



Ending violence against women: from words to action

Study of the Secretary-General

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Fighting violence against women: what works

In countries around the world, a number of promising practices to prevent or respond to violence against women have been developed by States, NGOs and civil society organizations. These include: enacting clear policies and laws; establishing strong enforcement mechanisms; hiring effective and well-trained personnel; and involving many parts of government and the community.

According to the Secretary-General's in-depth study on violence against women:

- The most effective weapon to fight violence against women is a clear demonstration of political commitment, such as statements by high-level government officials, backed by action and the commitment of resources by the State.
- It is important to involve civil society, and especially women's organizations, in developing laws. For example, the Mongolian Domestic Violence Law, enacted in May 2004, was the result of collaboration between two prominent Mongolian women's NGOs and the parliamentary domestic violence legislative taskforce.

Enacting laws

- Many States have introduced national laws addressing various forms of violence against women. Eighty-nine States currently have some legislative provisions that specifically address domestic violence. Marital rape may be prosecuted in at least 104 States, and 90 States have some form of legislative provision against sexual harassment.
- Some States have laws that identify violence against women as a violation of civil or human rights. The South African Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act explicitly recognizes gender-based violence as unfair discrimination and requires State and non-State actors to promote equality.
- Some States have enacted comprehensive laws specific to violence against women that provide multiple types of remedy. In the United States, the 1994 Violence against Women Act authorized federal support for a broad range of initiatives, including: training for police, prosecutors and judges; shelters and rape prevention programmes; a national telephone hotline; and a national database.

Monitoring, review and reform of legislation

- Monitoring and evaluating laws through mechanisms such as ombudspersons, rapporteurs and gender equality machinery, ensures their continuing effective application. Nepal and the Netherlands have national rapporteurs who oversee and monitor anti-trafficking activities.
- Review and reform of legislation, based on evaluation and monitoring of the application of laws, has brought significant advances. Psychological and economic violence are now incorporated in the legal definition of domestic violence in a number of countries, including Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras and South Africa.

Implementing laws

- Implementation of laws is enhanced by mandatory and systematic gender-sensitivity training for law enforcement and judicial officials, and by issuing guidelines and protocols. The National Police Agency in the Republic of Korea educates police on the laws on domestic violence, procedures in responding to reports and steps to protect victims. In the United Kingdom, there are guidelines for police, social workers and educators on addressing forced marriages.
- It is important for women to know the law. In Timor Leste, Fokupers, an NGO, provides legal aid services for women victims and raises public awareness of women's legal rights. It distributes information to service providers, religious institutions, government agencies and lawmakers.



Improving criminal justice systems

- Vigorous arrest and prosecution policies and appropriate sentencing make a statement to society that violence against women is a serious crime. In Australia, the ACT Family Violence Intervention Program, an inter-agency project working with prosecutors in domestic violence cases, has seen a 288 per cent increase in cases prosecuted. Several countries, such as Sri Lanka, have minimum sentences for crimes such as rape.
- Safeguarding the rights of victims and creating a system that respects the privacy, dignity and autonomy of victims and is conducive to reporting, is an important principle of good practice. Courtroom procedures that protect the privacy of victims during trial, such as allowing evidence to be given by video link or restricting access to courtrooms during rape trials, are being used more often, including in Finland, Ireland, Japan and Nepal.
- Specialized courts and police units can improve efficiency, minimize the burden on victims and improve case outcomes. In the Dominican Republic, domestic violence legislation is enforced by: six prosecutor's offices, a magistrate's court and a criminal court working exclusively with domestic violence cases, as well as six police squads specifically charged with protecting women from violence.

Providing services

- It has proven effective to bring together health services for victims of domestic or sexual violence in one inter-agency unit, often called a "One-Stop Centre". First developed in Malaysia, this model is currently being replicated in much of Asia as well as in other countries, including South Africa.
- Hotlines and helplines, now standard in many countries, provide important access to information and support systems for victims of violence against women. The National Institute of Women in Costa Rica established a 24-hour toll-free phone line in 1997. A sharp increase in the number of calls followed publicity about the number.
- It is important to ensure that women fleeing violent situations have access to shelters that meet safety standards, to protect them from further violence.
- It is essential to provide legal services to women victims of violence, including free legal services to indigent women, to address a variety of issues faced by them. While such services are usually provided by civil society organizations, it is good practice for the Government to support such projects.
- Providing effective services for victims of trafficking requires addressing their immediate protection, medical, legal, and counselling needs, while remaining sensitive to the complexities of their situation. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the trauma suffered by victims of trafficking has been officially recognized, and women are given 15 days in a shelter before being interviewed.

Preventing violence against women

- States have become increasingly involved in trying to change attitudes and challenge discrimination. In Denmark, a comprehensive nation-wide government campaign was launched in Danish, English, Arabic, Turkish and Somali.
- Mobilization strategies at the community level can be effective in preventing violence against women if they are coordinated to involve all levels of society, including local government representatives, community leaders, NGOs and women's groups. In Upper Egypt, NGOs used community mobilization to inform local and religious leaders of the adverse effects of female genital mutilation/cutting and to call for an end to the practice.
- There are promising strategies to engage men in the prevention of violence against women. The White Ribbon Campaign has developed educational materials and action kits aimed at transforming men's attitudes and has distributed them to schools, businesses and labour unions. Since its inception in Canada in 1991, the Campaign has spread to 47 countries around the world.

Cooperation and co-ordination between agencies is vital. Singapore's "Many Helping Hands" approach includes a manual setting out the roles and responsibilities of each partner agency in the network.

Despite the progress of recent decades, violence against women has not yet received the priority required to enable significant change. Many innovative and promising approaches developed by women's groups and NGOs have yet to be replicated and institutionalized by States. A more cohesive and strategic approach is needed from all actors, including governments, the international community and civil society.