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# ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: EFFECTIVE APPROACHES AND MEASURING CHANGE

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## WHY OXFAM GIVES FOCUS TO ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Violence against women and girls is a global pandemic that knows no boundaries. In the past decade, through extensive recent effort by governments, United Nations agencies and civil society actors, more clarity has been achieved on the nature and dimension of the problem. We now have aggregated global and regional as well as country prevalence datasets (though significant data gaps still exist).<sup>1</sup>

The statistics on the prevalence and patterns of violence against women and girls worldwide, and in the Indo-Pacific region, are alarming:

- 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence.<sup>2</sup>
- As many as 38% of all murders of women are committed by intimate partners.<sup>3</sup>
- 37% of partnered women in South-East Asia report having experienced intimate partner violence at some point in their lives.<sup>4</sup>
- In Pacific countries where recent data is available, 2 in 3 women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from their partner.<sup>5</sup>
- Violence against women is the leading cause of death and disability of women no matter their age.<sup>6</sup>
- Women and girls in the age group of 15 to 44 are more at risk from rape and domestic violence than cancer, motor accidents, war and malaria.<sup>7</sup>
- Greater risk of violence against women and girls during or after armed conflict and other forms of humanitarian emergencies such as natural disasters is a consistent trend.<sup>8</sup>

For women and girls, the impacts of violence are tremendous.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example WHO et al. 2013, *Global and Regional Estimates of Violence Against Women*; Garcia-Moreno, C et. al. 2005, *WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women: initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses*, WHO, Geneva; ODE 2008, *Violence against women in Melanesia and East Timor: building on global and regional promising approaches*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS:

Violence against women is defined by the United Nations in its Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women as: *“any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”* (UN, 1993).

- violates a woman’s or girl’s right to a safe life
- causes physical and psychological harm<sup>9</sup>
- deepens the unequal power relations between women and men, girls and boys. Violence against women is described in the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence (DEVAW) as *“one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men”* (UN, 1993)
- engenders significant economic and financial security costs for women, including the ability to attain and sustain employment or other informal livelihoods activities (VicHealth, 2011)
- greatly constrains women’s and girls’ freedom to develop their life in the manner of their own choosing, obtain the education they need, participate in public life, and equally contribute to and benefit from development efforts

***“Violence against women is both a cause and a symptom of gender inequality and discrimination... It fuels further inequalities and negative consequences for women”***  
(ODE, 2008, p.9)

The immensity of the problem has been a global call to action. And the scale and complexity of the challenge should not overwhelm or dissuade us. Violence is not inevitable, and it is preventable.

Research is revealing that there is variation in prevalence that can in part be explained by certain determinants such as the unequal power and resource distribution between women and men, and rigid and harmful gender norms. Moreover, cutting-edge research shows that programmatic interventions can have impacts on preventing and addressing the impacts of violence against women and girls. We have reached a global consensus that there is no choice for institutions and communities but to take urgent action in order to secure women’s and girls’ basic human right of a life lived free from violence (ODE, 2008; SVRI, 2014; VicHealth, 2011; WHO and LSGTM 2010, WHO et al. 2013). Aid and development actors such as Oxfam can reach parts of the globe where the need is greatest.

***“There is a clear need to scale up efforts across a range of sectors, both to prevent violence from happening in the first place and to provide necessary services for women experiencing violence”*** (WHO et al., 2013, p. 2)

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<sup>9</sup> The World Health Organisation has found that, for example, women who have experienced partner abuse have higher rates of health problems, include depression, HIV and low-weight babies: WHO et al. 2013, *Global and Regional Estimates of Violence Against Women*, p. 2.

Oxfam takes up this challenge. We believe that all human beings are of equal value, and that everyone has fundamental rights that must be upheld at all times. All our work should aim at the universal realisation of human rights. Violence against women and girls, like poverty, is a denial of these basic rights. It is also a major impediment to development.

Contributing to gender justice is a key focus for Oxfam. ‘Gender justice’ means full equality and equity between women, men and people of other genders, in all spheres of life. Women and girls bear the brunt of gender inequality – through discrimination, marginalisation and violence.

Addressing violence against women and girls requires a concerted effort, and is therefore a key programming focus area for Oxfam within our broader Gender Justice goal.

The necessity of attention to addressing violence against women and girls has also been recognised in the Australian aid program. It is a priority focus area within the Gender Equality pillar of the current aid policy ‘Promoting Prosperity, Reducing Poverty, Enhancing Stability’. This priority is also reflected the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development 10-year initiative.

***“The Australian Government is strongly committed to being at the forefront of efforts to empower women and girls and promote gender equality in the Indo-Pacific region... Where there are persistent challenges and slow progress towards equality, we will invest strongly in enhancing:***

- *women’s voice in decision-making, leadership, and peace-building*
- *women’s economic empowerment*
- *ending violence against women and girls”* (DFAT, 2014, p. 25)

The imperative to act to address violence against women and girls is clear. The question then becomes: what should be done?

## WHAT WORKS TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS?

Addressing violence against women and girls is a critical global challenge. The worldwide rates of violence alone demonstrate that there is as yet no perfect or easily-realised solution. However, globally and regionally, research is currently emerging that synthesises rigorous evidence of the effectiveness of different approaches to addressing violence against women and girls (ODE, 2008; SVRI, 2014; WHO and LSHTM, 2010). This research highlights several consistent features of successful and promising approaches:

### **1. That commitment, collaboration and capacity is needed for appropriate, sustainable change**

Appropriate, sustainable solutions to the problem of violence against women and girls require detailed knowledge of the prevalence and the characteristics of the violence in the context in which the problem is experienced. Working in partnership with local communities, women and organisations that possess intimate knowledge of, and innovative ideas about, how to address violence is a fundamental necessity. Collaborative, multi-sectoral partnerships that build upon collective commitment are most likely to succeed. Local capacity building of civil society organisations and government institutions is essential in the Indo-Pacific context. Commitment to addressing the problem must be supported with long-term, significant financial, human and

technical resources (ODE, 2008; SVRI, 2014; WHO and LSHTM, 2010).

## **2. That preventing violence against women and girls can – and should be – addressed through different types of strategies**

Preventing violence against women and girls requires addressing of causes and risk factors, which are complex and multiple, dependent on context, and can shift with broader societal changes (SVRI, 2014). The complexity of causes and multiple manifestations of violence against women and girls suggest in themselves that multiple strategies are needed to successfully address this problem; that is, there is not a ‘one-size-fits-all’ preventive solution. This is supported by the emergent body of synthesising evidence.

Recent comprehensive global reviews show that there is significant evidence to recommend the following types of prevention interventions as effective or promising:

- Group- or community-based relationship-level interventions working with women and men
- Women’s economic empowerment initiatives - but only when coupled with approaches to transform discriminatory and restrictive gender norms
- Community initiatives to raise awareness of and change attitudes about women’s rights
- Men and boys’ group education (alongside women and girls and community mobilisation)
- Shelters for women escaping violence and protection orders
- Paralegal programs and community-based legal interventions (SVRI, 2014; WHO and LSHTM, 2010)<sup>10</sup>

An appropriate policy response including targeted legislation, appropriate resource, and effective implementation, has been shown to help enable wholesale norm change by promoting non-tolerance of violence against women and girls (ODE, 2008; WHO and LSHTM, 2010). Other strategies – such as intensive community-level work and awareness-raising campaigns – are also key in promoting changing attitudes and norms (ODE, 2008; SVRI, 2014; VicHealth, 2011; WHO and LSHTM, 2010; WHO et al., 2013).

## **3. That survivors of violence need significant levels of support**

Addressing violence against women also means attending to the pandemic currently affecting women; that is, responding to the immediate needs of survivors of violence.

Most survivors do not get adequate support in their efforts to overcome the consequences of violence. Dedicated psycho-social, health and legal services tend to be few and far between. Social norms often “blame the victim”, that is, they hold survivors responsible for their ordeal. As a result, many survivors find themselves socially marginalised and debilitated by crippling health conditions. The Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program has recognised the minimal support that survivors receive in the Pacific context (Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development). The justice system must also be accessible, responsive and effective for survivors of violence.

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<sup>10</sup> It is recognised that this is not a comprehensive list of successful strategies – rather these have been identified as those strategies with enough positive data to show its effectiveness or promise.

#### **4. That an integrated, coordinated approach to addressing violence against women and girls may be the most effective tool available**

Global good practice violence against women and girls initiatives ascribe to models that work at different levels, from the individual, to intimate relationships, to local communities, to a policy and legislative change. Increasingly there is evidence to suggest that the most effective interventions use a combination of strategies in a multi-sectoral fashion, working at different levels from the individual to the societal (ODE, 2008; SRVI 2014; VicHealth, 2011; WHO & LSHTM, 2010; WHO et al., 2013).

## **WHAT ARE OXFAM'S STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS?**

Oxfam works hard to ensure that our initiatives are aligned with what the global consensus is revealing about best practice and that we are contributing to this knowledge and evidence base. We also prioritise working in productive partnership with others – governments, civil society organisations, communities, and women leaders. That's because we know that the best, most appropriate solutions are those that are developed by the people for the context in which the problem is occurring, and that without collective will and coordination, change will be limited.

What Oxfam brings to working with partners in the development contexts in which violence against women and girls occurs is the support for a grassroots movement for change, the ability to link and learn actors within and between contexts, the human, technical and financial resourcing to improve the effectiveness of and scale-up initiatives, and the generation of knowledge and evidence for program learning and wider policy influence.

Oxfam employs an integrated program approach which works at different levels, from the individual, to the local community, to the national, regional and global. Our violence against women and girls program approach incorporates four complementary and intersecting domains of change, outlined below:

### **1. Attitude and behavioural change**

In order to prevent the violent behaviours experienced by women and girls, attitudes that condone and tacitly accept this problem need to change. That's why Oxfam, alongside our local partners, works with local communities and at a mass social scale to:

- Raise awareness and agency among women and girls, men and boys, to reflect on and challenge gender norms that constrain women's rights and perpetuate links between masculinity and violence
- Empower men and boys to act as partners for change
- Increase awareness of the impacts of violence against women and girls and to initiate local responses to uphold the right to live a life free of violence

### **2. Increased access to quality and appropriate services**

Oxfam supports local partners to provide holistic support services (paralegal, counselling, health and legal referrals, crisis accommodation, and repatriation and reintegration). These services work to both support female survivors of violence and to prevent imminent violence. We adopt two major

strategies to support increased access to quality and appropriate services:

- We work with communities to increase awareness of women, men, girls and boys to formal and informal services for support to address the effects of and prevent violence
- We build the capacity of service providers to provide accessible and quality services.

### **3. Policy and practice change**

Policy change and more effective implementation of policies and laws by government and justice sector actors is necessary to both enable wholesale norm change supporting prevention of violence, to ensure appropriate approaches and resourcing for addressing violence against women and girls, and to enable access to a functioning and responsive justice system for survivors.

In supporting policy and practice change, Oxfam works with duty bearers (community, police, judiciary and government actors) to increase their understanding of violence against women and girls, and supports local partners (especially women's organisations) to engage in productive policy dialogue. A longitudinal study in 2012 found that the influence of women's rights organisations was the single most important factor driving policy development to prevent and respond to violence against women, more so than other political and economic factors (Htun and Weldon, 2012). Moreover, our experience, particularly in Pacific contexts such as Papua New Guinea, has underlined the importance of reliable data that accurately measures and reports on the problem to enable policy engagement. In such instances, we work closely with partners (for example women-led service providers) to standardise and aggregate data.

### **4. Community and women's leadership for change**

Top-down, external solutions to contextual manifestations of violence against women and girls will not work. Oxfam believes in supporting a groundswell of support for change, by those who are at the coalface of the problem. That is why we work intensively to support community-led, innovative initiatives for change, as well as foster women's leadership and participation through relationships with women's groups, organisations, movements and networks. We are able to broker linkages between grassroots change initiatives and other institutions, including policy duty-bearers.

## **HOW DOES OXFAM MEASURE CHANGE?**

At Oxfam we take change and program performance seriously. We want to ensure that the work that we invest in is having a real, tangible impact on the problems we are addressing and the lives of the people with whom we work. That is why we have in place a series of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) policies and guidelines to hold ourselves and our partners to account and to learn for continuous improvement of our programs. We undertake independent evaluations of our violence against women and girls programs as well as aggregate indicators of significant change from across our programs.

We also have dedicated guidance and resources for measurement of change and learning in the area of addressing violence against women and girls. At a global level, Oxfam has initiated a Violence Against Women and Girls Knowledge Hub. This Hub enables the sharing of information and knowledge between programs and their staff, and facilitates global research and evaluation projects drawing in violence against women and girls programs from across our global reach.

## OXFAM'S CONTRIBUTION TO A SAFER, MORE JUST WORLD



Oxfam delivers programs which have a primary focus on addressing violence against women and girls.

From March 2013 to April 2014, these programs have directly reached **434,432** people, including **291,354** women and girls, across 15 countries.

Oxfam's portfolio of work also includes many programs (not captured here) that incorporate activities to address violence against women and girls.

## OXFAM'S CONTRIBUTION TO CHANGE

Oxfam's programs contribute to significant change to address the multiple dimensions of violence against women and girls. Below are examples of results against our four domains of change. The case studies documented draw from Oxfam programs where there is a primary or significant focus on addressing violence against women and girls. The results have been identified through independent evaluations and monitoring reports across 2008 to 2014.

### **Attitude and Behavioural Change:**

The Gender Justice Program in Indonesia increases intolerance of gender-based violence through awareness campaigns and policy engagement. The program works at different levels from the village to the nation to influence attitudinal and behavioural change. It is successful in involving men in efforts to transform gender inequalities and reduced abusive behaviour, through peer-to-peer encouragement and redefining roles and characteristics of an 'ideal man' (called 'Laki-laki Baru').

From 2011-2013, the program has raised 500 men's awareness on non-violence and appreciation for peace within families; reduced abusive behaviour; and elevated their confidence in sharing domestic roles with women,. This has enabled women's participation in public organisations, discussions or meetings.

The We Can Campaign in South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) has used public events, workshops, print and video resources, outreach to educational institutions, and one-on-one discussions to engender active participation of both women and men in addressing issues of violence against women.

As a result, We Can has contributed to shifts in attitudes and behaviours through a strategy of continuous discussions and reinvolvement over a long period of time.

*"I used to be timid, but am a confident person now. When I got engaged, my fiancée had no respect for women and used to abuse me. I felt that if my partner is unable to respect me then why should I tolerate such a relationship. I drew this strength from the Campaign."* - 21 year-old female (West Bengal)

The Program Promoting Violence-Free Lives for Women from Poor and Marginalized Communities in India holds regular community meetings and awareness raising initiatives with women and men on the legal rights of women and causes and consequences of violence against women and girls. This has resulted in greater intolerance for violence against women and girls. 76% of community group members now report that a husband hitting and beating his wife is 'totally unjustified'.

Police officials across all the states where the program has been implemented have observed significant change in people's perceptions towards domestic violence. They suggest that women have increased confidence in talking about issues, and cases of violence are reported to the police more frequently.

#### **Access to Quality Services:**

The Gender Justice Program in Indonesia supports the work of paralegals in the community, which is considered one of the more effective methods in reducing violence and in handling its occurrence quickly, cheaply, and in the best interest of women and child victims. From 2013-2014, paralegals have provided counselling and legal aid to 362 survivors of violence in cases including domestic violence, abuse, trafficking, divorce, and sexual exploitation.

31 paralegals (19 women) have been trained on trafficking cases, and 50 (34 women) trained in counselling, child rights, ethics, interacting with police, and accompanying victims.

The Ending Violence Against Women Program in Papua New Guinea supports 12 community-based organisations in nine provinces in their work to enable women to gain power over their lives and live free from violence. From 2013 to 2014, the program has provided crisis support including counselling, emergency accommodation, referral, and paralegal assistance to 4,037 women and girls.

Oxfam supports partners working with survivors of sorcery-related violence to provide counselling, referral and emergency relocation of people accused of sorcery and facing life threatening violence.

The program Promoting Violence-Free Lives for Women from Poor and Marginalized Communities in India has provided gender awareness training and capacity building to counsellors for improving case work in support centres. The program has also worked with local committees on identification and support to survivors of violence, including healthcare, social and welfare services, counselling, legal services, transportation and housing services.

18 support centres have been set up across 4 states in collaboration with the police department as models for providing all-encompassing support services to women survivors of violence, reaching 39,053 women during the program.

### **Policy and Practice Change:**

The Program for Prevention of Gender Based Violence in El Salvador brings together civil society groups and government entities to advocate for and develop violence against women policies. The program has been seen to play a critical role in several notable policy changes including:

The development of the draft bill that ultimately resulted in the Special Integrated Law for a Life Free from Violence for Women in 2010.

The development and approval of the Protocol for the Application of the Domestic Violence Law so that it would be more consistently enforced in 2010.

The decision of the Ministry of Education to adopt school-based violence prevention as a priority.

The Promoting Violence-Free Lives for Women from Poor and Marginalized Communities in India Program has engaged with state governments for better implementation of laws and for better support services. As a result, the program has seen an increase in registration of VAW cases, issuance of high court orders to district courts for protection officers, the opening of support centres at police stations, and changed attitudes of the media and local religious groups.

The Government of Gujarat is adopting the program's model, scaling up support centres in the state, and passing a government resolution mandating the setting up of 26 support centres across Gujarat.

The Gender Justice Program in Indonesia supports formal and informal authorities to effectively handle violence against women and girls cases, in particular through training of paralegals to work with police and integration of paralegal activities into government programs. The Government has awarded Kiufatu village in 2011 for its progress in reducing and handling domestic violence.

Structural change is also evident through churches integrating gender equality and non-violent values.

### **Community and Women's Leadership for Change:**

The West India Gender Program in India strengthens the capacity of implementing partners and community-based forums to address issues of violence against women. 11,239 women report increased participation in local governance and other decision-making forums.

*"Before training we thought that domestic violence is personal problem and we should not be interrupting but after training we understand it is social problem and we have to stop it."* - Women (Chhattisgarh, West India)

The Ending Violence Against Women Program in Papua New Guinea supports the Highlands Women Human Rights Defenders Network, a grassroots women's peace-building network, to assist women under threat of sorcery-related violence.

The Bangladesh Gender and Women's Leadership Project has supported 320 women's groups, with over 9,000 members. Group members have met regularly to discuss their experiences and information on women's rights. One result of this work has been women helping to follow up 144 cases of violence against women and girls. Women's groups have also documented and distributed stories of progress and personal leadership to show other women that change is possible.

The project has also worked with 150 youth groups (both girls and boys) to raise awareness on violence and discrimination. As a result, youth groups have become active in their community

speaking out against dowry, early marriage, and other harmful forms of discrimination against women and girls.

The We Can Campaign in South Asia evaluation findings reveal that there is an overwhelming acceptance of the notion that the community should come forward to support women facing violence (92%).

*became involved in the program two years ago and displays a deep determination to make a difference and fight gender discrimination. He has been instrumental in changing his mindset to become a more empathetic husband who now ensures that he is not drunk or abusive when he returns home, treats his wife with more respect and helps with household chores. The snowball effect of transformation has touched his family and neighbours, many of whom are now raising their voice against violence against women.*

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>2</sup> World Health Organisation, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and South African Medical Research Council 2013, *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence*, WHO, Geneva, p. 2.
- <sup>3</sup> WHO et al., *Global and Regional Estimates of Violence Against Women*, p. 2.
- <sup>4</sup> WHO et al., *Global and Regional Estimates of Violence Against Women*, p. 16.
- <sup>5</sup> Secretariat of the Pacific Community 2009, *Solomon Islands family health and safety study: a study on violence against women and children*, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Noumea, New Caledonia, p.   
[https://www.spc.int/hdp/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=cat\\_view&gid=39&Itemid=44](https://www.spc.int/hdp/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=39&Itemid=44); Secretariat of the Pacific Community 2010, *Kiribati health and support study: a study on violence against women*, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Noumea, New Caledonia, p. 2; Vanuatu Women's Centre, *Vanuatu National Survey on Women's Lives and Family Relationships*, Vanuatu Women's Centre, Port Villa, p. 16.
- <sup>6</sup> Sexual Violence Research Initiative 2014, *A Summary of the evidence and research agenda for what works: a global programme to prevent violence against women and girls*, DFID, United Kingdom.
- <sup>7</sup> United Nations Department of Public Information 2008, *Unite to end violence against women fact sheet*, available at: <[www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/pdf/VAW.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/pdf/VAW.pdf)>; DFID 2013, *Violence against women and girls in humanitarian settings chase briefing paper*, available at: <[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/271932/VAWG-humanitarian-emergencies.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/271932/VAWG-humanitarian-emergencies.pdf)>.
- <sup>8</sup> United Nations Department of Public Information 2008, *Unite to end violence against women fact sheet*, available at: <[www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/pdf/VAW.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/pdf/VAW.pdf)>.

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