



# ESTIMATING THE COST OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE ARAB REGION



UNITED NATIONS

الاسكوا  
ESCWA



**Violence against women and girls (VAW) is widely recognized as a critical human rights violation, with a wide-ranging impact on public health, societal well-being and economic development. VAW requires political commitment and leadership to prevent it, mitigate its consequences and prosecute its perpetrators.**

ESCWA and UN Women have developed a two-phased regional project. This project aims to support Arab States in estimating the costs of VAW and using such costings as an instrument for policy reform and advocacy.

The UN defines VAW 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 in private life.” VAW includes multiple actors including husbands, family and community members as well as state actors. Violence perpetrated by husbands is the most common form experienced by women.

Although women across the world experience violence, women in the Arab region appear to be particularly at risk. A comprehensive review by the World Health Organization

(WHO) found that global prevalence of physical or sexual partner violence, among ever married women reaches 37 per cent in the WHO East Mediterranean region, which encompasses most Arab states, compared to 25 per cent in the European region and the global average of 30 per cent.

VAW is a vicious circle that perpetuates its enabling conditions. Several factors increase women’s vulnerability, including male control, unequal gender norms, low socioeconomic status and lacking legislative and policy frameworks. In turn, women’s vulnerability to violence increases their social marginalization and limits their ability to sustain their jobs or complete their education, perpetuating their low socioeconomic status and multi-dimensional gender disparities. Protracted conflicts in the region have also increased women’s exposure to violence.

## Policy Context of Violence against Women in the Arab Region

Arab States have taken steps to adopt international instruments on women's rights. Except for Sudan and Somalia, all Arab States have ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Arab States have also begun to translate these obligations into their legislations, policy frameworks, and strategies on addressing VAW.

Nevertheless, progress has been slow and uneven across the region, with only a few countries on their way to meeting their human rights obligations. Many Arab States have made substantial reservations to CEDAW, either as a whole or to selected articles, in several cases severely defying the objective of the treaty. In addition, most Arab States have yet to fully translate their commitment to international instruments governing women's rights into the actions required to meet their international obligations, particularly those under CEDAW and its follow-up.

The constitutions of most Arab States are rarely aligned with their international obligations, nor do they reflect the requirements of a gender-sensitive constitution. For example, while most Arab countries have enshrined the prohibition of discrimination in their constitutions, discrimination on basis of sex is not always mentioned explicitly. Similarly, while many Arab constitutions mention women's rights, especially those related to political and economic participation, such provisions are often disconnected from reality and lack applicability.

Only a handful of Arab States have adopted laws specifically geared at combating VAW, or some forms of it, such as domestic violence. These laws are, in most cases, insufficient and rarely aligned with States' obligations under CEDAW and other instruments. For example, most legislations governing VAW adopt a narrow definition that ignores various types of violence, such as marital rape, "honour killings" and incest. In addition, VAW legislations focus only on prosecuting perpetrators of violence, ignoring the important elements of preventing violence in the first

place and protecting survivors of violence and reintegrating them into society. Laws also generally remain silent about legalizing the services offered for survivors of violence. The absence of a legislative framework prevents the development of a coherent policy framework to address VAW. Existing policies are disengaged from constitutional and legal provisions, making their application inconsistent and practically difficult. Conversely, laws on VAW often lack a policy framework that would enable their operationalization. Notably, reporting mechanisms remain insufficient and poorly coordinated, as shown in the infographic on page 5.



**The constitutions of Tunisia and Egypt include specific articles on the protection of women from violence against them**

## Economic and Public Health Implications of Violence against Women

Research on the impact of VAW on the economy is critical if Arab states are to encourage sustained economic growth. Women in the Arab region remain an underutilized economic resource, as limited female labor force participation and economic empowerment reflect patriarchal societal structures. Notably, norms of men as breadwinners and women as wives and mothers restricts working hours and acceptable job sectors and occupations for women.

There is a limited understanding on the connections between VAW and Arab economies, but existing research suggests that differential gendered access to labour markets and economic empowerment results in unequal

<sup>1</sup> The existing laws do not fully comply with the UN model law on VAW that requires States to: (a) adopt a broad definition of VAW; (b) include complaint mechanisms; (c) address criminal and civil proceedings; and (d) provide services for survivors of violence.

power relations within and outside the home, which are a direct driver of VAW. The larger participation of women in informal forms of work also reduces their protection against abuse and violence, including in the case of migrant workers.

Similarly, existing studies show the negative economic impact of VAW. Women exposed to abuse or violence tend to be less productive and more likely to take time off work, resulting in a loss for them and the economy as whole. VAW also has costly consequences for survivors seeking to access health, legal and support services, as they often cover such expenses out of pocket. The State also incurs high costs for providing services to survivors and their families.

VAW should also be seen as a significant public health concern. Violence has a marked detrimental effect on women's physical, mental, and sexual and reproductive health. Women suffer from direct (e.g. injury or death resulting from violence) and indirect health consequences (such as conditions that may result from chronic stress because of violence) that can persist after the violence has ceased. The wide-ranging impact of violence on women's health involves huge expenses in treating survivors and puts additional pressure on health services.

## Costing Violence against Women: A Key Policy Reform Tool

Costing VAW should be a key priority for Arab States, based on the recognition that it is a critical human rights violation that has a negative multiplier effect on the rights of women, economic growth, public health and societal wellbeing. Notably, costing exercises:

- ⊖ Confirm the severity of the problem as a public concern rather than a private issue.
- ⊖ Demonstrate that VAW is economically pernicious.
- ⊖ Show that VAW drains resources from many sectors including private businesses and agencies, government, NGOs and individuals.

- ⊖ Demonstrate that VAW hinders the realization of governments' development objectives, including reducing poverty, enhancing human capability, developing strong institutions and realizing high standards of wellbeing.

- ⊖ Create awareness about the effects of violence on society, and inform the public on gender inequalities.

- ⊖ Help to reduce the social acceptability of violence and increase social responsibility to address it.

- ⊖ Inform policy makers over spending priorities through estimating the cost of VAW and expanding the knowledge base for gender-responsive budgeting.

- ⊖ Support the development of legislation to address VAW as well as effective policy frameworks.

- ⊖ Guide national planning to allocate more resources to address VAW holistically, notably through the development of early prevention mechanisms.

## Main Approaches and Methods for Costing Violence against Women

There are multiple approaches to costing VAW, each requiring different data, using different techniques and producing different insights. Broadly speaking, the economic model to estimate the multiple costs of VAW can adopt two approaches. The first is a model that focuses on costing the socio-economic impact of VAW. It attempts to estimate the cost of inaction, i.e. the cost of the problem. It measures the direct and indirect, tangible and intangible costs of violence to survivors, their families, the community and society. For example, it considers out-of-pocket expenses (fees for support services, transport or shelter) and the value of missed paid or unpaid work due to VAW. The second approach focuses on estimating the costs of implementation of the policies to prevent and address VAW. The focus is therefore on the cost of action, i.e. the cost of the solution. It aims to understand the extrapolated total costs of providing services to survivors of VAW based on costs of individual goods/services and rates of usage.

Based on a critical review of available methodologies and



**Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) is a tool used to mainstream a gender focus into government budgets throughout the budget cycle (planning, execution and reporting). A GRB approach to costing can identify gaps in services or policies, weaknesses or absence of referral systems and/or protocols needed for better management of specialized and public and private services that survivors might access.**

regional specificities, UN ESCWA and UN Women have developed a proposed model for costing VAW in the Arab region. In this model, the various costs described above can be summarized in a total cost model for the direct and indirect tangible costs (hereafter referred to as financial costs) of marital violence as:

$$\text{FCMV} = \text{THC} + \text{TCSP} + \text{TBC}$$

FCMV are the financial costs of marital violence, a sum of the total household cost (THC), total cost of service provision (at the community-level, TCSP), and total cost to businesses (TBC)<sup>2</sup>. The model is in line with international recommendations considering the existing limitations, particularly limited data availability. The model provides a good initial cost estimate, which can be later completed as national reporting mechanisms improve. The effectiveness of the model depends on the type of available data and coordinated efforts on data collection.

## Policy Recommendations

### ⊖ State Institutions

- ⊖ Align the VAW accountability tools, including constitutions and national legislations, with international instruments and due diligence standards;
- ⊖ Adopt national legislations on VAW compliant with UN standards, and ensure these are aligned with relevant constitutional, strategic and policy frameworks;

- ⊖ Improve policy frameworks and action plans that include adequate human and financial resources and measures to capacitate and enhance cooperation between state services;
- ⊖ Improve reporting and referral mechanisms, build the capacity of relevant staff and create linked data collection systems;
- ⊖ Conduct nation-wide evidence-based research on the economic costs of VAW, in line with the model developed by ESCWA and UN Women;
- ⊖ Enhance capacities of government entities to integrate gender-responsive budgeting norms;
- ⊖ Enhance human and financial capacities of national women's machineries to coordinate monitoring and advocacy on VAW.

### ⊖ UN and other International Organizations

- Provide technical advice on international standards to support the legal reform process to address limitations in national legislation on VAW;
- Provide capacity development and facilitate exchange of information on GRB;
- Support the design and implementation of VAW costings through the provision of technical advice and organization of regional and national consultations on VAW;
- Support the effective implementation of comprehensive national responses to VAW.

<sup>2</sup> The model is further detailed in a forthcoming ESCWA/UN Women publication authored by Dr Nata Duvvury, an internationally recognized expert, entitled "Estimating Costs of Marital Violence against Women in the Arab Region: Operational Model" (2017).

### ⊖ Civil Society Organizations

- ⊖ Raise awareness among relevant stakeholders (national and local authorities, police, social workers, health care providers, etc.) on the importance of costing the various forms of VAW;
- ⊖ Coordinate with government agencies to establish reporting systems at the grassroots level, covering local clinics and health facilities, among other stakeholders;
- ⊖ Contribute to costing VAW through providing an estimate of costs for non-state services;
- ⊖ Provide shadow reports on progress related to addressing the various forms of VAW.

# REPORTING VAW IN THE ARAB REGION



## How can women report violence?

### Formal channels

Police, courts  
Government hospitals & other state institutions  
Government hotline where available



### Informal channels

NGOs  
Private hospitals  
Other informal channels (e.g. tribal leaders, shelters)

### VAW coordination mechanisms

Most countries have several, non-unified reporting forms for VAW incidents, however:

**Morocco** has a standardized form to report VAW across all reporting channels

**Tunisia & Palestine** are piloting projects to standardize reporting

### Who can report violence?

- In Egypt & Lebanon
  - Survivors
- In Morocco
  - Survivors
  - Family members
- In all other countries
  - Survivors
  - Family members
  - A lawyer and/or public prosecutor



### How do authorities follow up?

- ✓ Arrest the perpetrator if required
- ✓ Refer survivors to hospitals for medical examination
- ✓ Offer services to survivors (shelter, counseling etc.)
- ✓ Refer survivors to courts and public prosecutors who are responsible to initiate investigations

### VAW database systems

Fragmented sources mean that responding agencies do not have consistent information or aggregated data on VAW

- ✓ Most countries have established/ are establishing some form of VAW national database
- Few countries provide training for maintaining databases on VAW indicators



### Why do women not report episodes of violence?



Survivors of VAW have access to free legal services in almost all Arab countries



Almost all countries provide regular training to police officers on VAW and gender issues. However, in most cases the training is basic and does not for example cover the steps that survivors should follow to document VAW incidents

### Channels for refugee and migrant women

- There is a great disparity in the reporting mechanisms available to vulnerable groups such as migrant and refugee women
- Only Bahrain allows any woman full access to formal and informal channels, regardless of her nationality or residency status



### IN EGYPT

7.9 MILLION SURVIVORS are estimated to experience some form of violence each year

LESS THAN 1% REPORT such incidents to the police each year



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