

Annele Teteré

Concept Note: Intimate partner violence

Scope of the problem

Intimate partner violence is the most common form of violence experienced by women globally. The pervasiveness of different forms of violence against women within intimate relationships, commonly referred to as domestic violence or spousal abuse, is now well established. According to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), violence against women per se refers to both violence that is directed towards women because they are women and violence that affects women disproportionately.

Intimate partner violence is defined as “behaviour by an intimate partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, and psychological abuse and controlling behaviours. It covers violence by both current and former spouses and other intimate partners” (WHO, 2013)¹. Physical violence involves intentionally using physical force, strength or a weapon to harm or injure a woman. Sexual violence includes abusive sexual contact, making a woman engage in a sexual act without her consent. Psychological and emotional violence includes controlling or isolating, humiliating or embarrassing, and denying a woman access to and control over basic resources.

Intimate partner violence as a form of gender-based violence is a structural problem that is deeply embedded in unequal power relationships between men and women. Such violence is perpetuated by harmful social and cultural expectations about gender roles typically associated with being a woman or being a girl. Its function is to enforce and sustain gender inequality. Women and girls who are subjected to violence receive the message that they are worth less than others and that they do not have control over their own lives. This has direct consequences with respect to their health, employment and participation in social and political life². Professor of gender and development studies Naila Kabeer indicates that a long history of invisibility reflects the institutionalized nature of male bias within law and

¹ WHO (2013). Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence. Switzerland, World Health Organization

² Kelly L. and Lovett, J. (2005) What a Waste: The Case for an Integrated Violence Against Women Strategy, London: Women’s National Commission

policy, which prevented acknowledgement of gender-based violence and its significance in manifesting patriarchal power relations³.

Factual background

In 1993, the UN General Assembly adopted a declaration and noted that violence against women is a manifestation of the subordination of women in relation to men. A 2006 report to the UN General Secretary also described violence against women as a fundamental part of the creation of unequal living conditions of women and men. It was stated that violence against women impedes development and economic growth in poor countries. The report noted further that violence must be combated by promoting sexual equality between women and men, including by actively counteracting global discrimination against women.

The European Parliament, in its resolution on combating violence against women in 2014 also noted a strong link between violence against women and the general lack of equality between men and women globally. The resolution stressed that violence includes victims and perpetrators of all ages regardless of their education, background, income or social status.

There is a growing body of research on intimate partner violence. These studies provide an important evidence base for laws and policies to end this form of violence against women. Nevertheless there are persistent gaps in knowledge of this matter. Many countries still lack reliable data on intimate partner violence and if studies exist, they are often not comparable due to differences in methodologies used.

The analysis of WHO in collaboration with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the Medical Research Council (2013) based on existing data from over 80 countries found that globally 35% of women have experienced physical and sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence⁴. Some national violence studies show that up to 70 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime from an intimate partner⁵. It is also estimated that of all women killed in 2012, almost half were killed by intimate partners or family members⁶. More often than not, cases of violence against women go unreported. For instance, the report by the European Union Agency for

³ Kabeer, Naila (2014) *Violence against women as 'Relational' vulnerability: engendering the sustainable human development agenda*. Occasional Paper United Nations Development Programme, New York, USA.

⁴ WHO (2013). Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence. Switzerland, World Health Organization

⁵ UN Women, 2012, Violence against Women Prevalence Data: Surveys by Country. - See at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures#notes>

⁶ UNODC, 2013, Global Study on Homicide - See more at: http://www.unodc.org/documents/gsh/pdfs/2014_GLOBAL_HOMICIDE_BOOK_web.pdf - See more at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures#notes>

Fundamental Rights (FRA) based on interviews with 42,000 women across the 28 Member States of the European Union⁷ revealed that only 14 per cent of women reported their most serious incident of intimate partner violence to the police.

Most of research focuses primarily on physical and sexual violence. These forms of intimate partner violence have clear impacts mediated by trauma on physical and mental health undermining productivity and long term human capital formation. On the other hand, the measurement of psychological violence is problematic. Several new studies indicate that psychological violence impact on mental health is independent of physical violence and is a predictor of depression affecting employment stability and unemployment⁸.

Also, as evidenced by the NGO experience, an additional level of complexity is added with regard to young women and girls population that are active internet users as they are subjected to violence in the form of cyberbullying.⁹

Intimate partner violence is a widespread social problem that is not isolated to certain social categories of women. However, it has been recognised that there are particularly vulnerable groups when it comes to exposure to violence such as younger women and women with disabilities. Vulnerability involves three dimensions: exposure, consequences and resources. A group is vulnerable if it is either particularly exposed, if the crime involved gives rise to serious consequences or if the people exposed do not have the resources or the opportunity to use those resources to change their situation or make it known. The concept of vulnerability can be used to highlight how individuals can be exposed to violence and discrimination in a way that requires special support efforts.

Levels of risk factors associated with vulnerability to intimate partner violence:

Individual level: witnessing intimate partner violence in childhood, suffering abuse as a child, lower levels of education (perpetrators and victim), age of woman;

Relationship level: male control of household wealth and decision-making, controlling behaviour by husband, multiple partners or wives for husband, differences in spousal age and education, economic hardship, length of relationship, male alcohol, substance abuse;

Societal level: cultural norms that support violence as accepted means of conflict resolution, norms that support male dominance over children and require women's obedience and sexual availability, policies and laws that discriminate women in social

⁷ Violence against women: an EU-wide survey, European Union, 2014 - See more at:

<http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures#notes>

⁸ Duvvury N., Callan A., Carney, P. (2013) *Intimate partner violence: implications for economic growth and development*. Women's voice, agency and participation research. Series No. 3. Washington, DC: World Bank

⁹ FRA, 2014. Violence against women: an EU – wide survey

political and economic spheres; access to, and control over economic resources for women.

The capacity of women to cope with violence depends on professional support to mediate the short and long-term impact of intimate partner violence, which affects their health, human capital formation and productivity. Frequently women require economic interventions that enhance their livelihood security, reduce the risk of poverty and support rebuilding their lives.

Intimate partner violence occurs in all parts of the world, regardless of religious or cultural affiliation. However, there are differences between countries, differences which further point to the link between men's violence against women and society's view of gender equality. The WHO notes in its reports on domestic violence that the occurrence of violence and the reaction of the surrounding world to violence is linked to the degree of economic equality between the sexes, women's level of autonomy and attitudes about gender roles¹⁰.

Tajikistan

American researcher R. N. Haarr in her studies illustrates women's situation in Central Asia. The descriptive study¹¹ examines the relationship between women's experiences with intimate partner violence and suicidality in Tajikistan, including help-seeking behaviours of battered women. Four hundred women in three districts participated in this survey¹². The significance of this research is twofold due to the fact that in Tajikistan intimate partner violence and female suicide are commonplace, yet have remained relatively understudied.

The study reveals that within the context of marriage and the extended family system in Central Asia, marital violence is used by the husband and mother-in-law. It was found that the majority of Tajik women agreed that if a husband is angry with his wife, he has the right to hit or beat her, swear at her, say things to her that will hurt her or make her afraid, and forbid her to leave the house, to work, to meet friends or contact her family. Women approved all forms of wife abuse, including physical violence, emotional abuse, and controlling behaviours by husbands and considered those justifiable. Through personal experience and seeing violence, women are socialized to accept their multiple subordinate statuses and to believe that violence is a natural part of family and marital relations that must be tolerated for the sake of preserving the family¹³. The study further suggests that the

¹⁰ WHO (2013) Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence. Switzerland, World Health Organization

¹¹ Haarr R.N. (2010). *Suicidality among battered women in Tajikistan*. Violence against women 16 (7) 764 -788, Sage.

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

majority of women agreed, if a mother-in-law is angry with her daughter-in-law, she has the right to emotionally abuse her by swearing, saying things that will hurt her or make her afraid, and controlling her by forbidding her to leave the house to meet friends, contact her family. Women also recognize that divorce is imminent if they report an incident of marital violence to authorities, and divorce brings significant shame to their natal family. Divorced women are turned out of the house of their marital family and typically refused re-entry into their natal family house for financial and cultural reasons. Because women typically lack the financial means to support themselves, divorce renders many women and their children homeless. For these reasons, battered women typically remain in abusive marriages, even in the face of severe violence, and suffer in silence. As the last resort, several battered women will attempt or commit suicide to escape¹⁴.

In 2012 The Government of Tajikistan conducted the first Demographic and Health Survey in Tajikistan. The Survey was implemented by the Statistical Agency in coordination with the Ministry of Health and collected data on domestic violence, women's and children's health and knowledge about HIV, AIDS and tuberculosis. The Demographic and Health Survey collected data from more than 6,400 households interviewing over 9,600 women aged 15 to 49. Here are some of the key findings: 19% of women age 15-49 have experienced physical violence at least once since age 15 and 13 % have experienced physical violence within the 12 months prior to the survey; almost one in five ever-married women aged 15-49 reported having experienced emotional, physical, or sexual violence from a husband; among ever-married women who have ever experienced physical or sexual violence from a husband, 27 % report experiencing physical injuries, only one in five women has sought assistance to try to stop the violence; 4 % of women report having experienced sexual violence at least once in their lifetime.

According to reports of NGOs more than 70% of Tajik women have been victims of intimate partner violence, but few of them have reported their abuse to the police. Women who experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their marriage and who told someone about the abuse were more likely to have suicidal thoughts and attempt suicide.

In 2013 Tajikistan passed its first law to combat domestic violence. The law provides free medical and legal assistance to victims of intimate partner violence. Those convicted of domestic abuse are fined and sentenced to 15 days in prison. Victims are encouraged to obtain assistance from centres, where they can also find temporary shelter. Although the

¹⁴ Ibid

majority of victims that have sought protection in the past are women, the law also looks to protect children and men¹⁵.

Uzbekistan

There is a lack of concrete data showing the true scale of intimate partner violence in Uzbekistan. Five periodic reports on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in Uzbekistan have been submitted to UN CEDAW Committee. The reports provided information on the specific programmes, activities and major initiatives undertaken by the Government throughout the period from 2001 to the present, as well as looked at the priorities of the Government.

In the area of intimate partner violence Uzbekistan has chosen a maternity and child-centred approach. One of the priorities of the State policy is the legal, economic and social protection of mothers and children as well as creating economic conditions to strengthen the family and ensuring public protection to vulnerable women and children with disabilities, orphans, and children from poor families. Uzbekistan still has no official laws against domestic or intimate partner violence, despite the repeated encouragement by CEDAW Committee and other international institutions. Human Rights Watch has noted¹⁶ that intimate partner violence is culturally considered as being a personal affair or family conflict and, that has led to shortcomings in segments of the legal system. Local government officials prefer reconciling husband and wife instead of protecting the wife and prosecuting the husband. There is also the related issue of women's attempted and committed suicide as a result of intimate partner violence, however there no precise figures on the matter exist due to under-reporting.

The Uzbek Bureau on Human Rights and Rule of Law pointed out in its submission to the UN Human Rights Council for the Universal Periodic Review of Uzbekistan¹⁷ (2013) that official views dismissing intimate partner violence in Uzbekistan are shaped partly due to the lack of an exact translation for "domestic violence" in the Uzbek language¹⁸. And while there are resources to support women in Uzbekistan coping with intimate partner violence, these are limited. As evidenced by NGO reports, women's social adaptation centres have been established in 8 regions, all of these pursuing the initiative of Women's committees and financial support of the UN Population Fund. In 2014 these centres provided support for 2729 women in difficult life situations: psychological assistance for 519 women, legal aid for 541 and social support for 507. More than 390 women and girls have received support to improve their professional skills and economic situation of families.

¹⁵ See at: <http://www.stopvaw.org/Tajikistan>

¹⁶ See at: <http://www.stopvaw.org/uzbekistan>

¹⁷ See at https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/ubhrrl_report_2013.pdf

¹⁸ Ibid

Recommendations

During the international workshop *Prevention of Violence – Precondition for Economic Empowerment of Women* held on the 3rd of March in Riga, the following recommendations were developed by participants:

To international organizations and for action at international level

1. Support research on emotional and psychological violence of intimate partner.
2. Prioritize intervention that integrates both support services and women's economic empowerment.
3. Develop policies and methods to combat cyberbullying as a form of intimate partner violence.
4. Ensure full access to legal aid and support services for each victim of intimate partner violence.
5. Pursue the change of public attitudes and culture that nourishes violence from intimate partner.
6. Guarantee that compensation for victims of intimate partner violence is provided by the perpetrators or state.
7. Support active and autonomous women's organizations to raise visibility of intimate partner violence and maintain this issue on public agenda, engage men in the transformation of unequal gender relations.
8. Provide sufficient budget for the prevention of violence against women.

To state and non-state actors and for action at national level

1. Ensure reliable and accurate statistics on intimate partner violence, as well as availability of data on the economic impact, physical and psychological consequences of violence against women.
2. Develop national policies and action plans targeting the elimination of intimate partner violence.
3. Ensure close coordination between state and municipal institutions to ensure the implementation of laws, policies, action plans.
4. Guarantee the participation of autonomous women's organizations in legislative processes and policy making.
5. Encourage the involvement, commitment and willingness of all stakeholders to pursue the target of equal society.
6. Address the problem of intimate partner violence through community and societal level, not only individual level.

7. Secure trainings for municipality officials and specialists (police, judges, healthcare specialists and social workers) on gender issues and methods to identify violence, support victims and work with abusers.
8. Educate youth about gender issues and equal relationships in the family.
9. Maintain NGO networking and cooperation with business organizations to offer economic opportunities for women.