



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Committee on Statistics

First session
4-6 February 2009
Bangkok

IMPROVING GENDER STATISTICS: MEASURING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

(Item 5 of the provisional agenda)

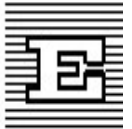
MEASURING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: TOWARDS BETTER INDICATORS

Note by the secretariat

Corrigendum

The dates of the session *should read* as above.

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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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First session
15-17 December 2008
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SUMMARY

The process of developing indicators to measure violence against women has gained momentum in the last few years. The General Assembly and the Secretary-General have made eradicating violence against women a top priority on the global agenda. The present document contains an assessment of the latest developments in defining a common set of indicators to measure violence against women and describes the current status of that process. A brief assessment of work on the subject in the Asian and the Pacific region is followed by a description of the main challenges in the measurement of violence against women. In the note, the secretariat also reviews the process of defining a set of indicators to measure violence against women in connection with the work of the Friends of the Chair group on violence against women established during a joint dialogue between the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-second session and the United Nations Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session, in February 2008.

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Introduction

1. Violence against women continues to be a human rights issue in many countries, despite numerous efforts at the national and international levels to eliminate it. Adopted in 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,¹ the first international treaty to address women's rights comprehensively, contains a definition of discrimination against women. In the comments to its General Recommendation No. 19 on violence against women, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women interpreted this definition as follows:

“...discrimination includes gender-based violence, that is, violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty.”²

2. In the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action,³ it was emphasized that “violence against women both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms”.⁴ Moreover, in its resolution 49/4 of 11 March 2005 on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all national policies and programmes, the Commission on the Status of Women called upon countries to improve and promote the collection, compilation, dissemination and use of gender equality statistics and relevant indicators, to enable the construction of appropriate tools for planning, programming and monitoring.

3. In its resolution 58/147 of 22 December 2003 on the elimination of domestic violence against women, the General Assembly called upon Member States to, among other things, collect, update and improve the collection of data on violence against women. In its resolution 61/143 of 19 December 2006 on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women, the Assembly emphasized the increasing demand for indicators to contribute towards strengthening a knowledge base on violence against women. In particular, the Assembly requested the Statistical Commission to work with the Commission on the Status of Women and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, in order to propose a set of indicators that would help States assess the scope, prevalence and incidence of violence against women.

4. At the launch of a campaign to end violence against women in 2007, the Secretary-General recognized that violence against women still remains rampant, and that reducing it needs to be a priority in State agendas (see <http://endviolence.un.org/press.shtml>). As part of this effort, the Secretary-General, in an in-depth study on all forms of violence against women (A/61/122/Add.1), urged all countries to have in place data-collection and analysis systems that support evidence-based policies and programmes to end violence against women.

¹ General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex.

² *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 38 (A/47/38)*, para. 6.

³ *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

⁴ *Ibid.*, annex II, para. 112.

5. Building on previous work, the statistical branch of the United Nations has been actively involved in the development of a core set of indicators on violence against women. The purpose of the present document is to briefly assess progress made in the Asian and the Pacific region in terms of the collection of data on violence against women, while discussing some of the challenges in its measurement. Then, a proposed set of core indicators developed by international experts is introduced, followed by a review of the ongoing work of the Friends of the Chair group on indicators of violence against women; the group will prepare a report to be presented at the fortieth session of the Statistical Commission in February 2009.

I. MEASUREMENT OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

A. Definition of violence against women

6. In its resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993 on the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the General Assembly defined violence against women 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”. Furthermore, in its resolution 58/147, the Assembly recognized that domestic violence could “include economic deprivation and isolation”, conduct that could cause “imminent harm to the safety, health or well-being of women”.

7. Thus, violence against women can take many shapes and forms. Physical violence entails the intentional use of force, including the use of weapons, to harm or injure women. Sexual violence is related to abusive sexual behaviour, including forcing, or attempting to force, women to engage in sexual acts without their consent. Psychological or emotional abuse, including stalking, involves controlling, insulting, humiliating or embarrassing women. Economic violence includes denying women equal access to employment and remuneration opportunities; it also implies limited access to and control over financial resources or property rights (see A/61/122/Add.1).

8. One of the most serious aspects about violence against women is that it does not occur only in external environments, in other words, it is not restricted to abuse from persons unknown to the victim. It can also happen in what is thought to be one of the safest places in society: the home. Domestic violence, including that inflicted by an intimate partner, is one of the most difficult crimes to prevent because girls and women may not see their family members as potential aggressors. Moreover, when domestic violence happens, women tend to hide it, often because they fear further abuse, but in some cases because they wish to protect the family reputation. Hence, given that women are usually afraid of denouncing abuse, making self-reporting scarce, it is also extremely difficult to collect data on the subject. The next section presents a brief overview of such efforts in Asia and the Pacific, highlighting the main problems.

B. Progress

1. International efforts

9. Various studies on violence against women have been conducted at the global level, and have included the Asian and Pacific region. In its Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women, conducted during the period 2000-2003, the World Health Organization (WHO) focused on physical, sexual and emotional violence by male intimate partners.⁵ The study analysed the extent to which intimate-partner violence is associated with a range of health issues for women. Given that definitions of what entails violence against women vary according to the specific country context, a major challenge for such a study was ensuring comparability across sites and sampling strategies. Bangladesh, Japan, Samoa and Thailand formed part of this project in Asia and the Pacific; a replication of this study was also carried out in New Zealand.

10. Another example is the International Crime Victims Survey project, initiated in 1989.⁶ Drivers of the initiative include the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, the Home Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the Ministry of Justice of the Netherlands and the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Criminality and Law Enforcement. This survey was set up in response to the need for reliable crime statistics that could be used for international comparisons. Sexual assaults such as rape, attempted rape and offensive sexual behaviour were addressed within the broader framework of crimes. Azerbaijan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea and Hong Kong, China participated in this project. A similar effort was initiated in 1997, namely, the International Violence against Women Survey coordinated by the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control with inputs from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute and Statistics Canada.⁷ The survey was specifically designed for international comparability, targeting three types of violence against women: physical, sexual and psychological. Full-fledged studies have been conducted in, among other places, Australia; the Philippines; and Hong Kong, China.

11. The demographic and health surveys developed through the MEASURE DHS programme of Macro International⁸ have been carried out at the global level, focusing on domestic violence and its links to and effects on the health of women and girls. These nationally representative household surveys are used to collect information on indicators such as frequency and consequences of violence, violence during pregnancy, when spousal violence was first initiated, and whether and from whom help is sought. In some cases, they also address men's attitudes towards the use of violence. In the late

⁵ World Health Organization, *WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women* (Geneva, 2005), also available at www.who.int/gender/violence/who_multicountry_study/en/index.html.

⁶ See <http://rechten.uvt.nl/icvs/>.

⁷ See www.heuni.fi/12859.htm.

⁸ Mention of firm names does not imply the endorsement of the United Nations.

1990s, MEASURE DHS, in consultation with experts, developed a standard domestic violence module of questions.⁹ In the Asia-Pacific region, this module has been included in surveys for Bangladesh, Cambodia, India and the Marshall Islands.

2. National efforts

12. Progress has also been achieved at the national level. South Asia, for example, has experienced an expansion of national studies on violence against women with a focus on domestic violence and sexual coercion within marriage. The 2005-2006 National Family Health Survey in India was the third in a series of national surveys addressing various forms of violence, such as physical and sexual.¹⁰ In Bangladesh, research conducted in a study over the period 1998-1999 in eight villages revealed a high incidence of marital violence.¹¹ However, as in many countries, most primary sources of data on gender-based violence in Bangladesh are court or police records, which are largely dependent on self-reporting by victims to the justice system or the police. This can lead to underestimates of the prevalence and extent of the problem at the national level.

13. In terms of South-East Asia, in 1995 Cambodia was one of the first Asian countries to undertake a representative sample survey on domestic violence, through a joint project between the country's Ministry of Women's Affairs and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs).¹² In 1993, the Philippines conducted its first national survey of women and many other studies have been conducted in various provinces since then (see A/61/122/Add.1). In East Asia, the Republic of Korea is one of the latest countries to join research in this area. In 2004, the country's Ministry of Gender Equality conducted the first national survey on domestic violence,¹³ followed by a second one in 2007.

14. In the Pacific, an NGO in Fiji conducted research over the period 1993-1997 on domestic violence and sexual assaults, to determine the incidence, prevalence and attitudes towards domestic violence for both men and women.¹⁴ In Samoa, a national survey involving over 1,000 ever-married or partnered women was conducted in the year 2000 (see A/61/122/Add.1, table 2) revealing that many women had experienced physical assault at some point in their lives. Australia has also conducted significant research on this subject. In 2005, a third national survey measuring the incidence of physical and sexual violence was conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.¹⁵

⁹ See www.measuredhs.com/topics/dv/start.cfm.

¹⁰ See www.nfhsindia.org/index.html.

¹¹ Lenore Manderson and Linda Rae Bennett, eds., *Violence against Women in Asian Societies* (New York, Routledge, 2003).

¹² Mary Ellsberg and Lori Heise, *Researching Violence Against Women: A Practical Guide for Researchers and Activists* (Washington D.C., World Health Organization and the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health, 2005).

¹³ Whasoon Byun, "Violence against women in Korea and its indicators", paper presented at the expert group meeting on indicators to measure violence against women, Geneva, 8-10 October 2007.

¹⁴ See the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre website at www.fijiwomen.com/index.php?id=1282.

¹⁵ See www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/ProductsbyTopic/0556FBD355B2719BCA2571C50074ABF2.

C. Limitations of data collection efforts

15. The present summary is not a comprehensive review; rather, it highlights some of the progress that has been achieved in the Asian and the Pacific region. However, many challenges remain, such as the fact that most surveys and studies on violence against women in the region have been conducted by international organizations, women's ministries or NGOs, with little or no involvement of the national statistical offices.

16. Furthermore, few countries in the region have collected data on violence against women on a regular basis. Most surveys have been conducted on an ad hoc basis. This has limited the ability to analyse changes over time, making it difficult to monitor violence against women accurately and regularly. Therefore, there is still a need to strengthen the knowledge base at the national level and to make the data collection more regular, accurate and comparable, in order to guide the design of preventive interventions and policies.

17. Most data-collection initiatives on violence against women have taken the form of household surveys. But some types of violence, such as "honour killings", maltreatment of widows, or dowry-related violence, are specific to certain groups of population, traditional practices and cultures. Household surveys would, thus, not have captured such specific forms of violence. In addition, forms of violence such as economic, emotional and psychological have not been covered by most studies. In many of the surveys conducted in Asia, the study population has been restricted to samples of married women only, thereby creating a serious underestimation of the overall prevalence of violence against women in societies.

18. Moreover, the comparability of prevalence estimates and data on violence against women both internationally and among different regions within the same country is hampered by a number of factors, such as the influence of social and cultural norms in determining what constitutes violence. Such differences are also present in the definition of women at risk, both in terms of age and relationship status. There is no common agreement among countries on the different types of perpetrators. Furthermore, types of violence measured vary greatly throughout the region, not to mention the various methodologies used, the way in which questions are framed, and the settings in which the interviews take place.

19. Aside from the demographic and health surveys, surveys in general do not illustrate how and why women experience violence, the cultural context of violence or the barriers women face in accessing justice, for which more research, stronger design of questionnaires and alternative methods, including conducting case studies, might be required. Little information has been gathered on the measures taken to combat violence against women at the national level, and few evaluations of their impact have been made.

20. In sum, relevant issues in the measurement of violence against women, identified in particular for the Asian and the Pacific region, include the following:

- (a) Difficulties in applying similar definitions and standards in a diverse region with such different cultures, religions and traditions;
- (b) The taboo nature of the subject, which makes data collection an extremely sensitive endeavour;
- (c) A significant need for training and development of expertise on the subject, but also advocacy to educate communities about the problem;
- (d) The requirement of a stronger involvement of national statistical offices in the use of indicators and data collection, as well as collaboration with international agencies, women's ministries and NGOs.

II. ISSUES PERTAINING TO THE COLLECTION OF DATA ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

A. Data sources

21. Two main collection tools are used to measure violence against women: administrative or criminal records and population-based or household surveys. Administrative or criminal registries, also referred to as service-based data, can be public or private and are usually obtained through health centres, police stations, public and welfare services, shelters and, in some cases, from lawyer associations or legal-aid services. These sources of information can prove very useful in determining the dynamics of violent acts committed against women. Additionally, administrative sources are useful for tracking the availability of services for abused women as well as the response levels of the government or civil society in a given community. Service-based data can also indicate what types of responses are available to assist and protect women, and the level of support demonstrated by health, police and judicial systems and NGOs.

22. Data collection through administrative records is generally more systematic than methods that rely on other sources of data. Nevertheless, this data collection method does not provide reliable estimates of the prevalence of violence against women in a certain community, given that few victims actually report incidents. Data availability and quality also vary considerably from one source to another, between health and police records for example, in some cases risking the possibility of double counting. Moreover, in communities where social services are all but limited to the police and hospitals, abuses such as psychological or economic violence are not recorded in that form. In cultures and societies where abused women and girls often face discrimination, cases of violence are rarely reported, leading to the continuation of the vicious cycle of violence and a lack of awareness, on the part of the public as well as policymakers, of the extent of the problem. Furthermore, the high variability in estimates of violence through administrative sources impedes comparability between and within countries.

23. Population-based surveys, on the other hand, can provide accurate estimates on the prevalence and incidence of victimization. Given that such surveys are based on randomly selected samples and are representative of a specific population, they present a more precise picture of actual occurrences than service-based records do. Moreover, surveys are usually conducted through in-depth interviews, allowing for the collection of useful information on the frequency and severity of the violence, the settings and context in which it occurs, and the types of perpetrator.

24. Household surveys, nevertheless, also have their limitations. In many countries, stand-alone surveys to measure violence against women have been conducted on an ad hoc basis, limiting the monitoring and tracking of abuse over time. Furthermore, particular forms of violence, such as female genital mutilation, dowry-related violence and other types of violence related to traditional or cultural practices, occur in very specific populations; in such cases household surveys might not be the best method. Since stand-alone surveys on violence against women are costly and require a high level of technical expertise, many countries add a module to an existing survey. Embedded question sets on violence against women in ongoing surveys, however, are more limited in the information they collect.

B. Selected technical issues

25. Due to the sensitive nature of the subject, designing the right tools, preparing enumerators, and conducting a survey on violence against women has proved to be a complex task. Women and their personal safety should always be the priority of any study, especially given that in some cases, merely participating in such a study could imply a greater risk of violence occurring. Enumerators should always be well trained and understand the implications that participation in such a survey could have for victims. Interviewers should also be able to refer women requesting assistance to available support services, and minimize distress to participants.

26. Some specific technical issues that need to be taken into consideration prior to conducting a survey on violence against women are: the type of survey and interview mode, the reference period, the length of the survey or questionnaire, confidentiality and security, and dealing with low response or response bias. Given the importance of the subject, a stand-alone survey is indicated as the most effective tool for measuring violence against women. An add-on module to an existing survey could also be useful, although information generated through an embedded set of questions is more limited and non-response rates are higher. Furthermore, enumerators require specific training to conduct such a survey.

27. The interview method can vary greatly, from a face-to-face or telephone interview to a self-administrated computer or mail-based questionnaire. A survey that is too long can negatively affect the response rate, but time is needed to develop the right level of trust between interviewer and interviewee. Surveys dedicated to a specific topic usually take between half an hour and one hour. Telephone interviews are usually designed to take less time, given the tendency of respondents to

have a shorter attention span when answering over the phone. Face-to-face interviews seem to be the preferred option because they result in lower non-response rates; they also provide the opportunity to present the victim with details on support and assistance groups.

28. Defining the reference period and the population group takes on a greater importance in these types of surveys. In a review conducted by the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) (ECE/CES/GE.30/2006/6) it was noted that most surveys address acts of violence during a woman's lifetime or during the 12 months before the date of the survey. Although the ages of respondents vary widely, surveys tend to ask about incidences that occurred from the age of 15, 16 or 18. Most surveys enquire about acts of violence during adulthood or over a lifetime; questions on abuse that occurred during childhood prove more controversial due to ethical reasons, but also due to technical challenges such as telescoping.¹⁶

29. The survey and questions should never be introduced to the audience as a survey on violence against women, but rather as a study on women's health and life experiences, to avoid prejudice and to guarantee confidentiality among family members. Strict control over confidentiality is of the utmost importance—even more so than in other types of survey, as it protects the safety of the respondent.

30. Non-response is widely recognized as a major problem in these types of surveys. It has been suggested that the length of the interview, the language and wording used, the level of trust developed between interviewer and respondent as well as the political and security situation in a country are all factors which affect response rates.

III. ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT STATUS OF INDICATORS TO MEASURE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

A. Reporting on development progress*

31. It is impossible to track progress on eradicating violence against women when no data on the prevalence and extent of such violence are available. It is, thus, vital to recognize the need for data collection, which provides the foundation for the accurate estimates and, in turn, analysis, required for promoting awareness of the dimension of the problem and supporting evidence-based policies, programmes and laws to protect women against this human rights violation. The United Nations Statistics Division, together with its direct counterparts in the regional commissions, the Division for the Advancement of Women and other United Nations entities, has taken the initiative to improve data availability on violence against women, as well as to define a core set of indicators.

¹⁶ The telescoping effect is people's tendency to perceive recent events as being more remote than they are, and to perceive distant events as being more recent than they are. The former is known as backward telescoping, and the latter as forward telescoping. Between backward and forward telescoping there is a point where events are just as likely to be displaced backward as forward in time.

* At the time the present document was submitted, the draft report of the Friends of the Chair had not yet been completed. The comments provided in the present document reflect only the discussions of the Friends of the Chair group and may differ from the final report.

32. In 2005, international experts attended an expert group meeting, organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women in collaboration with ECE and WHO, to conduct a statistical overview of the challenges and gaps in the collection of data on violence against women, as well as to discuss related methodological issues.¹⁷ Meeting participants agreed on the importance of indicators in the development of gender-equality policies, and that relevant indicators provided the basis for enhancing the capacity, policies and effectiveness of governments in regard to taking action against violence. One main conclusion was the need to define a set of internationally comparable indicators that governments could rely on to measure violence against women.¹⁸

33. In follow-up to this conference, the Division for the Advancement of Women, ECE and the United Nations Statistics Division, in collaboration with all United Nations regional commissions, met in Geneva in 2007 for an expert group meeting on indicators to measure violence against women, to review existing initiatives in the development of indicators, and to assess the advantages and disadvantages of certain indicators, based on countries' experiences. At this meeting, participants put forward a core set of indicators to measure the scope, prevalence and incidence of violence against women.¹⁹

34. In a joint dialogue between the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-second session and the United Nations Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session, in February 2008, a Friends of the Chair group on violence against women was established. In compliance with General Assembly resolution 62/133 on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women, the group was formed to conduct a technical evaluation and ensure the viability of the set of indicators put forward during the expert group meeting on indicators to measure violence against women. The membership of the Friends of the Chair group comprises representatives from the national statistics offices of Botswana, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Ghana, Italy, Mexico (Chair), Sweden, Thailand and the United Nations Statistics Division; ECE, ESCAP, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and WHO participate as observers. The group was requested to review the proposed set of indicators and to prepare a report containing recommendations to be submitted to the United Nations Statistical Commission at its fortieth session in accordance with Commission decision 39/116.²⁰

35. In the following section, each proposed indicator is presented together with the comments made by the Friends of the Chair group. General issues raised by the group regarding definitions of various terms included in each indicator are then addressed. Finally, additional indicators involving

¹⁷ See www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/vaw-stat-2005/documents.html.

¹⁸ Division for the Advancement of Women, Economic Commission for Europe, World Health Organization, "Report of the expert group meeting on violence against women: a statistical overview, challenges and gaps in data collection and methodology and approaches for overcoming them", Geneva, 11-14 April 2005.

¹⁹ Division for the Advancement of Women, Economic Commission for Europe, United Nations Statistics Division, "Report of the expert group meeting on indicators to measure violence against women", Geneva, 8-10 October 2007 (available at www.un.org/womenwatch/daw).

²⁰ See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2008, Supplement No. 4 (E/2008/24)*, chap. I, sect. B.

other types of violence are put forward, based on proposals made by the Friends of the Chair members.

B. Proposed set of indicators and recommendations of the Friends of the Chair group

36. In their final recommendations,²¹ participants at the expert group meeting on indicators to measure violence against women agreed that, at present, a proposed set of indicators should take into account the availability of current data sources and the feasibility for States to sustainably collect information on violence against women, while not overburdening those States that are yet to start collecting data on this matter. Taking into account countries' experiences, participants agreed on a basic set of indicators covering physical violence, sexual violence, intimate-partner violence and harmful practices, including female genital mutilation and early marriage. The members are evaluating the indicators in terms of whether they are easy to measure and interpret, relevant and accurate, and whether they can be universally applicable.

1. Physical violence

(a) Indicators

37. The proposed indicators are the following: the percentage of women (over the total number of women) who have experienced physical violence (a) during the last year and (b) during their lifetime. These indicators should be disaggregated further by severity (moderate/severe); perpetrator (intimate/other relative/other known person/stranger/state authority); and frequency (one/few/many time(s)).

(b) Comments

38. According to the Friends of the Chair group, the proposed indicators on physical violence are relevant and should be part of an international set of indicators on violence against women. The main factors that must be taken into account, however, are: establishing a common definition of violence, and defining its frequency, severity and type of perpetrator. Rather than making a reference to "violence" or "assault", any data collection method should refer to specific behavioural categories, such as being pushed, grabbed, slapped, tied, kicked, beaten or shot. Agreement among members of the Friends of the Chair group has yet to be reached on these categories. In terms of frequency, it should not be left to the respondent to interpret whether the occurrence of the violent act has happened a few or many times, given that these are subjective definitions and can be interpreted differently by each respondent.

39. Explicit categories referring to the type of physical injury, such as bruises, cuts and broken bones, should be included. In addition, a common agreement on what comprises moderate or severe violence, such as "the fear that one's life is in danger", should be arrived at. In terms of the type of

²¹ Ibid.

perpetrator, clear categories for the person's relationship to the respondent should be identified, such as current or last spouse or partner, acquaintance or friend, stranger, co-worker, teacher or classmate, and police, military or other type of authority. Population-based surveys are the ideal tool for collecting data on this subject.

2. Sexual violence

(a) Indicators

40. The proposed indicators are the following: the percentage of women (over the total number of women) who have experienced rape/sexual assault (a) during the last year and (b) during their lifetime. These indicators should be disaggregated further by perpetrator (intimate/other relative/other known person/stranger/state authority); and frequency (one/few/many time(s)).

(b) Comments

41. Sexual violence has also been recognized by the Friends of the Chair group as a vital indicator on violence against women. Recommendations made for the previous indicators in regard to frequency, severity and type of perpetrator apply to this indicator as well. On the definition of types of sexual violence, group members have suggested that this indicator should clearly specify all types of sexual assaults, rather than focusing on rape and sexual assault. Specific questions in various categories to address, among other things, non-consensual touching, sexual intercourse or sexual acts forced by money, physical force or other means, coercion to unwanted sexual acts, and the use of physical force to have sexual intercourse without protection, have been suggested by members of the group. Although members agree that population-based surveys are the best tool for collecting this data, they have also made reference to crime or police records which, while not useful for addressing prevalence, can provide information on the types of incidents and assaults.

3. Intimate-partner violence

(a) Indicators

42. The proposed indicators are the following: the percentage of women (over the total number of women who have ever had an intimate partner) who have experienced physical or sexual violence by current or former partner (a) during the last year and (b) during their lifetime. This indicator should be disaggregated further by frequency (one/few/many time(s)).

(b) Comments

43. The members of the Friends of the Chair group agree that information on intimate-partner violence is an essential part of any international set of indicators and that, although it is linked to physical and sexual violence, intimate-partner violence should be addressed as a separate indicator. In addition to the behavioural categories identified for physical violence, specific acts such as threatening to hit or throw something at the woman, choking her, using or threatening to use a firearm

or knife, and sexual assault should be included in the definition. Moreover, while a specific perpetrator is identified in this indicator, special attention should be paid to the different types of partner, such as spouse, sexual partner, dating partner or lover.

44. Determining the marital status of the respondent is relevant as well, since it has been identified as an important factor in the victimization of certain groups of women. It also serves to identify acts of violence in current and previous partner relationships. Finally, it is vital to keep in mind that definitions of intimate partners vary widely across cultures. Therefore, multiple opportunities to disclose this type of violence need to be included in any data collection exercise, as do questions directly linked to behavioural attitudes of the culture in which respondents live.

4. Harmful practices

(a) Indicators

45. Two indicators have been proposed: (a) the percentage of women (over the total number of women) subjected to female genital mutilation/cutting (disaggregated further by age); and (b) the percentage of women (over the total number of women) whose age at marriage is below 18 years.

(b) Comments

46. Members of the Friends of the Chair group agree that female genital mutilation is a harmful practice which severely affects thousands of women around the world. The group has also noted that the practice occurs in very specific contexts and that, in many countries or cultures, it might not be considered one of the most common forms of violence against women. Therefore, the Friends of the Chair group agrees that female genital mutilation should be addressed in an international set of indicators, but that given the possible low prevalence of the practice in some countries, it should be left to individual countries to decide the relevance of this indicator to their particular case.

47. According to the Friends of the Chair group, age at marriage can indicate the degree of autonomy reached by women in a society. Moreover, in many cultures early marriage is not considered a form of violence against women. Therefore, the discussion is still open on whether early marriage can be considered an act of violence, despite the fact that in the Convention on the Rights of the Child,²² all persons under the age of 18 are considered children.

48. In regard to the issues that apply to all indicators, the Friends of the Chair group notes that it is essential to agree on common definitions and categories of violence against women. In terms of reference periods, a further recommendation applying to all indicators is to refer to a “last 12 months” period instead of “last year”, to avoid confusion. Agreement has yet to be reached on whether women should be asked about any type of violent act they may have experienced during their lifetime, including childhood, or only those acts that occurred during adulthood, and whether the period of

²² United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1577, No. 27531.

adulthood starts at 15, 16 or 18 years of age. Concurrence on what is considered “severe” violence has yet to be reached. Furthermore, a wider discussion on the methods of data collection, types of surveys, and training related to ethical issues and women’s safety is recommended by the Friends of the Chair group.

49. Participants at the 2007 expert group meeting suggested that their list was by no means an extensive set of indicators, but that technical expertise and data availability across countries limited the development of further indicators. It is for this reason that the original proposed set of indicators focused on the more amply researched areas of physical and sexual violence, intimate-partner violence, and other harmful practices. Among the areas in need of further research, participants mentioned: femicide, threats of violence, economic and psychological violence, crimes committed against women in the name of “honour”, dowry-related violence, sexual harassment and sexual exploitation, trafficking and forced marriage.²³

C. Suggestions from the Friends of the Chair group on additional indicators

50. The Friends of the Chair group agrees that the proposal that emanated from the expert group meeting summarizes an extremely complex matter in a small set of indicators. While these indicators are very useful and relevant, the final set should be expanded to include other types and forms of violence. Psychological and emotional abuse, including stalking, is one of the main areas suggested. Indicators such as (a) the percentage of women who have suffered psychological violence from a current or former partner and (b) the percentage of women who have suffered at least one stalking episode in the last 12 months have been put forward. Types of psychological violence could include insults, humiliation, yelling and extreme jealousy. Acts of stalking could encompass obsessive behaviour, malicious and unwanted surveillance, invasion of privacy and acts threatening personal security.

51. Other indicators that the Friends of the Chair group suggests including are those related to economic violence and financial abuse, such as restrictions on access to family resources or inheritance, legal entitlement of property, or employment opportunities. A possible economic violence indicator could be the percentage of women with at least one incident of discrimination at work in the last 12 months. Discrimination incidents could cover being asked for a pregnancy test before being hired; receiving a reduction in salary or being fired because of pregnancy; receiving has a lower salary or benefits than a man with equal tasks and responsibilities; or being fired, not re-hired, or failing to receive a salary increase because of age or marital status.

52. Additional indicators related to marriage, as suggested by the Friends of the Chair group, should address forced marriage or union, and “bride kidnapping”. An indicator for this could be the percentage of women who are forced into or kidnapped for the purposes of marriage or unions. The

²³ Division for the Advancement of Women, Economic Commission for Europe, United Nations Statistics Division, “Report of the expert group meeting on indicators to measure violence against women”, Geneva, 8-10 October 2007.

group also suggests that an indicator on spousal murder and femicide be included as a measurement of violence in intimate-partner relationships. Moreover, sexually transmitted diseases should be specifically addressed in the context of intimate-partner relationships. A possible indicator could be “the percentage of women who are married or in domestic unions who acquire a sexually transmitted disease through unprotected sexual intercourse with their current or last partner”.

53. While many more indicators could be proposed, the above suggestions cover the most common forms of violence against women, including physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence. The suggestions of the Friends of the Chair group are also in line with the point made during the expert group meeting on indicators on violence against women regarding the need to take into account the different levels of methodological development and expertise among States.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

54. The development of a comprehensive set of international indicators on violence against women would, in effect, need to be based on widely available and credible data collected at the national level, using comparable methods and definitions. However, in most countries in Asia and the Pacific, international agencies have led this work. In other cases, women’s ministries or NGOs have paved the way in studying this subject. It is therefore imperative to bring national statistical offices into the process, to increase data quality through their technical and analytical expertise.

55. As stated in the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (see A/HRC/7/6, para. 30):

“Establishing violence against women indicators is a human rights obligation, linked to both human rights jurisprudence and the due diligence principle, which calls upon States, among other things, to ensure that interventions designed to combat violence are based on accurate empirical data. This necessitates not just the compilation of accurate information, but also of indicators that make the data accessible for non-specialist decision makers and allow for public scrutiny of interventions”.

56. States need to take responsibility for the systematic collection and publication of data under a framework of official statistics; in the absence of such a framework, national statistical offices should provide support to other stakeholders engaged in such work. National statistical offices play a key role in collecting data and measuring violence against women, given the technical proficiency, credibility and legitimacy they bring to the process. The involvement of statistical offices in such exercises would also demonstrate the commitment and political will of Governments to place this subject at the top of their national agendas.

57. For these reasons, leadership by national statistical offices in this area is of paramount importance, and efforts should be made to promote the implementation of surveys on the subject as part of the regular statistical programmes of countries. Incorporating violence against women as a

permanent component of those statistical programmes would also guarantee the systematization and sustainability of data collection on the subject, moving one step closer to the eradication of violence against women.

58. The Committee may wish to express its priorities regarding the collection of data on violence against women and to express its views on the general acceptability of the set of indicators to measure violence against women described in the present document, and to identify the main problems and challenges related to data collection in support of these indicators.

59. The Committee may also wish to define how the measurement of violence against women and the advocacy for the use of relevant indicators on the subject should be addressed by the secretariat in its programme of work for the biennium 2010-2011.

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