Preventing violence against women
Introduction

The primary audience for this document is policymakers. Programme implementers working on preventing and responding to violence against women will also find it useful for designing, planning, implementing, and monitoring and evaluating interventions and programmes.

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Know the facts

**Violence against women (VAW) is a violation of human rights**, is rooted in gender inequality, is a public health problem, and an impediment to sustainable development.

Nearly 1 in 3 (35%) women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence, not including sexual harassment, by any perpetrator.

Globally, 30% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime.

Adolescent girls, young women, women belonging to ethnic and other minorities, transwomen, and women with disabilities face a higher risk of different forms of violence.

**Humanitarian emergencies** may exacerbate existing violence and lead to additional forms of violence against women and girls.

Globally between 38%-50% of murders of women are committed by intimate partners.

Violence negatively affects women’s physical and mental health and well-being. It has social and economic consequences and costs for families, communities and societies.

Low education, exposure to violence in childhood, unequal power in intimate relationships, and attitudes and norms accepting violence and gender inequality increase the risk of experiencing intimate partner violence and sexual violence.

Low education, child maltreatment or exposure to violence in the family, harmful use of alcohol, attitudes accepting of violence and gender inequality increase risk of perpetrating intimate partner violence.

The majority (55-95%) of women survivors of violence do not disclose or seek any type of services.

Violence against women and girls is preventable. To prevent violence, mitigate the risk factors and amplify the protective factors.
Assess the risk & protective factors

Risk Factors

Discriminatory laws on property ownership, marriage, divorce and child custody
Low levels of women's employment and education
Absence or lack of enforcement of laws addressing violence against women
Gender discrimination in institutions (e.g. police, health)

Harmful gender norms that uphold male privilege and limit women's autonomy
High levels of poverty and unemployment
High rates of violence and crime
Availability of drugs, alcohol and weapons

Protective Factors

Laws that:
- promote gender equality
- promote women's access to formal employment
- address violence against women

Norms that support non-violence and gender equitable relationships, and promote women's empowerment

Intimate relationships characterized by gender equality, including in shared decision-making and household responsibilities

Non-exposure to violence in the family
Secondary education for women and men and less disparity in education levels between women and men
Both men and boys and women and girls are socialized to, and hold gender equitable attitudes

 Childhood experience of violence and/or exposure to violence in the family
Mental disorders
Attitudes condoning or justifying violence as normal or acceptable
Implement 7 strategies to prevent violence against women

1. **Relationship skills strengthened**
   - refers to strategies aimed at individuals or groups of women, men or couples to improve skills in interpersonal communication, conflict management and shared decision-making.

2. **Empowerment of women**
   - refers to both economic and social empowerment including inheritance and asset ownership, microfinance plus gender and empowerment training interventions, collective action, creating safe spaces and mentoring to build skills in self-efficacy, assertiveness, negotiation, and self-confidence.

3. **Services ensured**
   - refers to a range of services including police, legal, health, and social services provided to survivors.

4. **Poverty reduced**
   - refers to strategies targeted to women or the household whose primary aim is to alleviate poverty ranging from cash transfers, savings, microfinance loans, labour force interventions.

5. **Environments made safe**
   - refers to efforts to create safe schools, public spaces and work environments, among others.

6. **Child and adolescent abuse prevented**
   - refers to establishing nurturing family relationships, prohibiting corporal punishment, and implementing parenting programmes as mentioned in INSPIRE - 7 strategies for preventing violence against children.

7. **Transformed attitudes, beliefs, and norms**
   - refers to strategies that challenge harmful gender attitudes, beliefs, norms and stereotypes that uphold male privilege and female subordination, that justify violence against women and that stigmatize survivors. These may range from public campaigns, group education to community mobilization efforts.
## Assess the Evidence on Interventions

### Relationships skills strengthened
**Group-based Workshops**
- In the two-year period following the implementation of Stepping Stones in South Africa with female and male participants aged 15–30 years, men were less likely to perpetrate intimate partner violence, rape and transactional sex in the intervention group compared to the baseline.6

### Empowerment of women
**Microfinance plus gender and empowerment**
- The AVAC project (Intervention with Microfinance plus Aids and Gender Equity) in South Africa empowers women through microfinance together with training on gender and power and community mobilization activities. Studies show it reduced domestic violence by 50% in the intervention group over a period of two years. At US$244 per incident case of partner violence averted during a 2-year scale up phase, the intervention is highly cost-effective.5

### Services ensured
**Ecological transfers**
- In Northeast Ecuador, a cash, vouchers and food transfer programme implemented by the World Food Programme (WFP) was targeted to women in poor urban areas, intending to reduce poverty. Participating households received monthly transfers equivalent to $340 per month for a period of 6 months. The transfer was conditional on attendance of monthly nutrition trainings. The evaluation showed that among boys 59% among girls at 24 months post intervention; in corporal punishment by 33% among boys and 59% among girls at 24 months post intervention; in corporal punishment by 33% among boys and 59% among girls at 24 months post intervention; in corporal punishment by 33% among boys and 59% among girls at 24 months post intervention.; in corporal punishment by 33% among boys and 59% among girls at 24 months post intervention.; in corporal punishment by 33% among boys and 59% among girls at 24 months post intervention.; in corporal punishment by 33% among boys and 59% among girls at 24 months post intervention.

### Poverty reduced
**Infrastructure and transport**
- In Hyderabad (Sindh Province), Pakistan, a right to play intervention reached 40% of public schools. Boys and girls were engaged in play-based learning providing them opportunity to develop life skills such as confidence, communication, empathy, coping with negative emotions, resilience, cooperation, leadership, critical thinking and conflict resolution that help combat conflict, intolerance, gender discrimination and peer violence. An evaluation showed decreases in peer victimization by 33% among boys and 59% among girls at 24 months post intervention; in corporal punishment by 45% in boys and 66% in girls; and in witnessing of domestic violence by 65% among boys and by 70% in girls.7

### Environments made safe
**Microfinance or savings interventions**
- One-stop crisis centres

### Child and adolescent abuse prevented
**Bystander interventions**
- Female participants aged 15–20 years in South Africa with female participants aged 15–20 years in South Africa were engaged in play-based learning providing them opportunity to develop life skills such as confidence, communication, empathy, coping with negative emotions, resilience, cooperation, leadership, critical thinking and conflict resolution that help combat conflict, intolerance, gender discrimination and peer violence. An evaluation showed decreases in peer victimization by 33% among boys and 59% among girls at 24 months post intervention; in corporal punishment by 45% in boys and 66% in girls; and in witnessing of domestic violence by 65% among boys and by 70% in girls.8

### Transformed attitudes, beliefs, and norms
**Community mobilization**
- Community Mobilizations (SASA!) is a community intervention in Uganda that prevents violence against women by shifting the power balance between men and women in relationships. Studies show that in SASA! communities 76% of women and men believe physical violence against a partner is not acceptable while only 20% of women and men in control communities believe this is acceptable. The cost of US$450 per incident case of partner violence averted in trial phase, intervention is cost-effective and further economies of scale can be achieved during scale-up.9

### LEGEND:
- promising: > 1 evaluations show significant reductions in violence outcomes
- more evidence needed: > 1 evaluations show improvements in intermediate outcomes related to violence
- conflicting: evaluations show conflicting results in reducing violence
- no evidence: intervention not yet rigorously evaluated
- ineffective: > 1 evaluations show no reductions in violence outcomes

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*EXAMPLE: Group-based Workshops*

*EXAMPLE: Microfinance plus gender and empowerment*

*EXAMPLE: Advocacy for survivors*

*EXAMPLE: Economic transfers*

*EXAMPLE: Right to play – preventing violence among girls and boys in schools*

*EXAMPLE: Community Mobilizations (SASA!)*

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*EXAMPLE: Relationships skills strengthened*

*EXAMPLE: Empowerment of women*

*EXAMPLE: Services ensured*

*EXAMPLE: Poverty reduced*

*EXAMPLE: Environments made safe*

*EXAMPLE: Child and adolescent abuse prevented*

*EXAMPLE: Transformed attitudes, beliefs, and norms*
Develop a **theory of change**

**INTERVENTIONS**
- Relationship skills strengthened
- Empowerment of women
- Services ensured
- Poverty reduced
- Environments made safe
- Child and adolescent abuse prevented
- Transformed attitudes, beliefs, and norms

**OUTCOMES**
- Programmes to address VAW widely implemented
- Increased resources and political will to address VAW
- Increased awareness about VAW as a public health problem and that it is preventable

**IMPACT**
- Sectoral outcomes related to health, economic, and social development improved (e.g., improved mental health, reduced household poverty, improved women’s and child health, improved women’s education and earnings, and reduced absenteeism)
- Programmes to address VAW widely implemented
- Increased resources and political will to address VAW
- Families, communities and institutions believe in and uphold gender equality as a norm and no longer accept VAW
- Men accept and treat women as equals
- Women can make autonomous decisions
- Women have knowledge of their rights and access to programmes
- Violence against women is reduced or eliminated
- Equality and respect are practiced in intimate, family and community relationships
- Interpersonal conflicts are resolved peacefully

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**BARRIERS**
- Limitations on women’s autonomy
- Children exposed to violence
- Social norms that perpetuate male power
- Inadequate services
- Inadequate legal and social protections for women
- Lack of political will and resources
- Under-resourced women’s organizations or movements

**OUTPUTS**
- Improved health and development outcomes in households, community and society
- Women are exercising their human rights and contributing to development
- Violence against women is reduced or eliminated
- Equality and respect are practiced in intimate, family and community relationships
- Interpersonal conflicts are resolved peacefully

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Building on resiliency and knowledge, and resourcing and supporting communities to find solutions.
Apply the **guiding principles**

for effective programming

1. **Put women’s safety first and do no harm**
   - Ensure confidentiality of information and anticipate and address unintended consequences

2. **Promote gender equality and women’s human rights**
   - Ensure that analysis of unequal gender and power relations and male privilege over women is at the center of programming

3. **Leave no one behind**
   - Address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination based on sex, gender, class, race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity

4. **Develop a theory of change**
   - Elaborate how programming inputs will lead to changes in intermediate outcomes and likely impacts

5. **Promote evidence informed programming**
   - Strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems to build the evidence base on what works and facilitate knowledge sharing to inform programming

6. **Use participatory approaches**
   - Stimulate personal reflection and critical thinking, and build on the voice, agency and skills of people.

7. **Promote coordination**
   - Support partnerships across sectors and organizations, and at local and national levels

8. **Implement combined interventions**
   - Facilitate collective programming with individuals, families and communities to address the multiple risk factors underlying VAW and multiple forms of violence within families.

9. **Address the prevention continuum**
   - Link prevention and response interventions

10. **Take a life-course approach**
    - Implement programmes that work with children, adolescents and young people for early interventions
Strengthen **enabling environment** for prevention

**a** Build political commitment from leaders and policy makers to speak out, condemning violence against women.

**b** Invest in, build on the work of, resource, and support women’s organizations.

**c** Put in place and facilitate enforcement of **laws and policies** that address violence against women and that promote gender equality, including access to secondary education.6

**d** Allocate resources to programmes, research, and to strengthen institutions and capacities of the health, education, law enforcement, and social services sectors to address violence against women.
Adapt and scale-up what works

Violence prevention interventions that have been shown to work on a pilot basis can be scaled-up in different ways. They can be expanded by adding more beneficiaries; they can be adapted and replicated in another geographic location; and there can be expansion in coverage of the same intervention over a wider geographic area. Interventions that are being scaled-up in a new setting need to be adapted to context. This requires an understanding of the local culture, values and resources.

Interventions identified as promising (pages 10-11) can be adapted and scaled-up with attention to the guiding principles for prevention and to the adaptation and scaling-up considerations on the next page; those classified as “more evidence needed” (pages 10-11) may need to be replicated or further refined before they are scaled-up; and those identified as “conflicting” or “no evidence” need to be further evaluated.

**Align with national commitments** (e.g. a national plan, policy, strategy) to end violence against women, or to promote gender equality or women’s health.7

**Identify and maintain fidelity to core principles** of gender equality, rights and safety as well as to minimum “dosage”, while also adapting to context, including language and culture.

**Programme for synergy**, combining multiple strategies and interventions at the individual, interpersonal, community and societal levels for sustained impact.

**Invest in capacity among implementers**, and giving enough time to scale-up and to allow for change to occur and sustain.

**Build on on-going initiatives**, integrating prevention activities into existing health, development and other existing sectoral programmes.

**Design with “scale” in mind**, investing for the long-term, keeping costs and sustainability in mind.

**Start small, document and evaluate** the adaptation and scale-up in order to innovate and strengthen evidence-informed programming.

**Support a community of practice** among programme developers and implementers to facilitate learning and knowledge sharing.
Progress in preventing violence against women can be measured in the short and the long-term.

1. In the long-term, the impact of prevention programmes can be measured as reductions in prevalence of different forms of violence against women.

2. At the global level, countries are required to report progress in preventing violence against women as part of SDG targets. Two indicators are proposed:

- prevalence of intimate partner violence in the last 12 months among women aged 15 years and older (SDG target 5.2 - eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls);
- proportion of young women and men aged 18–29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18 (SDG target 16.2 - End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children).

3. In the short to medium term, interim indicators that contribute towards reductions in prevalence of violence against women will depend on the types of programmes. These can include, for example, improvements in:

- gender equitable attitudes and norms
- partner communication
- women’s autonomy, agency and/or self-efficacy
- girls’ and women’s education

4. It is important to specify a theory of change elaborating how the programme will likely improve interim indicators and how these in turn will contribute to reducing prevalence of violence against women.

5. It is important to evaluate before scaling-up and to monitor the scaling-up on an on-going basis to ensure that resources are invested in programmes that work, unintended or harmful outcomes are mitigated, and the scaling-up process takes into account the local context.
The way forward: a call to action

Commit to change

Start today

Support evidence-based approaches

Join others
Citations and additional references


1. These are for both perpetration of and victimization from intimate partner violence (IPV).

2. The 7 strategies are not mutually exclusive, should not be seen as silos, and there are some overlaps across them.

3. Although specific interventions and their examples are listed under one particular strategy, it is important to note that many of them reflect combination/bundled programming with multi-component and multi-level interventions that fall across more than 1 of the 7 strategies of RESPECT. Their categorization under one strategy reflects the primary intent of the intervention. For example, some interventions under transforming norms also include relationship strengthening skills. Likewise, empowerment of women interventions may include an economic transfer component. Therefore, these strategies should not be seen as standalone but as approaches whose impact may be better enhanced in combination with others.

4. Evidence ratings are largely derived from systematic reviews of more than 1 evaluation of interventions that mostly use experimental designs including randomized, cluster randomized and quasi-experimental methods. It is recognized that for some strategies such as justice sector interventions, alternative evaluation methods may be more appropriate including time series, observational and cross-sectional designs despite being typically considered lower quality. This is an emerging field and hence, there is a great deal of variation in rigor of study design and evaluation. The sources for these reviews and studies are provided as part of references.

5. Refers to evaluations where some studies may show positive impacts and others may show no impacts or negative impacts, highlighting that the impact of interventions may be context specific. Hence, any replication or adaptation of the intervention must pay close attention to the contextual or implementation factors.

6. This includes laws and policies that: criminalize sexual abuse, promote equality in inheritance, ban child marriage and FGM, marriage, custody and divorce laws that guarantee equality for women; action plans that promote gender equality and address violence against women; and also includes implementing justice and law enforcement services such as arrest orders and legal aid.

7. Even where there is no national commitment to ending violence against women, there may be other commitments to empower women, to gender equality, or to women’s health that may be useful to consider.