



Division for the Advancement of Women



"Violence against women: a statistical overview, challenges and gaps in data collection and methodology and approaches for overcoming them"

Expert Group Meeting

Organized by: UN Division for the Advancement of Women
in collaboration with:
Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and World Health Organization (WHO)
11 – 14 April, 2005
Geneva Switzerland

International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS)

Expert paper prepared by:

**Sami Nevala
European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control,
affiliated with the United Nations (HEUNI)**

Introduction

The International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS) is an international, comparative survey on violence perpetrated by men against women. The IVAWS project was initiated in 1997 when HEUNI together with a number of international experts in the field started developing a comparative and standardised survey tool for measuring violence against women worldwide. The project is co-ordinated by HEUNI with inputs from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) and Statistics Canada.

IVAWS is specifically designed to target violence against women and to make international comparisons. It utilises the methodology and contacts developed for the International Crime Victim Survey (ICVS) and the specific expertise of Statistics Canada in developing sensitive survey tools for measuring violence against women. The International Violence Against Women Survey thus combines the comparative methodology of the International Crime Victim Survey with the national violence against women surveys.

International mandate

Elimination of violence against women is one of the priorities of the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme. Based on the Resolution on the Elimination of Violence against Women adopted by the 9th United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders (Cairo, April–May 1995), and as a follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, September 1995), a plan of action on the subject of women and violence was submitted for consideration to the UN Crime Commission at its fifth session in 1996 and went through consultations with Governments, United Nations entities, international governmental organisations and NGOs. The need for gender-disaggregated data describing the prevalence, nature, causes and consequences of violence against women has been reiterated in a number of international forums.

Sixth Session of the United Nations Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, 1997, approved a resolution on “Elimination of Violence against Women” which, inter alia, urges member states to utilise the “Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice”, presented as an annex to the resolution.

As regards research and evaluation, the “Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice” urges Member States, the Institutes comprising the United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Programme network and other relevant bodies:¹

- to develop crime surveys on the nature of violence against women;

¹ United Nations, Economic and Social Council, “Elimination of Violence Against Women - Canada: revised draft resolution”, Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, Sixth Session, Vienna, 28 April - 9 May 1997, E/CN.15/1997/L.7/Rev.1, “Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice”, Section VIII. Research and Evaluation. Approved by the General Assembly as A/52/635.

- to gather data and information on a gender-disaggregated basis for analysis and use, together with existing data, in needs assessment, decision making and policy making in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice, in particular concerning:
 - i. the different forms of violence against women, its causes and consequences;
 - ii. the extent to which economic deprivation and exploitation are linked to violence against women;
 - iii. the relationship between the victim and the offender;
 - iv. the rehabilitative or anti-recidivistic effect of various types of intervention on the individual offender and on the reduction of violence against women;
 - v. the use of firearms, drugs and alcohol, particularly in cases of violence against women in situations of domestic violence;
 - vi. the relationship between victimisation or exposure to violence and subsequent violent activity;
- to monitor and issue annual reports on the incidence of violence against women, arrest and clearance rates, prosecution and case disposition of the offenders;
- to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal justice system in fulfilling the needs of women subject to violence.

One of the four official workshops during the **Tenth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, 2000**, was entitled “Women in the Criminal Justice System”. The workshop included among the participants practitioners, policy makers, advocates of victims’ rights and women’s rights, as well as researchers. The importance of international research and analysis emerged as one of the major themes of the workshop. The workshop conclusions call for action in that “harmonized and coordinated strategies should be pursued, including joint action programmes and research efforts, strengthened communications, and collaborative networks involving governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations”.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action², adopted at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, calls on governments, the international community and civil society, including non-governmental organisations and the private sector, to take strategic action against violence against women. Strategic objective D.2. calls for studying “the causes and consequences of violence against women and the effectiveness of preventive measures”. Governments, regional organizations, the United Nations, other international organizations, research institutions, women’s and youth organizations and non-governmental organizations, as appropriate are called to take action to: “Promote research, collect data and compile statistics, especially concerning domestic violence relating to the prevalence of different forms of violence against women, and encourage research into the causes, nature, seriousness and consequences of violence against women and the effectiveness of measures implemented to prevent and redress violence against women;

- a. Disseminate findings of research and studies widely;

² Available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/index.html>

- b. Support and initiate research on the impact of violence, such as rape, on women and girl children, and make the resulting information and statistics available to the public;
- c. Encourage the media to examine the impact of gender role stereotypes, including those perpetuated by commercial advertisements which foster gender-based violence and inequalities, and how they are transmitted during the life cycle, and take measures to eliminate these negative images with a view to promoting a violence-free society.”

Ad Hoc Committee of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly³, June 2000 notes that since the Beijing conference in 1995, research into all forms of violence against women has increased. However, the report also notes that “[i]nadequate data on violence further impedes informed policy-making and analysis”. The report recommends Governments to take action at the national level to “[c]ontinue to undertake research to develop a better understanding of the root causes of all forms of violence against women in order to design programmes and take measures towards eliminating those forms of violence”. Furthermore, Governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and other actors of civil society are recommended to “[d]evelop and use frameworks, guidelines and other practical tools and indicators to accelerate gender mainstreaming, including gender-based research, analytical tools and methodologies, training, case studies, statistics and information”.

ECOSOC, 14 July 1997, adopted the conclusions on “Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes of the United Nations system”, which were followed on 13 October 1997 by a letter from the Secretary-General requesting the UN entities to:

- formulate specific strategies for ensuring that gender issues are brought into the mainstream of activities: and
- systematically carry out gender analysis of information and data disaggregated by sex and age, sector-specific gender surveys and gender-sensitive studies.

The **General Assembly** in its 58th session (2003) calls upon States “[t]o collect, update and improve the collection of data on violence against women, including through sex-disaggregated information systems, which should be made public and disseminated widely⁴.”

Finally, a recent report of the Secretary General to the **Commission on the Status of Women**, based on the information provided by the Member States, states that “[a]mong the most frequently mentioned challenges is the lack of reliable and comparable sex-disaggregated statistical data and information, compounded by insufficient research and studies⁵.”

³ Document A/S-23/10/Rev.1, available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/as2310rev1.pdf>

⁴ A/RES/58/147

⁵ Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the special session of the General Assembly entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century”, E/CN.6/2005/2.

Development of the International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS)

The International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS) project was started in 1997 with the development of a draft questionnaire and methodology. In late 1999, an International Project Team was formed between the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, affiliated with the United Nations (HEUNI), the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) and Statistics Canada⁶. Following the co-ordination meeting held in Helsinki in January 2001 that planned the first stage of the preparations for the pilot stage of the IVAWS project, the questionnaire was revised and the methodology manual drafted. In March 2001, the first meeting for national coordinators was organised in Vancouver, Canada, during which the questionnaire and project structure were discussed. The questionnaire underwent a thorough revision. The final pilot questionnaire was finalised in October 2001.

Preparations for pilot studies were commenced in early November 2001, with Canada carrying out a 100 respondent pilot study at the end of the year. Other countries followed with pilot studies during 2002, including Argentina, Costa Rica, Denmark, Italy, Kazakhstan, Poland, Australia, Indonesia, Philippines, Serbia, Switzerland and Ukraine⁷. During mid-2002 the questionnaire also underwent some revisions. The second expert meeting of national coordinators was held in October 2002 in Turin, Italy. The meeting discussed the pilot experiences and reworked the questionnaire based on this experience. In early December 2002 the questionnaire was ready for the full-fledged surveys. The questionnaire has already been translated into Chinese, Czech, Danish, French, German, Greek, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, and Spanish. The survey methodology package includes besides the questionnaire and a pre-programmed data capture programme, also a Manual⁸ with detailed guidelines on how to implement the survey. The Manual includes, *inter alia*, the following sections:

- Development of local project descriptions
- Budget items
- Project structure
- Requirements for project implementation
- Recruitment and training of interviewers
- Debriefing of interviewers
- Sampling
- Data collection
- Coding, data entry and logical validation
- Data analysis

⁶ The International Project Team consists of representatives from HEUNI, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and Statistics Canada.

⁷ Estonia carried out a pre-pilot study already in May 2000.

⁸ The IVAWS Manual is partly based on the manual of the International Crime Victim Survey. The IVAWS Manual was drafted by Natalia Ollus, Holly Johnson, Anna Alvazzi del Frate and Sami Nevala.

At the moment, full-fledged studies have taken place in six countries (Australia, Costa Rica, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Mozambique, Switzerland), and national reports from these studies have already been published or they are forthcoming. Another five countries (Greece, China (Hong Kong), Italy, the Philippines, Poland) will finish their fieldwork by the end of 2004–early 2005. In the beginning of 2005, after the first set of national datasets has been integrated to the IVAWS database, the work on the comparative analysis will be started.

The questionnaire

The questionnaire can be roughly divided into three parts: experienced violence, consequences of violence, and background information. The victimisation screeners are composed of twelve questions, each category beginning with a question on lifetime victimisation, and followed by a more detailed breakdown of prevalence and incidence by perpetrator.

Physical violence

Has any man ever:

- Threatened to hurt you physically?
- Thrown something at you or hit you with something that hurt or frightened you?
- Pushed or grabbed you or twisted your arm or pulled your hair in a way that really hurt or scared you?
- Slapped, kicked, bit, or hit you with a fist?
- Strangled, tried to suffocate you, burned or scalded you on purpose?
- Used or threatened to use a knife or gun on you?
- Other physical violence?

Sexual violence

Has any man ever:

- Forced you into sexual intercourse?
- Attempted to force you into sexual intercourse?
- Touched you sexually against your will?
- Forced you into sexual activity with someone else?
- Other sexual violence?

The most recent incidents of partner violence and non-partner violence are then explored in closer detail with separate sections dedicated for both types. Case details include things such as possible injuries, need of medical care, reporting (or not reporting) to the police, and the respondent's views on how her voice was heard.

Data collection

Response rates, sampling, methodology

Violence against women is a sensitive topic. The sensitivity of the topic is one factor that contributes to respondents' willingness to participate. The survey may trigger traumatic memories of past events and the respondent may refuse to participate, or may wish to terminate the interview. Other reasons for non-response include lack of time, lack of privacy to respond (especially related to respondents own perception of safety), and lack of interest to participate in surveys.

In order to minimise initial refusals, the IVAWS is not introduced as a survey on violence, but on personal safety. Efforts are taken to ensure that the interview can be conducted in private. If the respondent is unavailable to participate, measures are taken to reschedule or relocate the interview. In order to accommodate themselves for different scenarios during fieldwork, interviewers and researchers need to familiarise themselves with the community and the different social and cultural issues in the areas where they are interviewing (e.g. as intergenerational households, high unemployment, dowry, customary marriages, polygamous marriages etc).

In the experience of the IVAWS, it seems that women are generally willing to participate and that the topic of the survey is perceived to be important. Many respondents feel that through participating they contribute towards a greater good, and that their experiences may help other women in similar situations. Several women have also stated that the interview has been their first opportunity ever to talk about their experiences of violence. It is thus important to treasure the trust that the respondents show towards the interviewers.

For women with several experiences of victimisation the interviews tend to take long (45 minutes to over an hour). Interviewers therefore need to be equipped to encourage completion of the questionnaire. However, not too much pressure should be put on interviewers or respondents if respondents refuse to participate in the survey.

The main challenge in terms of sampling is to capture those who presumably experience the highest levels of victimisation, such as the homeless, and those staying in institutions, hostels and refuges (most notably those staying in refuges for battered women). Walby & Myhill (2001) propose to include additional samples to the main sampling frame to cover these often marginalised populations. The Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland study included, besides the representative main sample of 3,000 randomly selected male and female respondents, also a sample of 100 homeless women. The study also approached the so called Travellers, women in prostitution, people with learning disabilities, prisoners, and patients in psychiatric settings. These subgroups were not approached directly, but were covered through discussions with key informants at organisations and institutions working with these groups. The aim of looking into the subgroups was to highlight possible differences in risk, challenges in disclosing sexual violence and problems in seeking help (McGee et al 2002).

The mode of inquiry that is chosen should "reflect an intimate understanding of the cultural context in which the research takes place" (McGee et al 2002). However, another aspect that affects the choice of methodology is funding and practicalities, such as access to respondents. Ever since victim surveys were introduced, there has been discussion on the superiority of face-to-face interviews over telephone

interviews and vice versa. Telephone interviews are generally more anonymous than face-to-face interviews and may therefore enhance disclosure (Morris 1996). On the other hand, surveys conducted by telephone may suffer from sample bias due to limited coverage and the ethnic, socio-economic, and other characteristics connected to telephone ownership, or on the other hand, with the increasing prevalence of the mobile phones⁹.

Face-to-face interviews, on the other hand, may help the respondent in different and difficult questions, support the respondent if there are distressing questions, as well as encourage reluctant respondents to reply (Heiskanen 1999). The IVAWS will utilise both telephone and face-to-face methods. In countries with an adequate telephone coverage, and a history of telephone interviewing, computer assisted telephone interviews (CATI) are carried out. However, in developing countries, and countries with inadequate telephone coverage, face-to-face interviews are preferred.

Interviewer selection and training

As is shown above, special consideration must be given through interviewer selection and training to ensure that respondents in a range of countries are comfortable to disclose their victimisation and that the interviewers are capable of handling the trust vested in them by the respondents. The most important aspect is selection of interviewers. In the IVAWS, only female interviewers are used. The use of female interviewers only is a special feature of the dedicated violence against women surveys¹⁰. Interviewers should ideally also be paired with the respondent so that their relationship in terms of age, ethnic belonging and religion do not clash in a way that is harmful for the interview.

The interviewers should have some previous experience of survey interviewing, but most importantly, they should possess some knowledge of and comfort in discussing issues related to violence against women. They should also be non-judgmental, non-biased and empathetic towards victims of violence against women. It is also crucial to highlight that interviewers should not consider themselves to be counsellors. While interviewers should have some knowledge of the topic of violence against women, they should not themselves possess any un-processed traumatic experiences of male violence¹¹.

Interviewer training is critical for the implementation of the survey, especially for acquiring accurate and reliable data, for increasing disclosure, and for minimising non-response or terminations. The training module of the IVAWS gives the

9 If mobile phone numbers are included in the sample and random dialling is used, persons with both a mobile phone and a landline have greater probability to be included in the sample; however, in many countries mobile phone numbers are not included in random dialling samples, and therefore persons with only a mobile phone are excluded. In many countries, however, persons with a mobile phone as their only phone tend to be younger than the average population. Because this group of persons also experiences the highest victimisation risk, it is a problem if they are excluded from the sample.

10 The gender of the interviewer (and possible interpreters) can be even more crucial when it comes to interviewing immigrant women, or women from certain ethnic/language minorities.

¹¹ Personal experiences of male violence is not a hindrance to being enrolled as an interviewer and in many instances personal experiences contribute to a greater understanding of the issue at hand; however, the interviewer should have processed her own experiences so that she feels comfortable in encountering women with similar experiences.

interviewers tools for understanding the dynamics and mechanisms of violence against women. The training also equips the women with knowledge to ensure safety for respondents and interviewers, how to respond to emotional trauma that might be raised by responding to this survey, for both respondents and interviewers, and how to ensure honest disclosures of violence

Conclusion

The IVAWS can provide insight to the extent of violence against women worldwide. Firstly, the questionnaire together with the methodology manual form a survey package which can be used to conduct the survey in different countries. This might encourage countries where violence against women is not a priority issue, to implement a survey. Hence, in countries where there is little or no information on the extent of men's violence against women, the IVAWS has the opportunity to serve as a basis for national action and debate on the issue. On the other hand, in countries where there has been previous research in the prevalence of violence against women IVAWS is interesting particularly because of its international aspect i.e. what are the differences and similarities of various countries with regard to women's experiences of violence, willingness to report the incidents, support structures, etc. In addition to statistical data, the IVAWS thus provides information on the national circumstances and characteristics with regard to violence against women. This type of information gathering has only limited value as such, but the importance of the results is in that they can be used to launch a firmly grounded public debate, in the media, in academia and in the political sphere about the causes, consequences, and the aftercare of violence against women in the society.

Although national studies on violence against women have been conducted in many countries, the IVAWS and the national surveys should not be considered as excluding one another; both have their specific foci of interest. The IVAWS, consisting of a repeatable survey design, facilitates comparability despite the possible discrepancies in applicability of the questionnaire in different national settings. Therefore, the International Violence Against Women Survey fills a gap in finding international as well as national remedies to violence against women.