



Australian aid: Eliminating violence against women

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IS A UNIVERSAL PROBLEM, BUT COMPOUNDED IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES WHERE WOMEN'S SOCIAL STATUS IS OFTEN FAR LOWER THAN MEN'S. WORKING TO ELIMINATE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IS A COMPLEX TASK AND STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THIS ISSUE HAVE TO WORK ON MANY FRONTS FROM LEGAL FRAMEWORKS TO SUPPORT SERVICES.

THE FACTS

Violence against women was defined in 1993 by the United Nations 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'. While men experience higher levels of violence as a result of war, gang and street violence, and suicide – women are more likely to be assaulted or killed by someone they know. Over 90 per cent of the violence against women is committed by men.

Data from large-scale studies in 48 countries suggest that between 10 and 69 per cent of women reported being physically assaulted by a male partner at some point in their lives. Partner violence also accounts for large numbers of deaths among women. Studies from a number of countries show that between 40 and 70 per cent of female murder victims were killed by their partner.

Rape is increasingly used as a weapon of war. Worldwide, an estimated one in five women will be a victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime. In Rwanda approximately half a million women were raped during the 1994 genocide. Protection and support for women survivors of conflict are meagre. A Fiji Women's Crisis Centre paper, *Violence against women in the Pacific (2005)*, states that there is evidence from Bougainville, the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Fiji that sexual violence against women was used as a weapon in ethnic and armed conflicts.

Violence against women takes a number of other forms including harmful traditional practices. These have been committed against women in some societies for so long they are considered part of cultural practice. They include female genital mutilation, (a form of female circumcision), dowry murder, honour killings and early marriage. Each year these practices can lead to death, disability, and physical and psychological damage for millions of women. In the case of female genital mutilation, complications can include septicaemia, infertility and obstructed labour. It is estimated that there are currently 130 million women and girls affected by female genital circumcision, with a further 2 million at risk each year.

An issue closely related to violence against women is trafficking in persons. Trafficking involves the recruitment, transport, harbouring or receipt of persons by force, fraud, deception or the abuse of power. The trafficking of persons for sexual exploitation and forced labour is a fast-growing international criminal activity. A report of the Secretary General for the United Nations General Assembly, (A/59/287/Add.1), *Women and International Migration (2004)*, recognised that trafficking is now considered the third largest source of profits for organised crime – behind drugs and guns.

Violence against women adversely affects the long-term health of those assaulted. In addition to psychological trauma, sexual violence in particular, can lead to gynaecological disorders, unwanted pregnancies, premature labour and birth, and an increase in sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. Exposure to sexually transmitted diseases increases as a result of rape and fear or inability to negotiate safe sex. Violence during pregnancy is also an enormous problem, as it can quadruple the risk of low birth weight babies and double the risk of miscarriage.

Gender-based violence can directly affect educational attainment. A study in Nicaragua found that 63 per cent of the children of abused women had to repeat a school year and left school on average four years earlier than others.

The cost associated with violence against women is high – increased health care expenditure, demands on courts, police and schools, and losses in educational attainment and productivity. A survey in India showed women lost an average of seven working days after each incident of violence. In Fiji the direct and indirect costs of violence against women have been estimated at around seven per cent of gross domestic product. The cost of violence against women is exacerbated in developing countries where women often have lower status than men.

Where violence against women leads to fear of participation in schooling or economic activity, it is possible that it may be a major impediment to development. Poor and rich countries alike need to use their human capital effectively to promote economic growth.

AUSTRALIA'S APPROACH TO ELIMINATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The elimination of violence against women is a priority of the Australian Government, both domestically and overseas.

Eliminating discrimination against women, including violence against women, is one of the gender policy objectives of the Australian aid program. Australia recognises that violence is a key factor preventing women from exercising their rights and achieving social and economic equality.

Examples of approaches adopted in AusAID-funded activities that have been successful or innovative in developing countries follow.

Changing attitudes that condone or tolerate violence against women is challenging and requires a long-term commitment to promoting human rights.

In **Fiji** Australia has supported the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre since 1990. The centre is involved in a range of activities, at both practical and advocacy levels, focused on ending violence against women in the Pacific region. These activities include being the Secretariat of the Pacific Women's Network on Violence against Women and acting as a clearinghouse for information of the network. The centre also offers a regional training program for people working in programs to address violence against women in the Pacific.

One training program run by the centre, along with the Vanuatu Women's Centre and the Solomon Islands Family Support Centre, targets men. This program trains men, including police officers, military personnel, community workers, chiefs and religious leaders, in raising awareness of violence against women. The training increases men's awareness of gender equality as a fundamental human right. It also focuses on men addressing their own violence before they can be effective advocates or provide counselling to other men and the importance of respecting the human rights of both men and women.

In **Vanuatu** the Vanuatu Women's Centre has established committees on violence against women, which play a pivotal role in community education programs. These committees of men and women are made up of prominent members of the community – in some cases elders, chiefs and rural practice nurses. The committees receive regular training from the Vanuatu Women's Centre on basic counselling skills and best practice in community education. There is evidence that the committees are increasing community awareness of violence against women, with an increase in media reporting on the issue and more cases of gender-based crimes being taken to traditional and formal courts for prosecution. These committees are unique to the Pacific.

Approaches that effectively address violence against women range from changing laws, working to strengthen the response of law enforcement agencies, educating women on their rights, and working with the community.

In **Papua New Guinea** Australia is taking a comprehensive approach through its law and justice, civil society and health programs to the issue of violence against women. Funding has been provided to the Consultative, Implementation and Monitoring Council's Family and Sexual Violence Action Committee. Key achievements to date include developing an advocacy strategy using all forms of media, and introducing a 'White Ribbon' campaign aimed at getting men to say 'no' to violence against women. In addition, a Family Support Centre at Port Moresby General Hospital has been established to provide 24-hour care for victims of sexual violence.

Through its National HIV/AIDS Support Project Australia has provided support for prominent Australian rugby league players to undertake media campaigns aimed at increasing community awareness of HIV/AIDS. Given the link between HIV/AIDS and gender-based violence, these campaigns have also incorporated strong messages that violence against women is unacceptable.

Legal reform can be ineffective if there are insufficient capacity and resources to implement the changes. Australia is helping Papua New Guinea to implement sexual assault law reform through its program of assistance for the law and justice sector. The assistance is being provided through a sexual assault adviser working within the justice system. The adviser has supported the Public Prosecutor in developing an agreed list of standard indictments for each of the sexual offences under the Criminal Code (Sexual Offences and Crimes against Children) Act of 2002.

Cultural issues involving payback (revenge against victims who report rape) and compensation for victims (families secure payment instead of prosecution) have now been formulated into policy that recognises that payback and compensation do not erase the need for the state to address the alleged offence through the legal system.

Empowering women through activities that promote income generation can assist them to recover from violence. However, this can be undermined if broader measures to address violence against women are not in place.

In **Sri Lanka** Australia supported a program aimed at addressing the impact of conflict on women. The program worked in central Sri Lanka and Galle, in the north and eastern districts of Ampara, Batticaloa and Jaffna, and with displaced Muslims in Puttalam. It adopted a range of approaches to improve the status of women affected by the conflict. These included increasing their income through small loans and improving the capacity of local authorities to respond to violence against women. The program also constructed wells and latrines, which reduced the need for women to use the forest where there was a higher chance of exposure to violence. This also reduced the travel time for collecting water.

It has been shown that domestic violence increases during wartime and after conflicts due to ex-combatant trauma and the influence of a militaristic culture of violence.

In Gaza in the **Palestinian Territories** Australia recently supported an activity to assist women victims of domestic violence overcome their emotional and psychological injuries. A counselling unit and outreach activities were established and mediation provided. The activity also aimed to educate the general public about the incidence and impact of violence against women by, for example, providing a platform for women to speak out on the issue.

Young people are more open to changing their views about the acceptability of violence than are adults.

In **South Africa** the National Institute for Crime Prevention and Reintegration of Offenders found that up to 80 per cent of young people were exposed to either sexual or domestic violence. Sexual violence ranges from harassment at school to abuse and rape.

Through its Addressing Violence against Women Fund, Australia supported an activity that provided training in high schools to empower students and teachers to run gender-based anti-violence projects within schools. The training focused on sensitising students and teachers to issues such as child abuse, domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment and human rights. The aim of the training was to help young people and their teachers understand their rights and the services available for victims/survivors of gender-based violence. It also aimed to increase reporting of such violence by schools and students.

Trafficking must be addressed through a combination of approaches to strengthen criminal justice systems, law enforcement and border control, to promote human rights and to support victims, including through their return and reintegration into their communities where appropriate.

Australia takes a holistic approach to trafficking in persons. This includes ratifying the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children during the United Nations 2005 World Summit. It also includes supporting development activities to improve the ability of governments in South-East Asia to prevent trafficking in persons. Given that such trafficking is a transnational issue, effective strategies to combat it require a cross-border approach.

In Laos, Cambodia, Burma, China and Thailand Australia is supporting an activity that aims to strengthen regional cooperation and legal policy frameworks, and to build national and regional capacity to combat trafficking in persons. All countries are focusing on developing early warning systems at the grassroots level. In Laos, for example, this includes training people working with the Lao Youth Union and the Lao Women's Union in gender trafficking issues, data collection and analysis, and early warning systems.

In Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam Australia is supporting activities that assist in the return and reintegration of trafficking victims and other vulnerable migrant women and children. The activities work through government agencies, multilateral organisations and non-government organisations to strengthen their ability to assist victims and to promote cooperation in the region to counter trafficking through legal, administrative, policy and advocacy measures. Current activities focus on providing training for law enforcement agencies and policy makers, developing bilateral and regional agreements, and strengthening criminal justice systems.

Through the **Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and related Transnational Crime**, Australia, with its co-chair Indonesia and other regional partners, fosters cooperation in combating people smuggling and trafficking through targeted and practical activities. This has included activities on criminalising people smuggling and trafficking, and developing national action plans to combat trafficking.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

GENERAL INFORMATION

www.who.org (see World Health Organization, World report on violence and health, Geneva, 2002)

www.fijiwomen.com (Fiji Women's Crisis Centre)

www.unifem.org (United Nations Development Fund for Women)

www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/violence.htm (United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, Platform for Action – violence against women)

www.unicef-icdc.org/publications/ (United Nations Children's Fund Innocenti Research Centre, Domestic violence against women and girls, Innocenti Digest No. 6, Florence, Italy, June 2000)

www.unfpa.org (see State of World Population 2005, and the Millennium Development Project on gender)

www.womenwarpeace.org (a portal on women, peace and security)



MORE INFORMATION ABOUT AUSTRALIAN AID

Further information about the Australian Government's overseas aid program is available online at www.aisaid.gov.au

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FRONT COVER IMAGE: *PNG woman
receives counselling.* PHOTO: *Mathias
Heng, AusAID.*

BACK COVER IMAGE: *Mal Meninga visits
the AusAID funded Morata Women's
Refuge Centre that works to stop
violence against women.*
PHOTO: *Ricky Roe.*

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