

I. WHY COST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Violence against women (VAW), and specifically domestic violence (DV) against women,¹ is a global pandemic and a violation of an individual's human rights. Research has found that one in every three women worldwide has experienced physical and/or sexual violence, and the rate is slightly higher at 37 per cent in the Eastern Mediterranean region.² This indicates the widespread nature of DV and the urgent need for a comprehensive response by governments across the globe.

The economic, social and health costs of violence against women, while largely undocumented and unrecognized, are considered by researchers, programme practitioners and advocates to be enormous. There is currently growing interest in estimating the costs of DV, particularly the costs of inaction,³ to provide governments evidence of the scale of financial losses. Sustainable human development will continue to be directly and negatively affected until the cycle of violence against women is broken. Demonstrating the economic and other costs to households, communities and the economy at large is one way to help break this cycle.

Estimating the economic impacts of DV is important to illustrate in clear terms to government planners the systemic loss to a country's economic potential. In terms of the logic of economic planning, the estimate of leakage from the system also provides the basis for understanding the potential gain from increased investment in policies and programmes to reduce DV. Framing the issue in terms of its economic consequences redefines it as a matter of public welfare, rather than a private concern within families. Working from the assumption that the fundamental objective of government is to promote a vibrant and growing economy, this economic analysis also provides an evidence base to redirect budget allocations to ensure a sufficiently funded, comprehensive and ultimately effective response to DV. In addition, it contributes to increasing the efficiency and transparency of budget allocations, especially for countries that have a limited budget for gender equality, which is the case in most Arab countries. Furthermore, by accounting for inflation, the expected increase in use of services in response to DV and the population growth rate, governments can project costs of service provision.⁴

Nearly 60 studies, largely from countries in the Global North, have attempted to provide cost estimates of DV⁵ at the individual, household and community levels. Many of these studies provide only selective estimates of costs of violence; their findings are approximations based on partial information and with many assumptions for aggregation. In general, these studies have aimed to document and quantify the economic impacts of violence upon individual household economies and to assess the following: loss of family earnings due to repeated physical injuries or emotional abuse;

¹ Domestic violence encompasses violence perpetrated by family members against other family members. These guidelines focus on domestic violence against women, namely, violence perpetrated against women by family members. Marital violence is a subset of DV and focuses on violence against women by a husband or partner.

² WHO and others, *Global and Regional Estimates of Violence Against Women: Prevalence and Health Effects of Intimate Partner Violence and Non-Partner Sexual Violence* (Geneva, World Health Organization, 2013).

³ Costs incurred as a result of governments failing to adequately address the problem of DV.

⁴ Nata Duvvury and Sinead Ashe, "A costing tool for action: estimating the resource requirements for a minimum package of essential services for women experiencing violence" (New York, UN Women, 2016).

⁵ Many of these studies have a limited focus on marital or intimate partner violence.

work days lost by both women and men and related health costs (including the costs of accessing services); and the impact of spousal violence on children and their education.

Countries that have focused on estimating the economic costs of DV have used the evidence to raise the priority given to the phenomenon in national policies and programmes, as well as to increase the resources available to programmes for prevention of violence, treatment and care for survivors and for prosecution of perpetrators of violence. For example, in Egypt, the findings of a national costing study conducted in 2015 have contributed considerably to proposed legislation on VAW. The findings are also being used by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the National Council for Women (NCW) to raise awareness and put pressure on policymakers. In Viet Nam, the government agreed to develop and deliver a minimum package of services based on the results of its costing study. Fokupers, an NGO in Timor-Leste, was also able to increase the budget allocated to combat DV through advocacy based on the findings of their costing exercise.⁶ In Peru, estimates of the costs for the private sector has led to some companies developing and implementing a business model to address violence against women.

II. WHY COST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE ARAB REGION?: A TOOL TO INFLUENCE POLICY REFORM

In the Arab region, DV has been widely recognized as a critical human rights violation requiring political commitment and leadership to prevent it from happening and, when it does, to mitigate its consequences and prosecute its perpetrators. While some data is available in some countries, the understanding of the economic impacts and financial consequences of DV is limited. Costing DV in the Arab region will fill a gap in knowledge on its prevalence and its economic impacts. A focus on the economic costs can offer a potential entry point to positively influence budget decision makers in Arab States and, most importantly, to introduce policy reform.

Costing DV will help Arab States coordinate their efforts on a national level, as efforts thus far have been fragmented. This is evident in the disconnect of the international and national legal frameworks from the actual policy frameworks implemented and services established.⁷ Costing DV will assist Arab States to implement due diligence and to meet their international commitments and obligations, such as the Beijing Platform of Action, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the relevant goals and targets in the Sustainable Development Goals. Analysing the cost of DV will also enable Arab States to fully assume their role as duty bearers, confirming the severity of the problem as a matter of public, not private, concern.

The recent costing study in Egypt, examined, was conducted to address the dearth of information on the prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) and its economic impact.⁸ The study confirmed a high rate of violence perpetrated against women. The total cost for women and families due to this violence was approximately 2.17 billion Egyptian pounds (LE) in 2015. The

⁶ See <http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2016/06/un-women-costing-tools-have-led-to-improved-essential-services>.

⁷ E/ESCWA/ECW/2017/2.

⁸ The Egyptian study had an expanded focus to capture violence experienced by women from the spouse, family members and in the public spaces.

findings led to enhanced awareness and the development of VAW services, among other significant advances.

Costing types of violence is of particular help in the following sequential areas:

- Showing violence against women is morally unacceptable and economically pernicious;
- Understanding how it drains resources from other sectors (private businesses/agencies, government, community groups, individuals), especially in countries with scarce resources;
- Demonstrating how continued violence limits development objectives, such as reducing poverty, enhancing human capability and realising the highest possible standard of wellbeing;
- Raising awareness of the effects of violence on various segments of society and the absence of gender equality in the private and public spheres;
- Reducing the social acceptability of violence and increasing social responsibility towards addressing it;
- Informing policy spending priorities by providing an estimate of the cost of violence and its effect on the economy;
- Advocating for holistic legislation to address violence against women, alongside the required legal and procedural changes.