Domestic Violence
A Public Security Priority

GCSP Inclusive Security Policy Brief Series

Domestic violence (DV) has traditionally been considered a private matter, but with an estimated 30 per cent of women globally having experienced physical and/or sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner,[1] the scale of the problem cannot be ignored. DV extends beyond physical assault to include emotional, psychological, economic, and online abuse, and is not limited by age,[2] gender, or sexual orientation.[3]

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has seen the frequency, severity, and complex nature of DV evolve, **creating a shadow pandemic[4]**, with helplines in Singapore and Cyprus registering a 30 per cent increase in calls[5] and European DV hotlines recording around 60 per cent more calls in a single month[6].

While the data mainly focuses on women's experiences, men, boys and girls are also victims. It is crucial to **ensure targeted, gender mainstreamed, and evidence-based responses** that guarantee safe, violence-free environments for all, regardless of age or gender.

Legal framework and gaps

In 2018 more than one billion women lacked legal protection from sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner, including women living in 21 of 36 fragile and conflict-affected states. Where protective legislation exists, enforcement may be weak because of gaps in national laws, lack of protective orders, and inadequate police and judicial responses[8].

General Recommendations 19 and 35 of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) have been catalysts to evolve customary international law and develop comprehensive structures to **prevent, prosecute, and eliminate all forms of violence against women**. However, 61 CEDAW states parties have reservations regarding the Convention and 22 countries have self-declared that they are not bound by key articles, citing religion and traditions as reasons[9].

The European regional mechanism known as the Istanbul Convention has been monumental both in terms of shifting the concept of DV to include the entire family unit as well as former partners, while also recognising the concept's changing and multifaceted nature. It defines DV as "**all acts of physical, sexual, psychological**
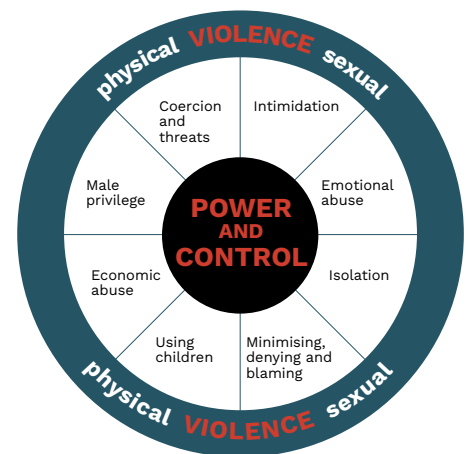
Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, MN, https://www.theduluthmodel.org/

or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim".

A systemic approach

Developing and implementing laws constitute only one step towards eradicating DV: addressing its root causes and preventing it from happening are critical. Discriminatory social norms play a large part in perpetuating inequality and cycles of violence.

"Domestic violence affects extended family, social circles, communities, [and] cities and has profound effects nationally in terms of the expenses and the impact it has on emergency response."

Will Averill, Director of Communications at the Willow Domestic Violence Center[7]

[1] WHO, "Global and Regional Estimates of Violence against Women: Prevalence and Health Effects of Intimate Partner Violence and Non-partner Sexual Violence", 2013, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241564625>.

[2] UNICEF, "Behind Closed Doors: The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children", 2009, <https://www.unicef.org/media/files/BehindClosedDoors.pdf>.

[3] Mayo Clinic, "Domestic Violence against Men", 2020, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/domestic-violence-against-men/art-20045149>.

[4] N. Pfitzner et al., "Responding to the 'Shadow Pandemic': Practitioner Views on the Nature of and Responses to Violence against Women in Victoria, Australia during the COVID-19 Restrictions", 2020, <https://research.monash.edu/en/publications/responding-to-the-shadow-pandemic-practitioner-views-on-the-natur>.

[5] UN Women, 'Violence against Women and Girls: The Shadow Pandemic", 2020, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/4/statement-ed-phumzile-violence-against-women-during-pandemic>.

[6] Euronews, 'WHO Deeply Troubled by Spike in Domestic Violence in Locked down Europe", 2020, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/05/07/who-deeply-troubled-by-spike-in-domestic-violence-in-locked-down-europe>.

[7] P. Tavares & Q. Wodon, "Global and Regional Trends in Women's Legal Protection against Domestic Violence and Sexual Harassment", 2020, http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/679221517425064052/EndingViolenceAgainstWomenandGirls-GBVLaws-Feb .pdf

[8] <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/679221517425064052/EndingViolenceAgainstWomenandGirls-GBVLaws-Feb2018.pdf>.

[9] Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979, <https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en>.

While local contexts vary, women globally are responsible for a significant amount of unpaid work or do work that is not valued equally to men doing the same work, leading to women having less economic, political and social power.[10] Gendered masculinity norms also impact men negatively, with societies that value strength, power and dominance in men frequently causing those who deviate from such norms to feel shame or suffer humiliation.[11]

Aggression has historically been perceived as a masculinised trait, something young boys are socialised to use,[12] and attitudes and beliefs whereby violence against women and in the family is perceived to be justifiable are still prevalent: the World Values Survey 2017-2020 conducted in 48 countries found on average that **respondents consider it never justifiable for a man to beat his wife (73.3 per cent) and for parents to beat their children (51.1 per cent)**[13].

Social change requires education and positive role models to encourage emotional self-awareness and self-care among all people, including men and boys. Visible and gender-diverse leadership at all levels (from the individual to the global), and in all areas (domestic, labour, education, the economy, politics and law enforcement) is also essential to advance the rights of women and girls in both law and practice.

Recommendations

We can all play a part in challenging harmful and discriminatory gendered norms and raising awareness of the prevalence of DV in its various forms. Governments and organisations can go further:

1. Establish **specific protocols** and **innovative solutions** that allow victims to continue to be able to access services. These could be both technological, like instant messaging apps with geo-location or SMS-based reporting methods, as well as direct reporting mechanisms that do not require cell phones and Internet access.[22]

2. **Gather disaggregated data** to support more effective policies and programmes by establishing:
   - **gender-responsive frameworks** for the realistic identification, understanding and measurement of the experiences of victims (both physical and psychological), as well as their perception of risks, fairness, and trust in institutions; and
   - **mechanisms** to consolidate data sourced from various governmental and non-governmental organisations like hotlines.

3. **Coordinate interagency procedures** and integrate training across the system for law enforcement agencies, healthcare and education providers, employers, and civil society organisations so that they can more effectively prevent DV, protect victims and respond to any signs of domestic abuse[23].

4. **Close legislative gaps** and implement CEDAW country-specific recommendations to address the root causes of DV.

5. Increase and maintain **funding and support** for sustained efforts to strengthen prevention and protection services, based on an improved understanding of the structural dynamics that favour DV, which is in turn based on a more complete register of victims and perpetrators resulting from the use of improved data-gathering methodologies.

FACTS AND STATS:

- Worldwide in 2017, **137 women were intentionally killed** by a member of their own families every day.[14]

- **Disability-related stigma and discrimination** compound women's vulnerability to violence and hinder their ability to seek help,[15] as do forced displacement and conflict.[16]

- In 2018 in England and Wales men were **three times less likely** to report being a victim of DV than women.[17]

- In 2019, among **10,600 Finnish victims** of reported domestic and intimate partner violence, **24.6 per cent were minors**. Among adult victims, **76.8 per cent were women**.[17]

- A total of **104 countries** reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had disrupted services related to preventing or dealing with **violence against children**.[18]

MULTIPLE FACES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

New forms of violence have arisen during the COVID-19 pandemic, with some perpetrators restricting their respective families' access to sanitisers or spreading misinformation about the disease and the health condition of pandemic victims[4].

Online abuse increased by 50 per cent in Australia from March to April 2020,[19] while online child sex abuse cases tripled under lockdown in the Philippines.[20]

Fifty-four per cent of **image-based sexual abuse cases** registered during 2015-16 and 2018-2019 in the state of Victoria, Australia were linked to family violence.[21]

[10] K. Khoday, Human Development Report 2020, UNDP, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/rethinking-human-development-era-planetary-transformation-0>.
[11] R.W. Connell, "Studying Men and Masculinity", in Resources for Feminist Research, Toronto, O.I.S.E, 2001.
[12] J.H. Pleck, "The Gender Role Strain Paradigm: An Update", in A New Psychology of Men, New York, Basic Books, 1995.
[13] Significant differences were found among the 48 countries surveyed, with the proportion of respondents considering it never justifiable for a man to beat his wife ranging from 22 to 95 per cent (C. Haerpfer et al., World Values Survey Wave 7 (2017-2020), 2020, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV7.jsp>).
[14] UNODC, Global Study on Homicide 2019, 2019, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/global-study-on-homicide.html>.
[15] K. Dunkle et al., "Disability and Violence against Women and Girls: Emerging Evidence from the What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls Global Programme", 2018, <https://www.whatworks.co.za/documents/publications/195-disability-brief-whatworks-23072018-web/file>.
[16] WHO, COVID-19 and Violence against Women: What the Health Sector/System Can Do, 2020, <https://apps.who.int/iris/rest/bitstreams/1274324/retrieve>.
[17] ManKind Initiative, "Statistics on Male Victims of Domestic Abuse", 2020, <https://www.mankind.org.uk/statistics/statistics-on-male-victims-of-domestic-abuse/>.
[18] UNICEF, "Protecting Children from Violence in the Time of COVID-19: Disruptions in Prevention and Response Services", 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/reports/protecting-children-from-violence-covid-19-disruptions-in-prevention-and-response-services-2020>.
[19] UN Women, "Online and ICT-facilitated Violence against Women and Girls during Covid-19", 2020, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/brief-online-and-ict-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls-during-covid-19>.
[20] Europol, "Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (IOCTA)", 2020, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/iocta-report>.
[21] Sentencing Advisory Council, "Sentencing Image-based Sexual Abuse Offences in Victoria", 2020, <https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/publications/sentencing-image-based-sexual-abuse-offences-in-victoria>.
[22] GIWPS, "Advancing Women's Participation in Post-conflict Reconstruction", 2020, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/event/advancing-womens-participation-in-post-conflict-reconstruction/>.
[23] NGO's at grass root levels help men to develop new masculinities through training and continuous support. Mexican "Gendes" https://www.gendes.org.mx/ offers a 24/7 hotline for men struggling with difficult emotions during Covid-19 lockdown.