

Regional Meeting on Strengthening the Implementation of Prevalence Surveys on Violence against Women in the Arab Region

15-17 October 2019, Cairo, Egypt

****KEY CONCLUSIONS**

Roles of NSO and national women machinery

1. Countries confirmed that the official source of data is the national statistical offices (NSOs) responsible for collecting and producing VAW prevalence data in close collaboration with women machineries. NSOs must ensure harmonization of definitions and concepts and use of standardized data collection tools and computations of indicators.
2. Collaboration with women machinery on planning prevalence VAW surveys on the onset, is important to define survey objectives. That would ensure meeting users' demands and effective use of resources. Expanding on the scope of a survey beyond those needs would jeopardize not only the quality of data but also waste limited resources. It is important that other actors, particularly women's organizations and other actors as relevant in each country, are also engaged.
3. Results of VAW surveys worldwide confirm that domestic violence is the most prevalent form of violence especially when the perpetrator is the partner/husband. VAW prevalence survey main objective therefore is to collect information to that end to reveal physical, sexual and psychological violence over time and study the characteristics of both the survivor and perpetrator, as well as information about the extent and nature of the violence, consequences, as well as risk and protective factors.
4. Understanding violence experienced by women by others outside the family, in particular sexual violence, is also of great relevance for the formulation of policies and programmes to address violence occurring in public spaces, such as workplaces, educational settings, streets and public transportation, among other settings.
5. Over the years, countries implementing VAW prevalence surveys have been increasing in the region. Many countries are planning to implement VAW prevalence surveys after the 2020 round of population and housing census. Countries were highly encouraged to implement standalone specialized surveys on VAW to establish national baseline data and better capture a larger number of violence survivors. This will allow countries to monitor progress thereafter either through

modules incorporated in health-related surveys or in specialized surveys and measure prevalence in lifetime and incidence of violence over the past year.

Regional standard toolkit

6. However, available data are not comparable to measure VAW at the regional and global levels. Countries were urged to abide by standard methods and implement core regional questions, which are aligned with globally agreed standard questionnaires. Countries can add questions relevant to national context, while ensuring core questions and comparability as per the regional questionnaire of the ESCWA VAW Toolkit rev 2. However, countries were reminded that new questions to be added should first follow standard practice of cognitive testing and validation.
7. Countries commended ESCWA on developing and upgrading the regional toolkit to support national effort in compiling VAW data. Countries acknowledged the importance of adhering to the core questions and the minimum components of each in order to produce official standardized data for evidence-based policy.
8. VAW is a complex phenomenon that results from gender inequalities and greater vulnerability of women to specific forms of violence such as intimate partner violence and sexual violence which until recently have been hidden.
9. Dedicated surveys (and their instruments and methods) developed to measure VAW are not recommended to be used to measure violence against men or children as the violence experienced by men and children is of different nature and requires different issues to be explored. Adding other elements to a VAW survey compromises the quality of data collected.

VAW specialized training

10. The meeting also emphasized the importance of conducting in-depth and specialized training on VAW to produce accurate data and comply with globally agreed ethical and safety standards, to ensure the safety of interviewers and interviewees. The training on concepts, data collection tools, in addition, to field practice, exercises, testing, role-playing and interviewing life victims are among many of the recommended methods to be employed by the countries when implementing a training over a period of 2-3 weeks.
11. Asking about violence against women is sensitive, but can be done in ways that is ethically and methodologically sound and prioritizes the safety of interviewees and interviewers.
12. Interviewer training is critical for overcoming barriers to asking about sensitive issues, including sexual violence.

Safety and ethical standards

13. Countries agreed that the safety of both women interviewee and interviewer need to be taken into account and planned in advance. It is ethically unacceptable to conduct a poorly designed study that cannot address the aim. Privacy and confidentiality are therefore very important to the

success of the survey and safety of women. Various methods should be employed to provide women interviewee with a safe environment to disclose complete and accurate information without jeopardizing their safety and to provide support to survivors when needed. Women should consent to participate in the survey and should be informed that they can refuse to participate or abandon the interview at any time.

14. Safety and ethical standards differ as per women's life cycle. Countries who plan to collect information on adolescents or the elderly should refer to safety and ethical standard according to relevant age group. Interviewing children involves additional ethical concerns (in some countries require mandatory reporting of child abuse), and is therefore not recommended. Recommendations specific to interviewing young adolescents and children are available and will be shared.
15. It is important for the region to ensure adherence to globally agreed standards for measuring VAW, while phrasing questions in a way that is culturally appropriate. Too much adaptation can compromise comparability and validity, e.g. changing the threshold for physical violence.

Data sources

16. Data on VAW can be derived from different sources (prevalence surveys, module in health-related surveys, and administrative records). It was noted that those sources are designed for different purposes and hence provide different information on VAW. Administrative data does not provide prevalence as it only reflects a small group of women that report to services. Prevalence surveys are recognized as the most effective and comprehensive tool to collect prevalence data on VAW.
17. Although specialized surveys are the gold standard, DHS provides good quality data that follow the internationally agreed standards, including ethical and safety standards, and has the potential to be repeated every 5 or more years.

Sampling

18. A large sample size does not necessarily ensure robust and accurate data. Should aim for a sample size that gives us sufficient power and is representative, without causing interviewer fatigue which may compromise the quality of the data and women's safety in the community - clusters with households as primary sampling unit.

Displaced women in conflict/crisis countries

19. Prevalence data in humanitarian settings is lacking but there are additional safety and ethical considerations. A risk-benefit analyses is needed before undertaking a prevalence survey in crises. Ability to offer psychological support services is imperative in these settings.
20. A number of countries in conflict expressed concern on how to measure violence against displaced women, particularly in the context of an acute crises. It was noted that no standard methods are yet in place, however, ESCWA and WHO will assist countries by making available good practices from the globe and the region.

Analysis

21. Countries acknowledge the importance of compiling international agreed indicators including those recommended by the Friends of the Chair (9 indicators) and the SDG VAW prevalence related indicators. In addition, countries discussed the importance of a regional list of indicators to reflect the regional context and requested ESCWA to include them within the Toolkit rev2. The list of indicators will facilitate defining the scope of the VAW questionnaire, mapping the indicators to the survey objectives as defined by policy makers.
22. Age is an important demographic characteristic in women's life cycle. Therefore, it is imperative that countries produce and report prevalence data on types of violence by 5 year age groups, and also report the 15-49 year age group for comparability.
23. The main purpose of collecting data on VAW is to understand the magnitude and nature of the problem to inform policies and programmes and monitor trends at the national level and should not be restricted to an SDG reporting exercise. At the same time, it is helpful and important to ensure comparability between countries for SDG reporting and monitoring of global and regional trends.
24. Addressing VAW requires cross sectoral engagement. It is important to adopt a participatory approach with relevant actors throughout the VAW survey process from planning to dissemination. This is to build ownership and buy-in from senior leadership, and mobilize political support. Partnerships do not only imply communications. However, it requires collaborations, cooperation, consultation, communication, and coordination (5Cs).

Reporting

25. Transparency and completeness of data reported is critical in the dissemination of information on VAW. Countries were requested to report on the number of target populations in addition to rates. Countries were also requested to provide further information on the characteristics of the subpopulation in both the numerator and denominator including the age group, relationship to perpetrator, etc. In order to understand the context of VAW indicators reported by countries, it is essential to provide the disaggregation of each type of violence and not only the totals. A check list of how to report on analysis will be provided by WHO and translated into the Arabic language by ESCWA to be included in the Toolkit.
26. All tables should be self-explanatory and labeled adequately. As a minimum, reports should present data by type of violence, age group, time-frame, partnership status, urban/rural, whether perpetrator is current or most recent or any partner, who was sampled (all women, ever partnered women, currently partnered women only), presenting the prevalence of 15-49 year age group whatever the sample group was, and including denominators.
27. Prevalence is a key input to assessing cost of violence, but costing does not need to be done in the context of a prevalence survey.

28. Collect data that you will use and put in place strategies to ensure the data is used, for example, setting up an advisory committee of relevant stakeholders, including women's organizations and engaging with key actors who will use the data for programmes and policies from the design to dissemination stages.

Remember bad data is worse than no data!

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