

Strengthening the role of the health system in addressing violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children

The Sixty-seventh World Health Assembly,

Having considered the report on addressing the global challenge of violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children;¹

Recalling resolution WHA49.25 (1996), which declared violence a leading worldwide public health problem, resolution WHA56.24 (2003) on implementing the recommendations of the *World report on violence and health*, and resolution WHA61.16 (2008) on the elimination of female genital mutilation;

Cognizant of the many efforts across the United Nations system to address the challenge of violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children including the International Conference on Population and Development, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and all relevant United Nations General Assembly and Human Rights Council resolutions, as well as all relevant Commission on the Status of Women agreed conclusions;

Noting that violence is defined by the WHO as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation”;²

Noting also that interpersonal violence, distinguished from self-inflicted violence and collective violence, is divided into family and partner violence and community violence, and includes forms of violence throughout the life course, such as child abuse, partner violence, abuse of the elderly, family members, youth violence, random acts of violence, rape or sexual assault and violence in institutional settings such as schools, workplaces, prisons and nursing homes;³

Recalling the definition of violence against women as stated in the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women;⁴

¹ Document A67/22.

² *World report on violence and health*. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2002.

³ Page 6 of *World report on violence and health*. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2002.

⁴ United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/48/104.

Concerned that the health and well-being of millions of individuals and families is adversely affected by violence and that many cases go unreported;

Further concerned that violence has health-related consequences including death, disability and physical injuries, mental health impacts and sexual and reproductive health consequences, as well as social consequences;

Recognizing that health systems often are not adequately addressing the problem of violence and contributing to a comprehensive multisectoral response;

Deeply concerned that globally, one in three women experience either physical and/or sexual violence, including by their spouses, at least once in their lives;¹

Concerned that violence, in particular against women and girls, is often exacerbated in situations of humanitarian emergencies and post-conflict settings, and recognizing that national health systems have an important role to play in responding to its consequences;

Noting that preventing interpersonal violence against children – boys and girls – can contribute significantly to preventing interpersonal violence against women and girls and children, that being abused and neglected during infancy and childhood makes it more likely that people will grow up to perpetrate violence against women, maltreat their own children, and engage in youth violence, and underscoring that there is good evidence for the effectiveness of parenting-support programmes in preventing child abuse and neglect in order to halt the intergenerational perpetuation of interpersonal violence;

Noting also that violence against girls needs specific attention because they are subjected to forms of violence related to gender inequality that too often remain hidden and unrecognized by society, including by health providers, and while child abuse (physical, emotional) and neglect affects boys and girls equally, girls suffer more sexual violence;

Deeply concerned that violence against women during pregnancy has grave consequences on the health of both the woman and the pregnancy, such as miscarriage and premature labour, and for the baby such as low birth weight, as well as recognizing the opportunity that antenatal care provides for early identification, and prevention of the recurrence of such violence;

Concerned that children, particularly in child-headed households, are vulnerable to violence, including physical, sexual and emotional violence, such as bullying, and reaffirming the need to take action across sectors to promote the safety, support, protection, health care and empowerment of children, especially girls in child-headed households;

Recognizing that boys and young men are among those most affected by interpersonal violence, which contributes greatly to the global burden of premature death, injury and disability, particularly for young men, and has a serious and long-lasting impact on a person's psychological and social functioning;

Deeply concerned that interpersonal violence, in particular against women and girls, and children, persists in every country in the world as a major global challenge to public health, and is a

¹ Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence. WHO, 2013.

pervasive violation of the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and a major impediment to achieving gender equality, and has negative socioeconomic consequences;

Recognizing that violence against women and girls is a form of discrimination, that power imbalances and structural inequality between men and women are among its root causes, and that effectively addressing violence against women and girls requires action at all levels of government including by the health system, as well as the engagement of civil society, the involvement of men and boys and the adoption and implementation of multifaceted and comprehensive approaches that promote gender equality and empowerment of women and girls and that change harmful attitudes, customs, practices and stereotypes;

Aware that the process under way for the post-2015 development agenda may, in principle, contribute to addressing, from a health perspective, the health consequences of violence, in particular against women and girls, and children, through a comprehensive and multisectoral response;

Acknowledging also the many regional, subregional and national efforts aimed at coordinating prevention and response by health systems, to violence, in particular against women and girls and against children;

Noting with great appreciation the leading role WHO has played in establishing the evidence base on the magnitude, risk and protective factors,¹ consequences, prevention of and response to violence,² in particular against women and girls,³ and against children, in the development of norms and standards, in advocacy and in supporting efforts to strengthen research, prevention programmes and services for those affected by violence;⁴

Also noting that addressing violence, in particular against women and girls and against children is included within the leadership priorities of WHO's Twelfth General Programme of Work 2014–2019 in particular to address the social, economic and environmental determinants of health;

Recognizing the need to scale up interpersonal violence prevention policies and programmes to which the health system contributes and that while some evidence-based guidance exists on effective interventions, more research and evaluation of these and other interventions is required;

Stressing the importance of preventing interpersonal violence before it begins or reoccurs, and noting that the role of the health system in the prevention of violence, in particular against women and

¹ Protective factors are those that decrease or buffer against the risk and impact of violence. While much of the research on violence against women and violence against children has focused on risk factors, it is important for prevention also to understand protective factors. Prevention strategies and programmes aim to decrease risk factors and/or to enhance protective factors.

² Including the World Report on Violence and Health (2002).

³ Including the WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women (2005); Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence (2013); Responding to intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women: WHO clinical and policy guidelines (2013).

⁴ This work is carried out mainly by the Department of Violence and Injury Prevention and Disability, the Department of Reproductive Health and Research, the Department for Mental Health and Substance Dependence and the Department for Emergency Risk Management and Humanitarian Response, in close collaboration with Regional and Country Offices.

girls, and against children, includes supporting efforts to: reduce child maltreatment, such as through parenting support programmes; address substance abuse including the harmful use of alcohol; prevent the reoccurrence of violence by providing health and psychosocial care and/or rehabilitation for victims and perpetrators and to those who have witnessed violence; and, collect and disseminate evidence on the effectiveness of prevention and response interventions;

Affirming the health system's role in advocating, as an element of prevention, for interventions to combat the social acceptability and tolerance of interpersonal violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children, emphasizing the role such advocacy can play in promoting societal transformation;

Recognizing that interpersonal violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children, can occur within the health system itself, which can negatively impact the health workforce, the quality of health care provided and lead to disrespect and abuse of patients, and discrimination to access of services provided;

Affirming the important and specific role that national health systems must play in identifying and documenting incidents of violence, and providing clinical care and appropriate referrals for those affected by such incidents, particularly women and girls, and children, as well as contributing to prevention and advocating within governments and among all stakeholders for an effective, comprehensive, multisectorial response to violence;

1. URGES Member States:¹

(1) to strengthen the role of their health systems in addressing violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children, to ensure that all people at risk and or affected by violence have timely, effective, and affordable access to health services, including health promotion, curative, rehabilitation and support services that are free of abuse, disrespect and discrimination, to strengthen their contribution to prevention programmes and to support WHO's work related to this resolution;

(2) to ensure health system engagement with other sectors, such as education, justice, social services, women's affairs, and child development, in order to promote and develop an effective, comprehensive, national multisectorial response to interpersonal violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children, by, inter alia, adequately addressing violence in health and development plans, establishing and adequately financing national multisectorial strategies on violence prevention and response including protection, as well as promoting inclusive participation of relevant stakeholders;

(3) to strengthen their health system's contribution to ending the acceptability and tolerance of all forms of violence against women and girls, including through advocacy, counselling and data collection, while promoting the age-appropriate engagement of men and boys alongside women and girls, as agents of change, in their family and community, so as to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls;

(4) to strengthen the national response, in particular the national health system response, by improving the collection and, as appropriate, dissemination of comparable data disaggregated for sex, age, and other relevant factors, on the magnitude, risk and, protective factors, types, and

¹ And, where applicable, regional economic integration organizations.

health consequences of violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children, as well as information on best practices, including the quality of care and effective prevention and response strategies;

(5) to continue to strengthen the role of their health systems so as to contribute to the multisectoral efforts in addressing interpersonal violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children, including by the promotion and protection of human rights, as they relate to health outcomes;

(6) to provide access to health services, as appropriate, including in the area of sexual and reproductive health;

(7) to seek to prevent reoccurrence and break the cycle of interpersonal violence, by strengthening, as appropriate, the timely access for victims, perpetrators and those affected by interpersonal violence to effective health, social and psychological services and to evaluate such programmes to assess their effectiveness in reducing reoccurrence of interpersonal violence;

(8) to enhance capacities, including through appropriate continuous training of all public and private professionals from health and non-health sectors, as well as caregivers and community health workers, to provide care and support, as well as other related preventive and health promotion services to victims and those affected by violence, in particular women and girls and children;

(9) to promote, establish, support and strengthen standard operating procedures targeted to identify violence against women and girls, and against children, taking into account the important role of the health system in providing care and making referrals to support services;

2. REQUESTS the Director-General:

(1) to develop, with the full participation of Member States¹, and in consultation with United Nations organizations, and other relevant stakeholders focusing on the role of the health system, as appropriate, a draft global plan of action to strengthen the role of the health system within a national multisectoral response to address interpersonal violence in particular against women and girls and against children, building on existing relevant WHO work;

(2) to continue to strengthen WHO efforts to develop the scientific evidence on the magnitude, trends, health consequences and risk and protective factors for violence, in particular against women and girls and against children, and update the data on a regular basis, taking into account Member States input, and to collect information on best practices, including the quality of care and effective prevention and response strategies in order to develop effective national health systems prevention and response;

(3) to continue to support Member States, upon their request, by providing technical assistance for strengthening the role of the health system, including in sexual and reproductive health, in addressing violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children;

(4) to report to the Executive Board at its 136th session on progress in implementing this resolution, and on the finalization in 2014 of a global status report on violence and health which

¹ And, where applicable, regional economic integration organizations.

is being developed in cooperation with UNDP and UNODC, and reflects national violence prevention efforts, and to report also to the Executive Board at its 138th session on progress in implementing this resolution, including presentation of the draft global action plan, for consideration by the Sixty-ninth World Health Assembly.

Ninth plenary meeting, 24 May 2014
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