



GBV Administrative Data Toolkit for the Pacific Region

Supporting Resource 2e: Definitions of types of **violence against women**

Gender-based violence can be defined or classified in different ways. It is important to establish common understanding and working definitions of violence against women and how this is applied to administrative data contexts, particularly if you are working towards information sharing and collaboration between systems and services. The below definitions are widely adopted, based on the United Nations Guidelines for Producing Statistics on Violence against Women¹, along with more recent sources. The following sections illustrate some of the different ways violence against women and gendered violence have been defined by different organisations.

Physical violence: The list of acts of physical violence provided below comprises the most common acts of physical violence against women and is a recommended minimum list for use by countries. This list is not exhaustive or closed-ended for any country and may be expanded as appropriate in each context.

A minimum list of acts of physical violence consists of the following:

- Slapping her
- Throwing something at her that could hurt
- Pushing or shoving or pulling her hair
- Hitting her with something
- Hitting her with fists or other objects
- Kicking, biting, or dragging her
- Beating her
- Choking or burning her
- Threatening her with a knife, gun, or other weapon
- Using a knife, gun, or other weapon against her
- Other (leave open for the respondent to specify)

Other acts of physical violence that are known to be carried out or attempted against women in a specific country should be added to the list developed for that country. For example, in certain countries it might be appropriate to add such violent acts as stoning or throwing acid.

Sexual violence: Sexual violence is any sort of harmful or unwanted sexual behaviour that is imposed on someone. It includes acts of abusive sexual contact, forced engagement in sexual acts, attempted or completed sexual acts with a woman without her consent, sexual harassment, verbal abuse, threats, exposure, unwanted touching, incest, etc.

A minimum list of acts of sexual violence, which should be expanded depending on the specific country context, consists of the following:

- Rape: Refers to engaging in the non-consensual vaginal, anal, or oral penetration of a sexual nature of the body of another person with any bodily part or object, including through the use of physical violence and by putting the victim in a situation where she cannot say no or complies because of fear
- Attempted rape: Refers to attempting to have non-consensual sexual intercourse using force or threats
- Other sexual acts. Refers to:
 - Intimate touching without consent
 - Sexual acts other than intercourse forced by money
 - Sexual acts other than intercourse obtained through threats of physical violence
 - Sexual acts other than intercourse obtained through threats to the well-being of family members
 - Use of force or coercion to obtain unwanted sexual acts or any sexual activity that the female partner finds degrading or humiliating
 - Other acts of sexual violence.

¹ United Nations Guidelines for Producing Statistics on Violence against Women: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/docs/guidelines_statistics_vaw.pdf

Psychological violence

Psychological violence includes a range of behaviours that encompass acts of emotional abuse and controlling behaviour. These often coexist with acts of physical and sexual violence by intimate partners and are acts of violence in themselves. Studies have shown that the use of multiple types of psychological violence is associated with an increased risk of physical and sexual violence against female partners and can have serious impacts on such women, regardless of whether or not other types of violence occurred. Examples of behaviours that fall within the definition of psychological violence include the following:

- Emotional abuse:
 - Insulting her or making her feel bad about herself
 - Belittling or humiliating her in front of other people
 - Deliberately scaring or intimidating her
 - Threatening to hurt her or others she cares about.
- Controlling behaviour:
 - Isolating her by preventing her from seeing family or friends
 - Monitoring her whereabouts and social interactions
 - Ignoring her or treating her indifferently
 - Getting angry if she speaks with other men
 - Making unwarranted accusations of infidelity
 - Controlling her access to health care
 - Controlling her access to education or the labour market.

Female genital mutilation

Female genital mutilation is not a widespread phenomenon in many countries. Consequently, it is listed as an optional type of violence to include. It may be more appropriate to collect information and calculate indicators on this practice through specialized health surveys. That being said, female genital mutilation is an extreme form of physical, sexual and psychological violence and should not be ignored.

Economic violence

Economic violence is said to occur when an individual denies his intimate partner access to financial resources, typically as a form of abuse or control or in order to isolate her or to impose other adverse consequences to her well-being.

Economic violence involves the following:

- Denying her access to financial resources
- Denying her access to property and durable goods
- Deliberately not complying with economic responsibilities, such as alimony or financial support for the family, thereby exposing her to poverty and hardship
- Denying her access to the labour market and education
- Denying her participation in decision-making relevant to economic status.

The above examples should be considered illustrative only. Psychological and economic violence, in particular, can vary significantly according to cultural context and country circumstances and should be developed with this in mind.

Economic violence takes many forms. As a core topic it is limited to economic violence committed by intimate partners.

Online and ICT-facilitated violence against women²

The definition of online violence against women extends to any act of gender-based violence against women that is committed, assisted or aggravated in part or fully by the use of information and communication technology (ICT), such as mobile phones and smartphones, the Internet, social media platforms or email, against a woman because she is a woman, or affects women disproportionately.

Technology-facilitated abuse³

Technology-facilitated abuse is an increasingly concerning manifestation of violence against women. It is often an extension of coercion and harassment, and can involve ongoing harassment, impersonation, and threats. Technology-facilitated abuse often involves the following:

- Sharing intimate photos of someone without their consent
- Sending abusive texts, emails or messages via social media
- Making continuous threatening phone calls
- Checking someone's text messages, social media activity or internet activity
- Spying on, monitoring, or staling someone through surveillance software (e.g. spyware)

² UN Women (2020): Online and ICT-facilitated violence against women and girls during COVID-19. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Brief-Online-and-ICT-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls-during-COVID-19-en.pdf>

³ eSafetyCommissioner (2022). Domestic and family violence. Australian Government. <https://www.esafety.gov.au/key-issues/domestic-family-violence>

Different definitions of violence⁴

UN Statistics Division

Physical violence:

A minimum list of acts of physical violence consists of the following:

- Slapping her
- Throwing something at her that could hurt
- Pushing or shoving or pulling her hair
- Hitting her with something
- Hitting her with fists or other objects
- Kicking, biting or dragging her
- Beating her
- Choking or burning her
- Threatening her with a knife, gun or other weapon
- Using a knife, gun or other weapon against her
- Other (leave open for the respondent to specify).

Other acts of physical violence that are known to be carried out or attempted against women in a specific country should be added to the list developed for that country. For example, in certain countries it might be appropriate to add such violent acts as stoning or throwing acid.

Sexual violence

Rape: Refers to engaging in the non-consensual vaginal, anal or oral penetration of a sexual nature of the body of another person with any bodily part or object, including through the use of physical violence and by putting the victim in a situation where she cannot say no or complies because of fear.

Attempted rape: Refers to attempting to have non-consensual sexual intercourse through the use of force or threats.

Other sexual acts:

Refers to:

- Intimate touching without consent
- Sexual acts other than intercourse forced by money
- Sexual acts other than intercourse obtained through threats of physical violence
- Sexual acts other than intercourse obtained through threats to the well-being of family members
- Use of force or coercion to obtain unwanted sexual acts or any sexual activity that the female partner finds degrading or humiliating
- Other acts of sexual violence

Psychological violence

Examples include:

Emotional abuse:

- Insulting her or making her feel bad about herself
- Belittling or humiliating her in front of other people
- Deliberately scaring or intimidating her
- Threatening to hurt her or others she cares about.

Controlling behaviour:

- Isolating her by preventing her from seeing family or friends
- Monitoring her whereabouts and social interactions
- Ignoring her or treating her indifferently
- Getting angry if she speaks with other men
- Making unwarranted accusations of infidelity
- Controlling her access to health care
- Controlling her access to education or the labour market.

WHO (Health)

Physical violence: includes hitting, slapping, beating, kicking, shoving/pushing, hurting with a weapon.

Sexual violence: includes using force, intimidation or coercion to have sex or to perform sexual acts that the woman does not want. It also includes harming a person during sex. It includes rape, and attempted rape, which involves use of physical intimidation, coercion or drugs/alcohol to obtain penetration of the vulva/vagina, anus or mouth by one or multiple perpetrators including by an intimate partner.

Psychological/emotional violence: includes criticising repeatedly, calling names or insults, threats to hurt loved ones or to destroy things that person cares about, belittling or humiliation in public.

⁴ Source: Annex 2, in Kendall, T. 2020. "A Synthesis of Evidence on the Collection and Use of Administrative Data on Violence against Women: Background Paper for the Development of Global Guidance." New York: UN Women.

Different definitions of violence continued

UNODC ICSS (Crime)

Physical violence

Assault: Intentional or reckless application of physical force inflicted upon the body of a person.

Serious assault: Intentional or reckless application of serious physical force inflicted upon the body of a person resulting in serious bodily injury. **Serious bodily injury**, at a minimum, includes gunshot or bullet wounds; knife or stab wounds; severed limbs; broken bones or teeth knocked out; internal injuries; being knocked unconscious; and other severe or critical injuries. **Serious physical force**, at minimum, includes being shot; stabbed or cut; hit by an object; hit by a thrown object; poisoning and other applications of force with the potential to cause serious bodily injury. Inclusions: Inflicting grievous bodily harm; wounding; aggravated assault; inflicting bodily harm under aggravating circumstances; battery; acid attacks; female genital mutilation; poisoning; assault with a weapon; forced sterilization⁵; taking human blood, organs or tissues by use of violence. **Minor assault:** Inflicting minor bodily harm; simple assault; pushing, slapping, kicking, hitting, tripping, knocking down, and other applications of force with the potential to cause minor bodily injury; drugging or spiking. Intentional or reckless application of minor physical force inflicted upon the body of a person resulting in no injury or minor bodily injury. **Minor physical force**, at minimum, includes hitting, slapping, pushing, tripping, knocking down and other applications of force with the potential to cause minor bodily injury. **Minor bodily injury**, at minimum, includes bruises, cuts, scratches, chipped teeth, swelling, black eye and other minor injuries.

Homicide

Intentional homicide: Unlawful death inflicted upon a person with the intent to cause death or serious injury. (Includes murder; honour killing; serious assault leading to death; death as a result of terrorist activities; dowry-related killings; femicide; infanticide; voluntary manslaughter; extrajudicial killings; killings caused by excessive use of force by law enforcement/state officials.

Attempted intentional homicide: Attempt to inflict unlawful death upon a person with the intent to cause death or serious injury. (Includes attempted murder; attempt to inflict death as a result of terrorist activities; attempted infanticide; attempted femicide).

Non-intentional homicide: Unlawful death unintentionally inflicted upon a person by another person.

Sexual violence

Sexual violence: Rape; rape with force; rape without force; statutory rape; other rape.

Sexual assault: Physical sexual assault; non-physical sexual assault; other sexual assault not elsewhere classified.

Other acts of sexual violence

Rape: Sexual penetration without valid consent or with consent as a result of intimidation, force, fraud, coercion, threat, deception, use of drugs or alcohol, abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or the giving or receiving of benefits.

-**Sexual penetration**, at minimum, is the penetration of the vulva, anus or mouth with any body part or object.

-**Rape with force:** Sexual penetration without valid consent inflicted upon a person with force.

-**Rape without force:** Sexual penetration without valid consent inflicted upon a person without force.

-**Statutory rape:** Sexual penetration with or without consent with a person below the age of consent, or with a person incapable of consent by reason of law.

Sexual assault: Unwanted sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or contact or communication with unwanted sexual attention not amounting to rape.

-**Physical sexual assault:** Sexual assault with physical contact of a person.

-**Non-physical sexual assault:** Sexual assault without physical contact of a person.

-**Other sexual assault not elsewhere classified:** Sexual assault that is not described or classified in [other] categories.

Other acts of sexual violence: Sexual violence not described or classified in [other] categories.

Emotional/psychological violence

Acts intended to induce fear or emotional distress also threats: Any type of threatening behaviour if it is believed that the threat could be enacted.

Threatening behaviour, at minimum, is an intentional behaviour that causes fear of injury or harm.

Harassment: Harassment in the workplace; other harassment; stalking; other acts intended to induce fear or emotional distress.

Defamation or insult: Defamation or insult due to the victim's characteristics or ascribed attributes.

⁵ Performing surgery that has the purpose or effect of terminating a woman or man's capacity to naturally reproduce without his or her prior and informed consent or understanding of the procedure (Council of Europe 2011, article 39).

Different definitions of violence continued

GBVIMS (Social Services-Humanitarian)

Rape: Non-consensual penetration (however slight) of the vagina, anus or mouth with a penis or other body part. Also includes penetration of the vagina or anus with an object. They should be used only in reference to GBV even though some may be applicable to other forms of violence that are not gender-based.

Sexual assault: Any form of non-consensual sexual contact that does not result in or include penetration. Examples include: attempted rape, as well as unwanted kissing, fondling or touching of genitalia and buttocks. FGM/C is an act of violence that impacts sexual organs, and as such should be classified as sexual assault. This incident type does not include rape, i.e., where penetration has occurred.

Possible sexual exploitation and transactional sex are defined by the power relationship between survivor and perpetrator, as well as the circumstances surrounding the incident and not the actual act of violence (i.e., rape or sexual assault), which can lead to inconsistencies in the recording of incidents. The incident recorder includes a column in which ‘yes / no’ can be indicated in response to the question “were money, goods, benefits and/or services exchanged in the context of the reported incident?”, which can give a sense of whether the sexual violence being reported is exploitative in nature.

Physical assault: An act of physical violence that is not sexual in nature. Examples include: hitting, slapping, choking, cutting, shoving, burning, shooting or use of any weapons, acid attacks or any other act that results in pain, discomfort or injury. This incident type does not include FGM/C.

Child sexual abuse is defined by the age of the survivor. It includes different forms of sexual violence, which can lead to inconsistencies in the recording of incidents. By analysis of two incident types (sexual assault and rape) and the age of the survivor, one is able to easily analyse which reported incidents were child sexual abuse cases.

Possible sexual slavery is defined by the circumstances during which multiple acts and various forms of sexual violence are perpetrated over a period of time. The incident recorder is only able to capture one unique incident at a time. The incident recorder includes a column for indicating whether the incident was perpetrated while the survivor was: (a) being forcibly transported (trafficked); (b) being forced to join an armed group (forced conscription); (c) held against her/his will, abducted or kidnapped.

Psychological/emotional abuse: infliction of mental or emotional pain or injury. Examples include: threats of physical or sexual violence, intimidation, humiliation, forced isolation, stalking, verbal harassment, unwanted attention, remarks, gestures or written words of a sexual and/or menacing nature, destruction of cherished things, etc.

Intimate partner violence is defined by the relationship between perpetrator and survivor and may include multiple forms of violence (rape, sexual assault, physical assault, psychological/emotional abuse), which can lead to inconsistencies in the recording of incidents. By analysis of the type of GBV and the survivor’s relationship to the perpetrator, one is able to identify and analyse which incidents took place within the context of an intimate partner relationship.

Harmful traditional practices are defined by the local social, cultural and religious values where the incident takes place. To distinguish those acts of GBV that are harmful traditional practices specific to the context in which they took place, the standard intake/initial assessment form includes a question to indicate whether the GBV was a type of harmful traditional practice. The responses must be customized locally to define the incident as 1 of up to 5 relevant types of harmful traditional practices found in that context. The incident recorder will be able to quantify how many instances were marked yes/ no for harmful traditional practice and the frequency of the individual customized types.

Council of Europe⁶ and EIGE⁷ (Police and Justice)

Sexual violence: Any sexual act performed on the victim without consent. Sexual violence can take the form of rape or sexual assault.

Physical violence: Any act that causes physical harm to the partner or former partner as a result of unlawful physical force. Physical violence can take the form of, among others, serious and minor assault, deprivation of liberty and manslaughter.

Rape: Sexual penetration, whether vaginal, anal or oral, through the use of object or body parts, without consent, using force, coercion or by taking advantage of the vulnerability of the victim.

Psychological violence: Any act or behaviour which causes psychological harm to the partner or former partner. Psychological violence can take the form of, among others, coercion, defamation, verbal insult or harassment.

⁶ Ruuskanen and Aromaa 2008, pp. 23-24.

⁷ Minimum data to be collected according to the Istanbul Convention: sex of victim and perpetrator; age of victim and perpetrator; relationship of the perpetrator to the victim; type of violence’ geographic location; and “Other relevant factors deemed to be relevant to State Parties, such as disability”, as well as conviction rates. Council of Europe 2011, p. 15.