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Measuring violence against women

The kNOwVAWdata initiative: supporting safe, robust and ethical data on violence against women

Note by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)*

Abstract

The kNOwVAWdata initiative works with partners to build national and regional capacity to produce, analyse and use data on violence against women. The initiative began in 2016 in the Asia-Pacific region, with the support of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, to meet the growing demand for technical support to undertake national studies on the VAW prevalence. It is now a global flagship initiative for UNFPA supported across the Africa region, Arab States, Eastern Europe and Central Asia. kNOwVAWdata includes a four-week course run by the University of Melbourne, a network of data practitioners, knowledge products and contributions to the development of statistical methods and approaches to measuring violence against women.

This paper provides an overview of the kNOwVAWdata initiative activities and future directions. It highlights recent work undertaken by UNFPA and University of Melbourne on technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TF GBV), specifically with respect to ongoing and topical discussions relating to the increasing demand for data and research on TF GBV.

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I. About the kNOwVAWdata Initiative

1. Ethical, reliable and comparable data on prevalence are critical to comprehensive approaches to ending all forms of violence against women (VAW) and girls. VAW prevalence data has many applications, helping to justify, inform and monitor effective prevention and response efforts, tailored to specific country contexts.
2. In light of the growing demand for more accurate and reliable measurement of VAW prevalence, UNFPA Asia-Pacific Regional Office (APRO), with support from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), established the kNOwVAWdata initiative in 2016. kNOwVAWdata has since become a global UNFPA flagship initiative including in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region, Africa and Arab States.
3. kNOwVAWdata provides technical support and sustainable capacity building, enabling countries to undertake VAW prevalence studies in an ethical and scientifically robust way, by using internationally recognised, best practice survey methodologies. The initiative also focuses on increasing the use of VAW data and research through secondary analysis and developing data literacy for the use of data in advocacy, policies, decisions and programming. As it scales up globally, the kNOwVAWdata initiative is adapting to the different regional demands, including strengthened support for understanding the intersectional nature of VAW, generation and use of data relating to female genital mutilation and child marriage as well as increasingly emerging forms of violence including technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

A. Supporting national efforts to produce and use data on violence against women¹

4. UNFPA is at the global forefront in measuring, responding to and preventing VAW, and has provided VAW data collection technical support to dozens of countries. For the past decade, UNFPA APRO has been investing in initiatives to build skills among government staff and researchers in the region; the lessons learnt have been incorporated in kNOwVAWdata's training materials and capacity building efforts. UNFPA also has long-standing and trusted relationships working on population data initiatives with government statistical bodies worldwide—including on national censuses—as well as a network of partners engaged in UNFPA's work to end violence against women.
5. One of the main products of kNOwVAWdata has been a comprehensive professional development course created by UNFPA APRO in partnership with the University of Melbourne and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS). The course is offered annually by the University of Melbourne as a four-week face-to-face intensive training. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the course was adapted to be offered online.

¹ UNFPA. 2023. Summary Report: Evaluation of the kNOwVAWdata Initiative Phase I (2016-2020). https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/knowvawdata_phase_i_evaluation_summary_may_21_final_0.pdf

6. The course curriculum² is available for adaptation and is being offered through twinning partnerships already established in Central Asia and the Arab States regions, with plans to expand to other regions. In addition to the face-to-face component, ongoing mentoring and a network of former participants of the course form an essential part of the kNOwVAWdata course model and its sustainability.
7. In order to maintain and increase accessibility to data and research, kNOwVAWdata maintains an online repository of resources for researchers and practitioners working to measure and end VAW. Visitors to the UNFPA Population Data Portal³ as well as regional UNFPA sites,⁴ can find interactive data visualisations of key VAW indicators for countries, powerful multimedia stories about individuals and teams involved in conducting VAW surveys in Asia and the Pacific, as well as knowledge products and other resources—in particular, reports of country studies.

B. kNOwVAWdata in Central Asia, Arab States, Africa and other regions

8. Globalisation of the kNOwVAWdata initiative is well underway. The course developed by the University of Melbourne and UNFPA has been adapted to Central Asia and translated into Russian. It is being offered through an online platform launched in September 2022 and hosted by the American University of Central Asia (AUCA). Out of 320 applications from the region, 53 practitioners of public institutions and local NGOs have enrolled and 25 have successfully finished the course.
9. The course has also been translated into Arabic and adapted for roll out in 2023 in the Arab States. Twinning partnerships have been established between UNFPA, University of Melbourne and the American University of Cairo.
10. The course has also been translated into Spanish and adapted for rollout in Latin America. Similarly, translation of the course into French is underway for use in French-speaking countries in Africa as well as adaptation of the course for the region.
11. As kNOwVAWdata is expanded into other regions, additional priorities are being identified. As such, the course is expanding to include further modules to enable increased understanding of the intersectionality of VAW, administrative data systems, harmful practices including child marriage and female genital mutilation, femicide and emerging forms of violence, including technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

C. Current and future areas of work

12. The kNOwVAWdata initiative is working with relevant partner agencies to build on its support to national prevalence surveys by exploring, developing, testing and documenting new and adapted methodologies and approaches to measuring prevalence of VAW. This includes

² Sample curriculum: kNOwVAWdata Course on the Measurement of Violence against Women.

<https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/publications/sample-curriculum-knowvawdata-course-measurement-violence-against-women>

³ UNFPA, Population Data Portal, <https://pdp.unfpa.org/>

⁴ Measuring prevalence of violence against women in Asia-Pacific. <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/knowvawdata>

developing approaches for emerging types of violence, determining the resource needs for addressing violence and the economic costs of violence.

13. Responding to the demand for data, the priorities for methodological development, testing and capacity development include:
 - undertaking VAW prevalence surveys in humanitarian and conflict affected settings and lessons learned from these approaches, including building on the experience and lessons learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic
 - mapping of existing and emerging methods and modules for collecting data on VAW experienced by specific groups of women such as women with disabilities, older women, and other vulnerable and marginalised groups
 - conducting qualitative research on the range and impacts of technology-facilitated gender-based violence and convening experts and practitioners to inform development of new, context specific and appropriate approaches and methodologies
 - expanding the course modules to include specialist subject areas relating to harmful practices and administrative data collection systems, including reference to the GBV Information Management System⁵
 - continued scale-up and adaptation of the course for research and academic institutes across Africa and Latin-America regions.

II. Measuring technology-facilitated gender-based violence

14. Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TF GBV) is a highly contextualised issue. It takes various forms in the different regions and countries of the world, targeting different individuals and groups of individuals in different ways for different reasons. The use of air tags for tracking of estranged partners, misuse of heating and locking systems in homes, or image-based abuse may be much more prevalent in high income countries, while harassment via messaging or use of cameras for blackmail may be more prevalent in other and low- middle income countries. It is imperative that the issue of TF GBV, and the national and regional variations that exist, are well understood before survey questions for population-based prevalence surveys are developed at global or regional level.
15. Where population-based prevalence surveys are already underway, in-depth analysis of the outcomes against smaller scale research must be undertaken to mitigate the risk of masking a range of forms of TF GBV, as well as ensuring inclusion of the needs of adolescents who may be out of scope for population-based prevalence surveys but are a population for whom TF GBV is most prevalent.

1. Data and evidence needs

16. Strengthened data and research are required to provide a foundation upon which policies, programmes, laws and advocacy strategies can be developed. It is critical to understand the

⁵ gbvims.com

forms of TF GBV, its impacts, primary targets and perpetrators as well as the remedies that are needed and wanted, and appropriate accountability mechanisms. Critically, data can also contribute to decision making related to national resources and financing.

17. As the lead of the inter-organisational Gender-based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS), UNFPA is working to support inclusion of forms of TF GBV into GBVIMS data collection processes.⁶
18. Qualitative research is an important source of evidence to explore the causes, consequences and contextual factors of TF GBV and to inform the development of quantitative measures. The kNOwVAWdata initiative in Asia and the Pacific has partnered with the University of Melbourne to conduct a qualitative research project on TF GBV in Asia. Following a scoping study and ethics approval in 2022, the project will undertake data collection in three partner countries this year, with the analysis, findings and recommendations to follow in 2024.
19. This qualitative research will build upon existing research undertaken by UNFPA in several other regions and countries including in Serbia⁷, Turkey⁸, and Pakistan.⁹

2. Defining technology-facilitated gender-based violence

20. There is currently no internationally agreed definition for TF GBV. The 54th United Nations Statistical Commission “[T]ook note of the need for methodological work to measure technology-facilitated violence against women and existing efforts to address this gap, and asked for this item to be included in the agenda of the 55th session”.¹⁰
21. Following a review of global literature, UNFPA defines TG GBV as:

“an act of violence perpetrated by one or more individuals that is committed, assisted, aggravated and amplified in part or fully by the use of information and communication technologies or digital media, against a person on the basis of their gender.”¹¹
22. In the technical report *Making All Spaces Safe*¹², UNFPA compiled a range of recommendations (on page 46), including the formulation of a standardised definition and metrics for inclusion in population prevalence surveys and administrative data systems. Despite recommendations around the inclusion of TF GBV into population prevalence surveys, UNFPA have, as part of an ongoing body of work, revised this recommendation to respond to increasing research demonstrating the contextual nature of the issue, which would then better inform questions for population-based prevalence surveys.

⁶ Gender-based violence information management systems (GBV IMS). <https://www.gbvims.com/>

⁷ UNFPA, Serbia. <https://serbia.unfpa.org/en/publications/>

⁸ UNFPA. <https://turkiye.unfpa.org/en/publications/turkey-digital-violence-research-2021>

⁹ UNFPA. https://pakistan.unfpa.org/en/news/time-vow-end-violence-against-women#_ftn1

¹⁰ UNSD. https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/statcom/session_54/documents/Report-on-the-54th-session-draft-E.pdf

¹¹ Vaughan, Catherine, Bergman, Sarah, Robinson, Alexandra, and Mikkelson, Stephanie. 2023. "Measuring technology-facilitated gender-based violence: A discussion paper." <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/measuring-technology-facilitated-gender-based-violence-discussion-paper>

¹² UNFPA. 2021. Technology-facilitated Gender-based violence: Making All Spaces Safe.

<https://www.unfpa.org/publications/technology-facilitated-gender-based-violence-making-all-spaces-safe>

23. UNFPA also participated in an expert group meeting led by UN Women and WHO to support work to standardise the definition. Given the limited opportunity for broader consensus, UNFPA will be working with UN Women and WHO to conduct regional level consultations to ensure the full range of civil society organisations (CSOs) and tech stakeholders are engaged.

3. Considerations when conducting research on TF GBV

24. Among the issues to consider in the development of statistical standards for measuring TF GBV is the suitability of existing data sources. Population-based prevalence studies demand stable concepts and definitions that are relevant and coherent over time. While they need to evolve to meet changing data needs, questions must be well-designed and tested to ensure they are able to produce reliable and accurate estimates. Given the contextual nature of the TF GBV, it means that if questions in a prevalence survey do not address the specific form of TF GBV which is most common in that country or region, then the results will not reflect the experience of women and girls. This will then have significant ramifications for national budgeting and attention to the issue.
25. Another consideration is reaching the target population. Research suggests young people, often early adopters of new communication technologies, may be among the hardest hit by TF GBV. The target population for national prevalence studies target certain age groups (for example, age 15-49 representing typical reproductive age). Methods for producing data on the experiences of girls younger than 15 years old need specific attention.
26. There is demand to explore the role technology including ICT and digital technologies play in the safe, ethical and robust collection and production of data and statistics on GBV and harmful practices, to ensure they do no harm. UNFPA has recently published *Guidance on the Safe and Ethical Use of Technology to Address Gender-based Violence and Harmful Practices*¹³ that aims to increase awareness of the potential benefits and options that tech-based interventions could bring to GBV and harmful practices programming. Also to increase understanding of potential harm and misuse, and reduce risks associated with technology-based interventions. The guidance is suited to stakeholders working at the intersection of gender, data and technology. It draws on experiences developing the software behind GBVIMS, providing a shared framework for consistent standards and oversight that keep women's safety and ethics at the forefront.
27. Technologies, and the way in which they are being used, are constantly evolving and changing. *This may mean that statistical frameworks and population prevalence surveys may be redundant before they are even used for data collection.*

III. Conclusion

28. The kNOwVAWdata initiative has been a driving force in building capacity and supporting the production and use of VAW data in the Asia-Pacific region. Now being rolled out in other

¹³ UNFPA. 2023. Guidance on the Safe and Ethical Use of Technology to Address Gender-based Violence and Harmful Practices: Implementation Summary. <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/implementation-summary-safe-ethical-use-technology-gbv-harmful-practices>

regions and at global level, the materials are available in several languages and UNFPA is seeking opportunities for partnerships to amplify the initiative.

29. There is a high demand for safe, ethical and robust data on the many forms of violence against women, and for technical capacity to design data collection, analyse, interpret and use VAW data. Developments in statistical methodologies needed to respond to data demands require careful consideration, wide consultation and testing before quality quantitative data can be anticipated. Qualitative research at national level can provide insights to inform the development of statistical standards. Partnerships and participatory approaches that bring together experts from a range of fields and experiences are essential to guide the development of measurement concepts, definitions and methods for data collection.
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