

Addressing Violence against Women in Afghanistan: The health system response

1. Situation:

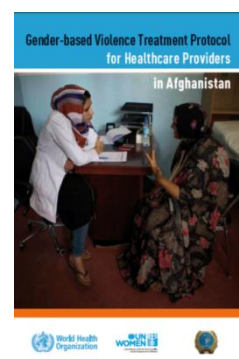
According to the 2010/2011 Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 15% of Afghan women (aged 15-49 years) were married before the age of 15, and 46% before the age of 18. Out of all women (aged 15-49 years), 92% believe that a husband is justified in beating his wife.¹ In March 2014, the Government published its first report on the elimination of violence against women (VAW) in Afghanistan.² Overall 4,505 incidents of violence against women were registered in relevant Afghan ministries in 32 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces between 2012 and 2013. Available data (see Box 1) show that violence against women is a pervasive problem in Afghanistan.³

Box 1

Almost 90% of women in Afghanistan have experienced at least one form of domestic violence, 17% have experienced sexual violence and 52% have experienced physical violence.

2. Legal, policy and multi-sectoral response:

- Afghanistan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women without reservations in 2003.
- The 2009 Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) law – which remains the main legislative tool for protecting women from violence – criminalizes 22 acts of violence and harmful traditional practices against women and girls. This law is enacted and enforced by a presidential decree.
- The Penal Code includes provisions to punish acts of rape including those that result in injury and disability. Other sections of the Criminal Code criminalize additional acts of violence perpetrated against women that are not codified in the EVAW law, such as murder and kidnapping.⁴
- The Government has a National Action Plan (2015-2018) on the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325⁵ and a National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (2007-2017).⁶
- The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) has a Health and Human Rights Strategy (2014-2017) and a National Gender Strategy (2012-2016).⁷



¹ Central Statistics Organisation (CSO) and UNICEF. Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2010-2011: Final Report. Kabul: Central Statistics Organisation (CSO) and UNICEF, 2012. Available at: <http://cso.gov.af/Content/files/AMICS.pdf>

² Ministry of Women's Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. First Report on the Implementation of the Elimination of Violence against Women Law in Afghanistan, 2014. Available at: http://mowa.gov.af/Content/files/EVAW%20Law%20Report_Final_English_17%20%20March%202014.pdf

³ Nijhowne, D., and L. Oates. 2008. Living with Violence: A National Report on Domestic Abuse in Afghanistan. Washington, DC: Global Rights: Partners for Justice. Available at:

<http://www.globalrights.org/Library/Women's%20rights/Living%20with%20Violence%20Afghan.pdf>

⁴ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Justice through the Eyes of Afghan Women: Cases of Violence against Women Addressed through Mediation and Court Adjudication. 2015. Available at https://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/UNAMA-OHCHR/UNAMA_OHCHR_Justice_through_eyes_of_Afghan_women_-_15_April_2015.pdf

⁵ UN Security Council Resolution 1325, 2000. Available: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325

⁶ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA). Available: <http://www.svri.org/Afghanistanpolicy.pdf>

⁷ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Public Health, Gender Department. National Gender Strategy (2012-2016). Available: http://moph.gov.af/Content/Media/Documents/MoPH_National_Gender_Strategy_Final_English_2012164201212934246553325325.pdf

3. Health system response:

- The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) is implementing a multisectoral response to gender-based violence (GBV). This involves establishment of family protection centres, with support from UNFPA, in six provincial hospitals with referral links to legal, police and other sectors.
- The MoPH launched a Gender-based Violence Treatment Protocol (2014)⁸ in line with WHO guidelines for responding to violence against women.^{9,10}
- A health facility readiness assessment carried out by WHO in Afghanistan's seven provinces in 2015 found that only 10% of health facilities are well prepared to address GBV. A quarter of the 280 health facilities surveyed had private examination rooms. Less than half of the health facilities had emergency contraceptives available and only 2% of health facilities had a written protocol for providing care to survivors of GBV.¹¹
- A comprehensive training package has been developed to train health care providers in using the GBV treatment protocol.
- A GBV information database is currently being developed by MoPH.



Workshop on the GBV protocol for healthcare providers in Kabul

WHO's work on VAW in Afghanistan. Key Achievements:

- WHO, in collaboration with UN Women, provided technical support to the MoPH in the development of Afghanistan's first GBV Treatment Protocol for health care providers in 2014.
- Training modules for health care providers on the GBV Treatment Protocol have been developed. Trainings for health care providers are being piloted for roll out.
- The WHO clinical handbook for health care providers has been translated into Dari and Pashtu.¹⁰
- A readiness assessment on health facility and provider capacity to provide GBV services was carried out in 7 provinces, focusing on existing practices, knowledge and attitudes, challenges, institutional framework and infrastructural readiness. A total of 280 health facilities were surveyed, and in-depth interviews were conducted with 770 healthcare providers and 1300 female clients.¹¹
- Between 2015 and 2020, 6500 health care providers will be trained in the use of the GBV treatment protocol to provide services to survivors of GBV, and health facilities will be equipped to provide GBV services. The GBV protocol and training modules will be integrated into existing medical curricula, and information materials (e.g. IEC materials and job-aids, protocol and clinical handbook) will be distributed to health facilities and to communities.

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⁸ Gender-based violence treatment protocol for healthcare providers in Afghanistan. Ministry of Public Health, WHO Afghanistan, UN Women, 2014. Available at: http://applications.emro.who.int/dsaf/EMROPUB_2015_EN_1882.pdf?ua=1

⁹ Responding to intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women: WHO clinical and policy guidelines. Geneva: WHO, 2013. Available at: http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/85240/1/9789241548595_eng.pdf

¹⁰ Health care for women subjected to intimate partner violence or sexual violence. A clinical handbook. Geneva: WHO, UNFPA, UN Women, 2014.

¹¹ WHO Afghanistan and YHDO. Assessment on the readiness and capacity of health facilities and healthcare providers to strengthen health sector response to gender-based violence in Afghanistan. Forthcoming.