Issues Notes

Taking Public Action to End Violence at Home

OECD High-Level Conference on Ending Violence Against Women

5-6 February 2020
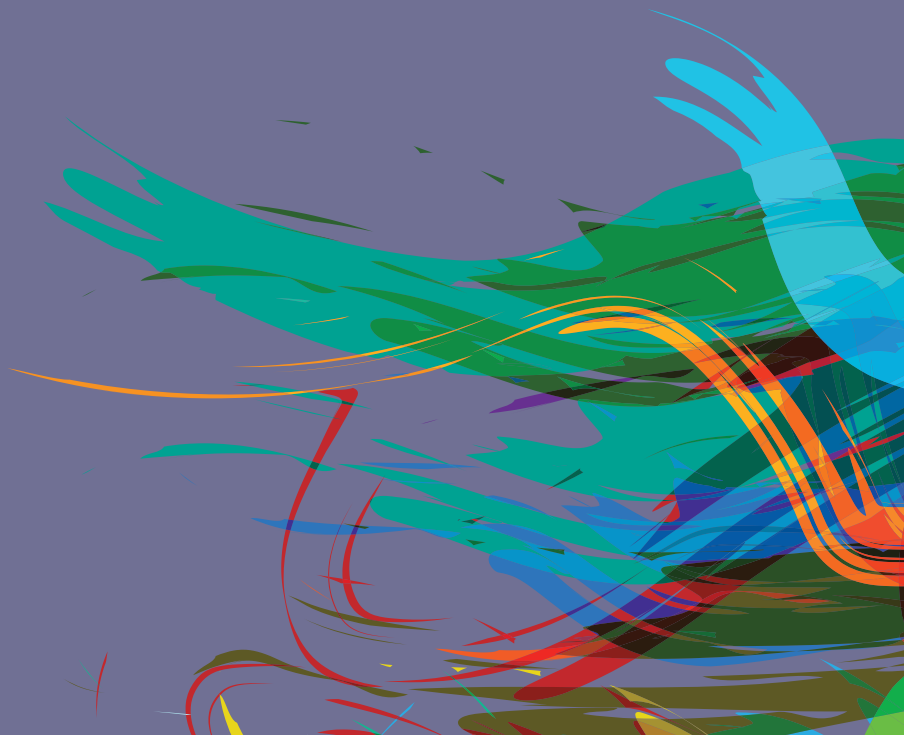
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Call to justice: Preventing and ending intimate partner violence

Survivors of intimate partner violence face barriers in accessing justice

Ensuring access to justice for survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) is critical for their safety and well-being, especially since IPV is rarely an isolated, one-time incident. However, access to justice for survivors remains a challenge around the world. Women are particularly prone to experiencing multiple and compounding obstacles in accessing justice, with many economic, structural, institutional, and cultural factors hindering their ability to adequately address the violence enacted upon them. Examples of barriers that women face range from a lack of understanding of how the justice system works due to the complexity of laws and legal proceedings, to engaging with predominantly male judicial and police systems in which implicit gender-based biases and gendered stereotypes are often embedded. An overarching theme across all countries is the difficulties experienced by survivors in accessing the justice system due to financial concerns. For example, many survivors face difficulty in the civil court system, as they frequently have to pay for their own lawyer to represent them in an IPV case. This is especially problematic when – as in many cases – a survivor is economically dependent on the perpetrator.

As summarised in Figure 1, enabling access to justice for IPV survivors requires collecting evidence and considering the multiple needs that IPV survivors have, which are often intertwined with complex emotions about their abuse and/or abusers. Survivors often face great difficulty addressing all of the simultaneous problems arising from the violence they have faced.[a] Moreover, legal and justiciable problems are often intrinsically tied with other social (e.g., custody of children, housing), economic, health, or employment issues. As such, IPV survivors may require access to a range of public services, ideally integrated with several legal and justice services. Any meaningful response to IPV, therefore, requires strong collaboration between organisations within the justice system as well as sound working relationships with external organisations. For example, women who report being the victims of IPV should have access to judicial protection and restraining orders, counselling, and victim funds.

Figure 1. Enabling Access to Justice for IPV Survivors
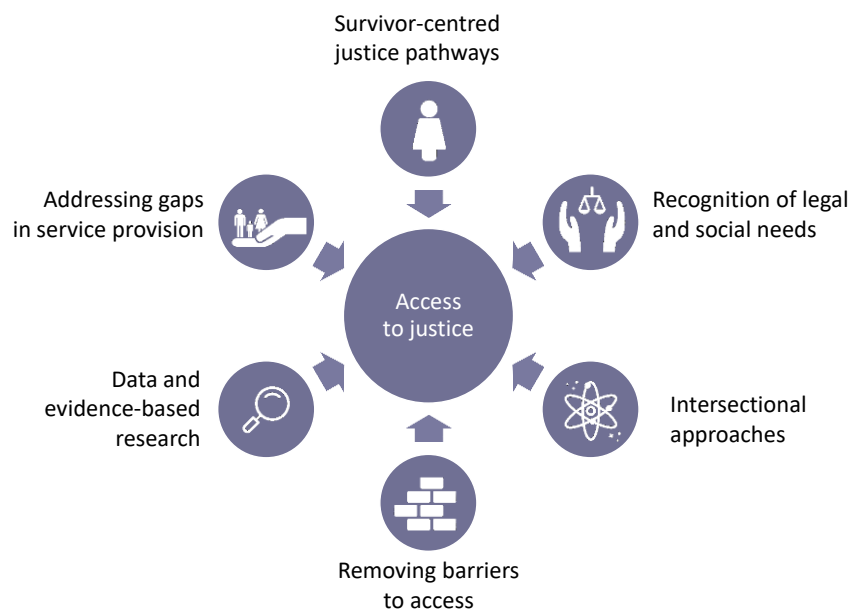
Creating survivor-centred justice pathways

Addressing the bottlenecks in justice pathways that continue to persist across countries is critical.[1] Women face specific barriers in accessing justice, including financial costs, stigma, harassment, and re-victimisation during the different stages of seeking justice. Survivors also often have multifaceted legal and related (e.g., social, health, economic) needs, yet most justice systems are fragmented and siloed, which results in proceedings being addressed in separate forums with multiple lawyers. As such, creating survivor-centred justice pathways and their integration with other services that remove these barriers is critical to supporting IPV survivors, as survivors understand better the particular needs and barriers they face. In this regard, important steps to take include:

- **Ensuring survivor-centred justice pathways are open, consistent, and effectively monitored**. Good practices include programmes to overcome accessibility barriers faced by at-risk groups; simplified legal language and procedures; reforms to the substantive law to facilitate legal clarity; civic engagement; and the co-design of services with survivors.

- **Creating mechanisms to uncover and map the legal needs and barriers faced by survivors**.[2] States can use legal-needs surveys, general population VAW surveys, academic studies, and pilot programmes to allow survivors, advocates, and service providers to identify needs and priorities.

- **Recognising the interconnectedness among criminal, civil, and other legal proceedings and subsequently take steps to coordinate judicial responses to IPV.** An example of a good practice is to create integrated courts that can hear all IPV-related proceedings at once.

- **Recognising that legal problems, including on IPV, are often intrinsically linked with other social, economic, health, or employment issues.** It is therefore important to facilitate access to a range of public services in addition to legal and justice services, which should be provided in an integrated and timely manner.[3]

- **Ensuring access to justice approaches are intersectional.** One-size-fits-all approaches are ineffective because the experiences of women differ due to their personal characteristics and the intersections of their individual circumstances. As a result, it is critical to incorporate an intersectional lens into planning judicial responses to VAW.

Discussion questions

1. How can governments facilitate ways to better understand the legal needs of survivors of IPV?
2. What are effective strategies for overcoming critical barriers and gaps that prevent access to justice for survivors of IPV?
3. How can survivor-centred justice pathways be created for survivors of IPV?

[a] For example, a survivor may be involved in a criminal case because the state charged her intimate partner with assault. She might have been charged with assault under a dual-charging system for allegations of domestic violence. She might simultaneously be involved in divorce proceedings and/or child custody proceedings in a civil court. She might also be seeking protective orders against her partner, attempting to secure sole access to the marital home, or seeking paid time off due to being a survivor of violence. Many of these proceedings will be addressed in separate forums with multiple lawyers, and over the course of months. These legal issues are complex and difficult to address on their own. When multiple proceedings are intertwined, many, if not all, of the legal needs of survivors can easily fail to be addressed.

Intimate partner violence: A manifestation of harmful masculinities

Violence against women is rooted in the power imbalance between women and men

Whilst there is no single cause for violence against women (VAW), some of the strongest and most consistent drivers are embedded in harmful social norms that contribute to gender inequality.[4] These norms define behaviours, values and social expectations associated with being a man or a woman.[5] The term "masculinity" refers to the roles, behaviours and attributes that are associated with maleness and considered appropriate for men. Ideas about and practices of masculinity differ from one culture to another, and change from one historical moment to another. Harmful masculinities are often conformed by patriarchal discriminatory norms and preserve masculine privilege and domination over women. Intimate partner violence (IPV) is therefore "a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men".[6]

Eradicating IPV is often framed as a responsibility of women to escape from violent relationships. However, gender equality is not just a "women's issue". Understanding what leads men to be violent will help targeting the underlying drivers of VAW. The same cultural norms allow both men and women to justify this behaviour. Indeed, in the countries where data is available, almost one man in three believes that wife beating is justified under different circumstances. And women themselves also accept the use of violence, up to 45% in Africa (Figure 2). It is therefore important to challenge and transform the harmful social norms that justify VAW to ones that promote gender equality and non-violence.

Figure 2. Acceptance of IPV by women and men by region
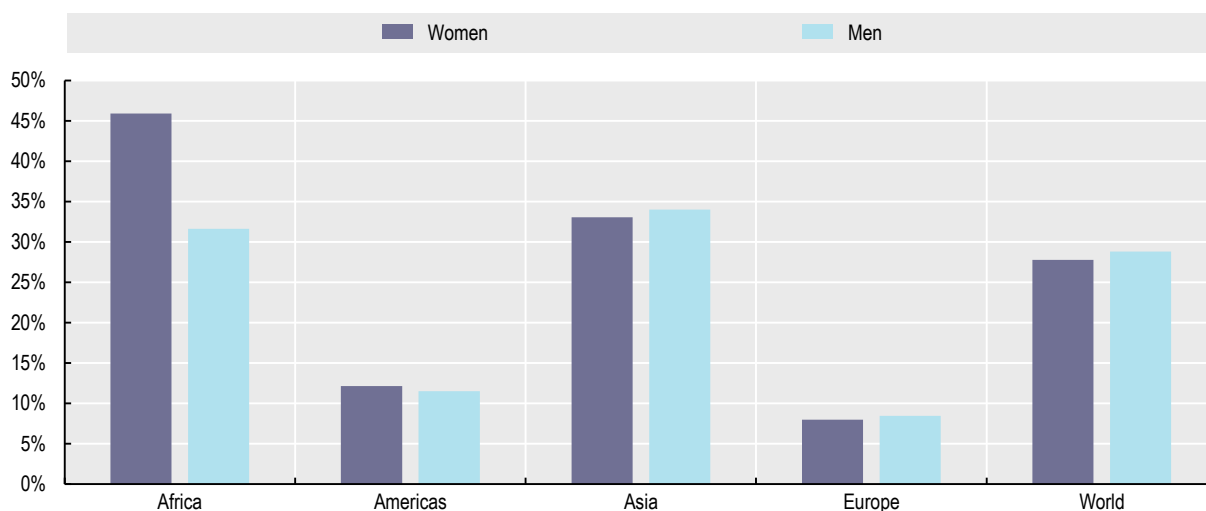
Note: Acceptance of intimate partner violence (IPV) is measured as percentage of individuals who declare that a husband can be justified in beating his wife under certain circumstances. Data are available for 50 and 36 African countries (women and men respectively), 27 and 6 American countries (women and men respectively), 49 and 22 Asian countries (women and men respectively) and 39 and 7 European countries (women and men respectively).
Source: OECD (2019c), Gender, institutions, and Development Database (GID-DB), https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=GIDDB2019[7]
Based on World Value Survey (wave 6 2011-2014r) and UNICEF (various years) data.

Putting men and masculinities at the heart of the policy agenda

Although IPV is driven by social and cultural norms, well-designed policies and programmes can challenge harmful masculinities and promote transformative ones. The emphasis on transformative masculinities was acknowledged at the 48th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2004, which identified "The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality" as one of its priority themes. Beyond engaging men and boys in interventions and programmes aiming to eliminate VAW, it is critical to put social norms that justify harmful masculinities at the heart of policy making. Guaranteeing women's rights to a life free from violence entails shifting the focus from women only, to gender relations and its power dynamics. Policy measures that can be adapted at three different levels notably include:

- **Individual level:** Working with **boys and girls** for change at the youngest age is critical. Existing interventions and programmes that engage men and boys have demonstrated the value of working with the youngest, when both their gender identities and attitudes towards gender relations are yet to be formed. Group education approaches, often supported by community-wide sensitisation campaigns, have shown to be effective in this regard.

- **Community level:** Capitalising on positive masculinities can largely support gender equality. Some **social norms** are more gender equitable and support the necessary social transformations to achieve Agenda 2030. This includes, for example, masculinities that emphasise the notion of equal gender relations and therefore challenge the legitimacy of patriarchal ideas and practices. Interventions targeting both women and men in efforts to change personal behaviours and social norms that support gender-based violence through collective action have proven to be successful, as well as programmes engaging male leaders in changing communal norms.

- **Institutional level:** Developing institutional mechanisms to work with **perpetrators** is crucial. All perpetrators of violence against women and girls, who are often men, should be held fully accountable but they should also receive psychological support to avoid potential negative effects brought during their serving time. Law enforcement and the justice system are often infused with patriarchal norms and culture that underpin VAW. Reforming the policies and cultures of male-dominated institutions means also challenging the way we support male perpetrators of violence.

Discussion questions

1. How can public policies promote gender equality and displace harmful masculinities from an early age, when gender norms are traditionally formed?

2. How can capitalising on positive masculinities which support gender equality be used to better engage men and boys in eradicating IPV?

3. What are the most effective ways of working with perpetrators of IPV to challenge harmful masculinities?

Reporting and measuring intimate partner violence

Intimate partner violence represents a global pandemic

Worldwide, around one in three women report having experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence (IPV) or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.[8] Male partners carry out most of this violence, and are responsible for nearly one in four of all murders of women.[9] A 2014 survey of European Union countries found that around 13 million women had experienced physical violence in the 12 months prior to being surveyed – a count higher than the total population of Belgium – and that 33% had experienced physical and/or sexual violence since they were 15 years old.[10] While most victims report that they were pushed or shoved, excluding pushing and shoving reduces the overall incidence only slightly, to 25% – meaning that many women also experienced other forms of abuse.

Figure 3. Intimate partner violence is common across countries

Self-reported lifetime prevalence of physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner, women, 18 to 74-year-olds, latest year available, selected countries
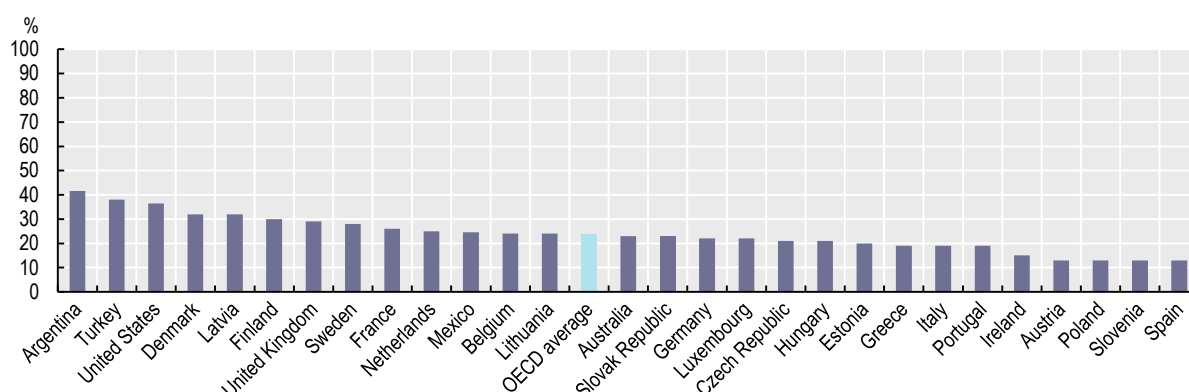
Note: Data refer to 2012, except for Turkey (2014), Argentina and the United States (2015), and Australia and Mexico (2016). Data for Mexico refer to women aged 15-49, for Turkey to ever-married women aged 15-59, for Argentina to women aged 18-69, and for Australia and the United States to women aged 18 and over. Cross-country differences in definitions, question wording and survey methodology mean that comparisons should be made with caution. For example, unlike all other countries, data for Turkey cover ever-married women and violence by a male partner, only. Data for the United States include "stalking", in addition to physical and sexual violence. Data for Mexico cover previous partners only if the woman was married to or in a union with the previous partner. See OECD Family Database Indicator SF3.4 (http://www.oecd.org/els/family/SF-3-4-Intimate-Partner-Violence.pdf) for detailed information on the sources, definitions, and question wordings used.
Source: For European countries, the EU FRA Violence Against Women survey 2012; for Australia, Personal Safety Survey (PSS) 2016; for Mexico, Bott S, Guedes A, Ruiz-Celis AP, Mendoza JA. (2019), "Intimate partner violence in the Americas: a systematic review and reanalysis of national prevalence estimates", Rev Panam Salud Publica. Vol. 43, No. 26. https://doi.org/10.26633/RPSP.2019.26, based on the Encuesta Nacional sobre la Dinámica de las Relaciones en los Hogares (ENDIREH) 2016; for Turkey, Research on Domestic Violence against Women in Turkey survey 2014 ; for the U.S., National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) 2015; for Argentina, Primer Estudio Nacional sobre Violencias contra la Mujer 2015.

Measuring VAW is difficult. Survey-based estimates likely underestimate the extent of the problem, as many victims are reluctant to admit abuse. Administrative data, like police reports, are often even less informative; many violent crimes go unreported because victims fear further violence and mistrust the criminal justice system to provide adequate protection. Cultural norms, fear of harm (towards the woman and her loved ones), stigma, and inadequate ability to self-support also contribute to non-disclosures of violent behaviour.[11]

Comparisons of VAW across countries are nearly impossible. Where surveys do exist, differences in survey methods (e.g. question wording, survey methods, definitions, and survey timing) affect comparability. Countries also differ in respondents' likelihood of reporting harassment. Many factors explain observed differences across countries in the prevalence of IPV: the social acceptability of talking about violence with other people, underlying levels of gender equality, acceptance of IPV in society, women's exposure to the risk of violence (e.g. whether or not they work outside the home), and differences in countries' overall levels of violent crime may all contribute to higher or lower levels of disclosure of violence.[12] Data collection agencies largely define IPV as including four broad categories of "direct" violence (physical, sexual, psychological and economic), but different organisations have different interpretations of how IPV is defined and understood.[13] There is also the challenge of whether to measure prevalence versus incidence of violence – in other words, whether to measure each individual act of violence experienced by a victim, for each perpetrator. Measuring each event can help illustrate the gravity of the abuse, but it places a high burden of recollection on the victim and, in the aggregate, may be less accurate than a simple incidence count.

Differences in political and cultural factors mean that individual countries need to collect their own data to serve as baselines for measuring progress. There is little benefit to extrapolating one country's prevalence estimates to another.[14] For countries that have carried out multiple waves of surveys with questions on sexual harassment and/or violence against women, it is possible to observe change over time. However, it is difficult to say whether higher or lower rates of reporting indicate substantive change on the ground, greater awareness of what constitutes sexual harassment, and/or willingness to report.

A leading cross-national survey on VAW (FRA) shows the difficulty in interpreting violence rates. The survey finds a counterintuitive result: there is a positive correlation between the prevalence of gender-based violence and European Gender Equality Index scores. European countries which score high in gender equality (like the Nordics) had higher levels of reported violence against women than European countries which are ranked as less egalitarian (Figure 3). However, when comparing extreme forms of violence – so-called "coercive control", in which an intimate partner supresses a victim's autonomy, rights, and liberties through physical, emotional, and psychological abuse – countries with higher levels of gender equality perform better.[15]

Countries with the lowest share of women under a partner's coercive control were Sweden, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Denmark, and the Czech Republic, all of which had rates below 5%. The highest prevalence of coercive control was in Eastern Europe. Such findings illustrate the difficulty of drawing cross-national comparisons: are women in northern European countries more likely to experience (non-coercive control) violence, or are they simply more likely to report it?

Governments need more (and better) data to improve their policy response to IPV

Measuring violence is important. One-off VAW surveys and VAW modules in larger surveys gather only limited information. Governments should conduct VAW-specific surveys and repeat them over time in order to understand better the determinants and patterns of violence. Careful planning and protocols are needed to ensure that survey questions are phrased appropriately and that women feel safe to answer honestly.

The need for "hard data" on rates of violence is clear. However, given that public policies today largely focus on violence mitigation, survey data should also be framed around questions of how public services treated victims and whether the policy response increased the accountability of the abuser or put survivors at greater risk.

Administrative data – collected through health, policy, social, or other services – is another tool for measuring VAW, but governments must better ensure consistency across levels of government, regions, and Ministries. Raw data at the local level also must be accurately transmitted and counted in national statistics.[16]

Discussion questions

1. How can governments better ensure the accuracy of IPV incidence data?
2. How should governments use IPV data to improve policies and inform the public?
3. How can governments take a more victim-centred perspective when collecting, analysing and publicising IPV data?

Integrating services to support survivors of violence

The challenge of effectively delivering services to survivors of intimate partner violence

Survivors of gender-based violence have complex needs, both during and after their experiences of violence. Threats to women's health include injuries, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy complications, mental health problems, homicide, and suicide. Survivors also often need legal advice, housing support, and help for their children, thus requiring a diverse range of services and support from government and other stakeholders. Different policy and service delivery spheres such as education, social protection, justice, employment, physical and financial security, and health need to work together and provide seamless support.[17]

Survivors who seek help regularly have to navigate a range of government offices and bureaucratic challenges in order to receive even basic support. They are often asked to repeat traumatic experiences multiple times, rather than being able to access a "one-stop shop" with collocation of relevant services and counsel. This, combined with the unique challenges survivors face, means that accessing help can be very challenging. Locating protection and support services on the same premises is recommended in the Istanbul Convention, which most OECD countries have signed onto.

Figure 4. Model of integrated public service delivery for survivors of violence

Note: Model illustrates potential coordination among public services offices (the external ring) with a centralised, possibly co-located case manager or office to facilitate navigating various services. The process of system exit and entry is not linear, as survivors often need to re-engage with public service providers several times.

Many factors block the development of comprehensive and integrated social services for survivors. Institutional "silos" – common in many governments – means that survivors may have to submit the same basic information repeatedly to apply to different services, rather than Ministries or offices sharing this data directly. This increases the administrative burden on survivors, who are often already strapped for time and resources. Providing good-quality, comprehensive, and integrated social services to survivors is a challenge for all countries.

Differences in front-line professionals' skills, training, and experiences mean that some public offices are well-equipped to help survivors of violence, while others are woefully under-equipped. Weak processes for identifying who should receive services, especially in places with budget constraints, can reduce programme take up and limit effective service delivery.[18]

Integrating services to help survivors

Because IPV affects multiple aspects of victims' lives, it is important for countries to invest greater political commitments, financial means, qualified human resources, and co-ordination efforts in the standardisation of integrated services for violence prevention, as well as for the protection and empowerment of survivors, who come from a diverse range of lived experiences. Integrating the wide range of services needed to support survivors requires a holistic approach – across Ministries, across local, regional, and national levels of government, across service sectors, across organisational and financial structures, and involving non-governmental stakeholders. Such an approach cannot only be reactive, but should instead offer a continuum of support with both preventative and responsive services. A whole-of-government approach, both horizontally and vertically across government bodies, is needed to enact change on the ground.

What policy measures can help in integrating services for survivors of violence?

- Collocating service providers is often a fruitful first step, as it can lead to increased collaboration among service providers and cooperation among professionals from different sectors. Coordinated funding mechanisms also help, though these are often more difficult to implement.
- Survivors should have early and simple access to "gate keepers" of integrated services; these human resources professionals should also be well-trained and specialised to work with survivors of IPV who are suffering from trauma.
- Standard practices for securely, efficiently, confidentially and ethically sharing personal data across offices should be developed to help reduce the administrative burden and costs for both clients and providers.
- Collaboration should be fostered across service delivery agencies through methods like joint management boards and cross-sector training.
- Integrated service programmes should be evaluated during and after implementation, and include service users' satisfaction as a monitored outcome.

Discussion questions

1. What institutional, financial, human resources, and other barriers currently exist across public and non-profit agencies that prevent the strong integration of social service delivery for survivors?
2. How can governments better integrate public services for survivors of violence?
3. What lessons have been learned in recent years in terms of ensuring positive outcomes for survivors? What works, and what does not?

Making violence against women a whole-of-government priority

Violence against women is a critical public governance challenge

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a particularly complex form of gender-based violence. It is usually part of an on-going pattern of abuse that can include physical violence, rape or other forms of sexual assault, psychological manipulation, coercive control, and economic abuse. The individual impacts of IPV may also vary among women due to intersectional identities and social and economic factors, such as age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and socioeconomic class. Consequently, IPV can affect nearly all aspects of survivors' lives, including their access to education, healthcare, employment, housing, and justice, which makes it a complex public governance issue. Because it cuts across public policy areas, IPV creates serious challenges with regards to data collection, risk assessment, and policy coordination. It also means the ways in which governments frame IPV as a problem – and implement policies in response – will have important consequences for the delivery of critical services (or lack thereof) to IPV survivors.

Given the multifaceted challenges presented by IPV, it is important to undertake a whole-of-government approach to ending IPV. An effective whole-of-government approach incorporates society-wide strategies for preventing IPV, protecting and supporting survivors, and holding perpetrators accountable. It begins with a comprehensive legal framework addressing violence against women; it includes minimum standards for services; and it clearly outlines roles and responsibilities and achieves buy-in across the government. It entails creating a culture of zero-tolerance, survivor-centric interventions, and capacity building. Finally, it requires robust accountability mechanisms that encourage risk assessment and management, independent oversight of institutions, and enforcement of justice.

Building a whole-of-government framework for ending violence against women

The first step in building a whole-of-government framework for ending violence against women (VAW), including IPV, is the development of a comprehensive, durable national strategy that clearly outlines the government's vision for addressing VAW.[19] National strategies are an important mechanism for focusing attention on the most crucial issues and challenges associated with VAW, and linking them to policies and actions that the government will take to address them. It also allows governments to establish clear and realistic roles and responsibilities across the government.

While it is important that strategies direct attention to specific kinds of violence such as IPV, it is critical that they recognize the need to address multiple forms of VAW under the same overarching structure. As such, strategies should clearly outline the root causes of VAW, the prevalence of the phenomenon in the country, and its impact upon society as a whole. It is also useful for strategies to account for both national and international standards (e.g., the Istanbul Convention, the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Sustainable Development Goals).

To ensure the whole-of-government framework lives up to its name, the implementation of strategies and associated laws, policies, and programmes must meaningfully involve the full range of public institutions.[20] Traditionally, long-standing cultural, institutional, and communication barriers between public institutions have prevented this from happening.[21] In consequence, approaches to VAW have been marked by uncoordinated responses across ministries and levels of government, often times, generating secondary victimisation, as victims and survivors navigate legal, social, and justice processes. In recognition that ending cycles of violence requires coordination among all relevant public institutions and services, governments would benefit from fostering a culture of information sharing and cross-sector collaboration. This includes creating vertical and horizontal collaboration mechanisms and developing integrated services and multi-agency partnerships.

Box 1. Examples of key institutions and their roles in addressing VAW

Centres of Government (CoG), the bodies or group of bodies that provide direct support and advice to Heads of Government and the Cabinet, are key actors in providing leadership and steering the development and implementation of VAW strategies and associated laws, policies, and programmes. The CoG is also typically responsible for designating or establishing a body to co-ordinate VAW responses.

Central Gender Equality Institutions, such as women's ministries or high-level gender equality offices, are tasked with creating social change and utilising a gender lens when conducting research and drafting policies and thus have key roles in the creation and implementation of VAW frameworks.

Ministries of Justice are largely responsible for legal and policy reforms, and are actively involved in the development of integrated responses to VAW, specialised domestic violence courts, and services for victims in the criminal justice system.

Line Ministries, especially those whose mandates cover health, education, housing, employment, and public safety, are crucial to the provision of coordinated, coherent, and far-reaching services that VAW survivors need to recover from violence and lead healthy lives.

Parliaments, including parliamentary committees, are the gatekeepers of the VAW agenda in reviewing draft and existing legislation and monitoring the activities of government through reviews and inquiries into programmes, policies, and expenditures.

Statistical Agencies play a vital role in gathering information on the prevalence and scope of VAW through the generation of evidence, including through the deployment of regular, well-designed national-level surveys and publicising results. These surveys should allow the government to better understand the frequency of abuse, the needs of survivors, and the potential obstacles they face.

While there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to addressing all forms of violence against all women and girls, especially IPV, some other good governance practices include:

- Designing policies and programmes across all levels and branches of government, at different intervention levels (i.e. individual, interpersonal, community, and society), and throughout all stages of abuse cycles.

- Establishing clear monitoring, oversight, and review mechanisms to ensure that whole-of-government frameworks for ending VAW are properly implemented and achieving their goals.

- Engaging key societal and non-governmental actors and stakeholders in the development and implementation of strategies, policies, laws, and programmes. Importantly, this must include engagement with survivors of violence.

- Applying a gender or intersectional lens to the development of laws, policies, and programming to account for gender norms and attitudes as well as intersectional identities.

Discussion questions

1. What steps must be taken to transform existing vertical, top-down approaches to addressing VAW into horizontal, whole-of-government and whole-of-state approaches?

2. How can governments overcome institutional fragmentation and silos in order to implement coordinated policies and services aimed at addressing VAW?

3. What mechanisms do governments need to adopt in order to ensure there is effective implementation of VAW strategies, policies, laws, and programmes?
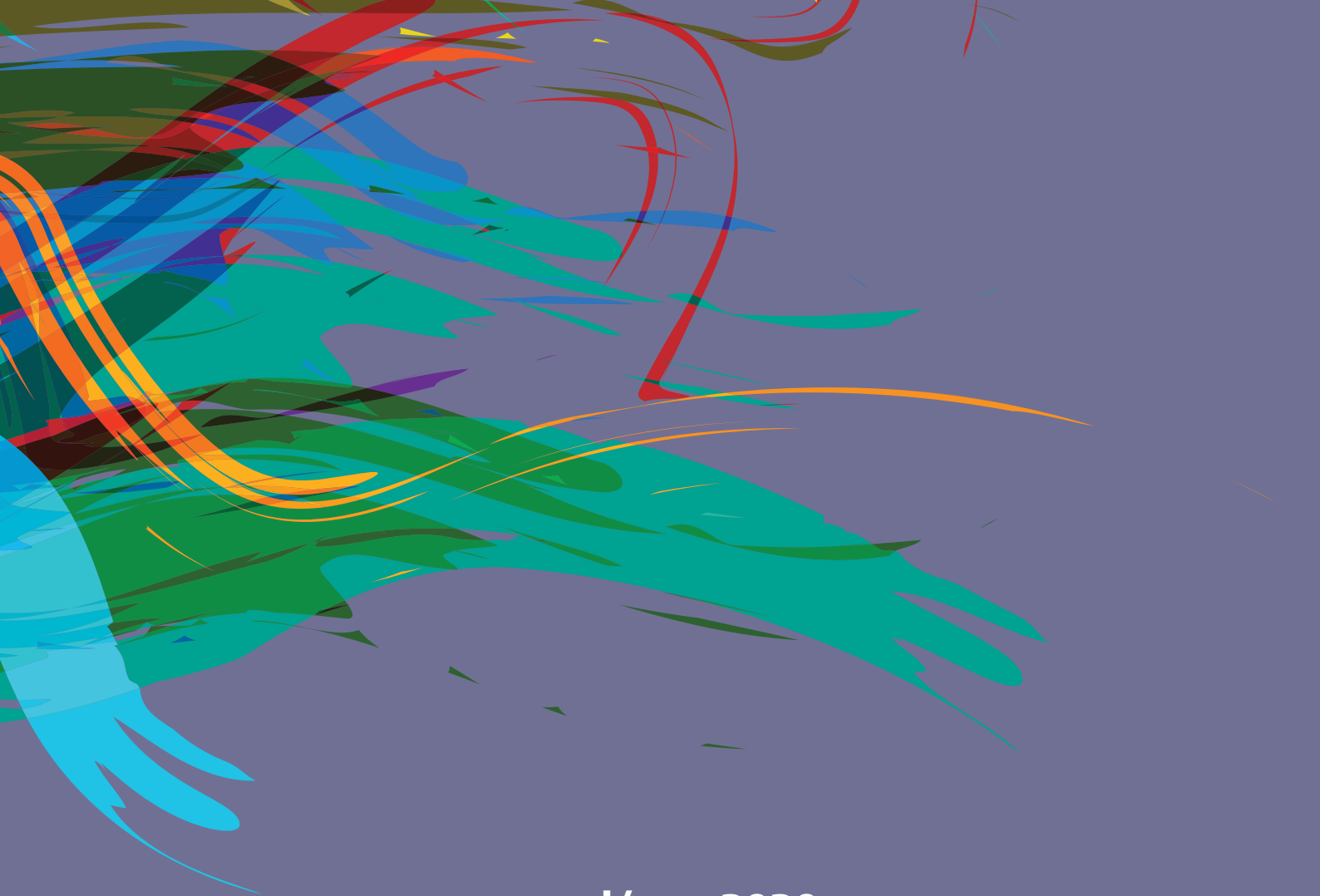
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