilitator's manual presenting workshop options and exercises, and an interviewer manual. A codebook and analysis framework will be available by the end of April 2010<sup>26</sup>. The module and manuals are currently being translated into Arab, Spanish and Russian.

Whereas the module has been conceived to enable countries to collect a minimum set of information to measure the VAW indicators through other appropriate population-based surveys, methodological, ethical and safety concerns remain. They are even more risks when using an add-on module to a survey on another subject compared to when the module would be used as part of a dedicated survey. The latter remains the preferred method to measure the indicators due to the sensitivity of the topic.

The interregional project aims to involve ten countries in the testing of the survey module, 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 sample size in the test setting, others might attempt at generating statistics for the core indicators.

Work is ongoing on the development and testing of the module:

1. Identify opportunities for testing in a number of countries, both as an add-on module and as a part of a dedicated survey.

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<sup>24</sup> See: <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2009.09.gender.htm>

<sup>25</sup> The DHS module is downloadable from: [http://www.measuredhs.com/pubs/pub\\_details.cfm?ID=709](http://www.measuredhs.com/pubs/pub_details.cfm?ID=709)

<sup>26</sup> The UNECE module and accompanying materials are downloadable from:

<http://www1.unece.org/stat/platform/display/VAW/measuring+violence+against+women>

For more information on the module contact [henriette.jansen@gmail.com](mailto:henriette.jansen@gmail.com); for more information on the testing process contact [tiina.luige@unece.org](mailto:tiina.luige@unece.org)

2. Implement training of trainers – first opportunity for Arab speaking nations will be 3-7 May 2010 in Beirut.
3. Further develop and implement the testing strategy.
4. Analyse the results and evaluate the test experience in various countries.
5. Organize an EGM later in 2010 to discuss test results and next steps.

## Challenges and recommendations for cross-national data collection on VAW

### Challenges

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

The increased recognition of the problem, the interest and pressure of political agendas towards (periodic) measurement of VAW indicators at national and regional levels, together with the easy availability of existing instruments to measure violence, are positive advances that help monitoring and evaluating global and local efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women.

These positive advances, however, are not without risks. The sensitivity of the subject matter makes that its measurement is not only less amenable to quantification compared to people, birth and deaths, inventories or goods, but there is a real risk that measurement of VAW jeopardizes safety of participants. This risk may increase further when measurements are done by those who traditionally have not dealt with measuring sensitive subjects and may not (yet) be fully aware of those risks.

Some examples:

- Special interviewer training is crucial for ethics, safety and data quality<sup>27</sup>. In practice in many countries there are often insufficient resources or budget allocations to this important aspect of the research. The pressure to do a VAW survey with limited resources may result in cutting down on interviewer training, which will have as consequence that interviewers may not be sufficiently sensitized to the issues and complexities of data collection on VAW. They may for example not be aware of the need to return to a house a certain number of times when a respondent cannot be located; or they may be judgemental or not fully maintaining privacy and

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<sup>27</sup> Ellsberg M. and Heise L. (2005) *Researching Violence Against Women: A Practical Guide for Researchers and Activists*. PATH/WHO. A training curriculum has been developed with this guide

confidentiality. All of this will result in lower response rates and disclosure rate<sup>28</sup>.

While prevalence rates in surveys on sensitive issues generally already underestimate the real size of the problem, with badly trained interviewers this will be more so. Further when interviewers are not sensitized enough about the risks involved, they may put the respondents or even themselves in danger. For example this may happen when they have not been trained in how to react in situations where a husband interrupts an interview, or what to do if a respondent asks for help.

- With the pressure to collect national data, large population based sampling may be desirable for statistical reasons (such as for regional and sub regional breakdowns). This brings with it additional challenges in terms of safety and data quality, because, among other things, adequate standards for support mechanisms for respondents and/or debriefings of interviewers cannot be maintained; further each interviewer may have to conduct many interviews per day or during a prolonged period which may be draining and even desensitizing with subsequent consequences for data quality.
- The interest in measuring violence against children (VAC) may lead to the desire to add questions on violence against children on a questionnaire on VAW. It should however be realized that different ethical issues apply to VAW and VAC, so separate measurements activities are needed for both these types of violence and they should not be combined for the sake of convenience.
- The legislation around statistical surveys in a country may prescribe the use of the official survey name which may include 'violence against women' on all documents and public announcements related to the study. This poses a real danger to the safety of women, because participating to survey that is known to focus on domestic violence may provoke retaliatory violence, and it may further result in many women not wanting to participate. Therefore surveys must have a name that does not include 'VAW'.
- Because prevalence figures are responsive to methodological and context issues (for example, the way questions are framed, interviewer training, the level of awareness in the society), a fluctuation in the prevalence rates over time may not directly reflect a real change in the levels of violence. This should be realized when interpreting the estimates for the indicators.

Some recent real life examples of challenges and their consequences are given in the box below.

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<sup>28</sup> Jansen H.A.F.M., Watts C., 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, 831-849

### Recent examples of 'lessons learned'

- A national (UN supported) survey on domestic violence, was described to communities and households as '*a survey on domestic violence*'. One woman per household was interviewed, and, when children aged 10-14 were available in the same household, one child in that age group was also interviewed on her/his experience with domestic violence. Many respondents refused to answer questions on partner violence (36%, 30% and 23% did not respond to questions of respectively emotional abuse, physical violence and sexual violence), most likely resulting in huge underestimations.
- A national (UN supported) survey on an unrelated subject added a few questions on Violence against women, administered to the head of household. The official reported statistic for prevalence of VAW based on this study is 2%, in stark contrast with the estimates from a small scale dedicated survey a few years earlier (they reported for example 10% prevalence of physical partner violence).

It cannot be underlined enough that measuring VAW raises important ethical challenges. WHO has developed 'Putting Women First: Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Domestic Violence against Women,'<sup>29</sup>. These guidelines 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 prevalence estimate could potentially be used to question the importance of VAW as a legitimate area of concern.

### Recommendations

#### *Data collection should only be done when ethics and safety can be addressed*

All data collection on VAW should be undertaken in a way that respects confidentiality and woman's human rights and does not jeopardize safety. They should be undertaken in accordance with the WHO ethical and Safety guidelines for researching VAW.

United Nations entities and intergovernmental bodies and the donor community, within their respective areas of competence, should take note of the international core indicators on VAW, but also all the issues around their sensitivity, so that when encouraging and

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<sup>29</sup> WHO (2001). *Putting women first: Ethical and Safety recommendations for research on domestic violence against women*. <http://www.who.int/gender/violence/womenfirtseng.pdf>

supporting countries to collect data to support indicators they can direct them to appropriate sources of material and assistance. The importance of a 'safe name' that does not reveal the content of the questions/subject of interest cannot be underlined enough.

With the upcoming increase in national and cross-national data collection activities, combined with the still limited capacity and experience to carry out such a survey in a safe and effective manner on the ground, the UN system should provide technical support to countries and promote existing methodologies and good practices to ensure that existing standards of excellence on data collection are met. Linkages and coordination with NGOs are also crucial in this.

If a dedicated survey on VAW cannot be done, an add-on module such as the one developed by UNECE should be applied **only** if collection of high quality data can be ensured respecting ethical and safety concerns, including confidentiality, appropriate referral, and providing ways to describe the survey module without putting participants in danger.

As methodologies for measuring violence against children (child abuse, child sexual abuse or sexual harassment) require different techniques, have different legal implications and ethical and safety issues, data collection on violence against children should not be done in the same surveys that measure VAW. A separate working group led by UNICEF, WHO and others is developing methodologies for this in response to recommendations of the Secretary General's study on Violence against children<sup>30</sup>.

#### Further methodological work needs to continue

Without attempting to be exhaustive below follow some of the recommendations related to the development and measurement of VAW indicators<sup>31</sup>:

With psychological and economic violence currently in the core set of VAW indicators, it is important to realize that these indicators do not benefit from the same level of consensus and methodology that exist on measuring physical and sexual violence. More methodological work is needed to establish content, boundaries and operationalization of the measures and we may need to recognize that some of them may never be captured in the same way across cultures.

Since specialist dedicated surveys are far preferable above adding a module to a survey on another topic, an important way ahead would be the development of a dedicated survey to systematically collect data on core and upcoming VAW indicators as they are being developed, that brings together the wealth of knowledge and experience of the community of researchers, advocates and others.

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<sup>30</sup> For this report see: <http://www.unviolencestudy.org/>

<sup>31</sup> Data collection in conflict and emergency setting is even harder and other initiatives are underway to develop guidelines and recommendations for this.

Further work should be supported on the development of unified methods and standards for data collection on all forms of VAW that are under-documented and collaborative work in refining the list of indicators

A word of caution is in place here for using *indicators on attitudes on VAW*, as an alternative for asking direct, possibly painful, questions about women's own experience with violence. Where attitude questions may have a use in some local contexts, they have no place in cross-national data collection. In the first place they measure different things in different settings. For example, in situations of day-to-day struggle to meet their family's basic needs, a woman's known 'reality' is merely her own experience, and the answers to attitude questions will directly reflect their own situation and experience - hence it is not surprising that they closely correlate with violence prevalence - . In more developed contexts attitude are most likely reflecting socially desirable answers and norms in the community and rates are highly responsive to for example awareness campaigns. Moreover there are serious methodological issues around many of the questions that are commonly used in questionnaires, some of which surface only when used in translation<sup>32</sup>.

Efforts should also be made to strengthen and improve the collection of administrative data, such as health, police, judicial and social services data.

Efforts should be made to develop and improve measures and data collection in the field of measuring the impact of VAW on development outcomes such as MDGs.

Questions may be raised about the exclusive focus on violence against women relative to men and future work may want to look into the relative importance of both.

## **Conclusion**

Sound data have been and will continue to be important in the global recognition of the problem, in the development of strategies to combat it and in monitoring progress towards the goal to eliminate all forms of violence against women. The development of appropriate indicators and guidelines, always putting ethics and safety first, as well as the development and testing of a module to achieve internationally comparable statistics that capture the various types of VAW are important efforts in the way forward. It remains a global and local challenge to ensure that all forms of violence are measured.

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<sup>32</sup> One example of such methodological issues has to do with negative words (such as 'unlikely' or 'refuse') and double negatives (such as in 'women do not have the right to refuse sex') that do not directly translate in a number of other languages causing that a 'yes' or 'agree' could mean the opposite compared to the English question.