



ISSUE PAPER FOR THE SESSION:

Scaling up work to address violence against women and children and its intersections with HIV

Defining the Issue

1. There is growing pressure on UNAIDS for leadership and technical guidance on how issues of violence against women and children (VAWC) and HIV should be conceptualized and addressed programmatically in national AIDS responses and in conflict and humanitarian settings. The PCB (December 2006) has requested that UNAIDS “intensify programmatic efforts on the intersection between gender-based violence and HIV” inside and outside the conflict settings.
2. While solid research on the intersections of VAWC and HIV is not robust, studies in individual countries show that the risk of HIV may be up to three times higher in women who have experienced violence than among those who have not (in high prevalence countries).¹ In numerous studies, violence and fear of violence has been cited by women as a major barrier to disclosure. Stigma and the resulting fear of violence also play a significant role in women’s decisions to seek testing and services and in their ability to implement risk-reduction strategies within their sexual relationships.
3. There have been a number of discussions, both within the UNAIDS Secretariat and with partners, on how best UNAIDS can support the work needed to address the intersections of violence against women and HIV, and agreement that more must be done. Presently UNAIDS is looking at the issue in terms of two challenges: (a) raising the profile and commitment of governments and the international community on addressing violence against women and in the context of HIV; and (b) developing guidance on concrete actions that governments can take at national level this issue.
4. In moving forward, a number of conceptual and epidemiological challenges need to be addressed:
 - the degree to which violence directly contributes to HIV infection in various settings, an epidemiological issue that is often raised by those sceptical that AIDS funds should be spent on VAWC;
 - the degree to which the AIDS response can relevantly respond to addressing VAWC given the clear need for a wider response to VAWC and violence in conflicts. There is some concern that a focus on VAWC and HIV detracts from the broader human rights and public health position that VAWC be addressed in its own right as a serious public health concern by the international community and not only due to its intersections with HIV;
 - the need for agreement on effective interventions to address the specific links between HIV and VAWC in national responses to HIV and conflict.
5. Conceptually, there is also the need to agree on a clear focus. Gender-based violence (GBV) and violence against women (VAW) are often used synonymously. Some partners advocate for a focus on violence against women and children, while others feel strongly the focus should remain on women. Others naturally feel the scope should broaden to include GBV, including a strong focus on violence against men who have sex with men and other sexual minorities. Defining the focus of UNAIDS work has implications in terms of the

scope of the research required and the range of interventions and guidance required.

Building partnerships

6. There are a wide range of actors in the areas of VAW (women's groups, human rights organizations, UN) but insufficient coordination particularly between women's organizations who have been working on violence issues for years and those outside the women's movement who are taking up this issue in the HIV context. Many women's organizations have expressed concern that using HIV as the entry point for work on VAW would limit work on VAW to this narrow perspective. Similarly, there is work being done around violence against children, but this is not always linked conceptually or strategically with violence against women. UNAIDS does not have technical expertise on VAWC and GBV, and thus strong partnerships with experts in these fields is essential in any effort to move forward.

7. In October and November 2006, the Secretary General released two major studies on violence: and in-depth study on all forms of violence against women and a study on violence against children. UNAIDS' work should fit within these frameworks.

- Secretary General's in-depth study on all forms of violence against women, which called for the establishment of a high level Task Force on Violence against Women to be set up by the UN Inter-agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANGWE). Essentially a UN/Bretton Woods body, this TF is to enhance, coordinate and monitor the UN's work on violence against women, in collaboration with civil society.
- Secretary General's study on violence against children recommended an establishment of a special representative of the SG on violence against children to monitor the implementation of the recommendations together with the Committee on the Rights of the Child and with the UN Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

8. UNAIDS immediate objectives:

- Better understand what is the best role UNAIDS can play in terms of identifying and promoting responses to the specific intersections of VAWC and HIV in a number of settings
- Help develop concrete tools and recommendations to advance the agenda on VAWC and AIDS and provide programmatic guidance
- Help build consensus among partners around a set of initial interventions
- Better place UNAIDS and others to input HIV concerns into the larger initiatives around VAWC and responses to conflicts generally
- Advance harmonization and coordination to magnify impact.

9. Next steps:

- UNAIDS Secretariat and the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS team, with WHO, is proposing to convene a small virtual working group of experts to input into research and writing around the development of:
 - (a) draft guidance on recommended interventions to address the intersection of HIV and violence against women
 - (b) identification of examples of best practice and production of a best practice guide on these, and

- (c) a costed core set of interventions to input to the overall Resources Needs Estimates for the AIDS Response.
- UNAIDS – together with partners – will convene an experts' meeting (likely in fall of 2007) to discuss and develop consensus on these recommendations.
 - Building on an agreed package of interventions, UNAIDS/GCWA will work with costing experts to provide technical expertise to assess the cost of the agreed package of interventions.
 - As part of a programme to scale up HIV interventions for populations of humanitarian concern, UNAIDS is coordinating the implementation of a number of activities, including
 - a review, in collaboration with WHO, of epidemiological evidence of the links between HIV and violence against women
 - collaboration with WHO in building capacity in the clinical management of sexual violence in emergencies
 - Support to the East Africa and Horn of Africa interagency task force on GBV, and
 - Collaboration with FAO on building the capacities for addressing underlying causes of transactional sex.

Questions for discussion

- a) How can UNAIDS best play its own appropriate role and support the scaling up of work in the context of sexual violence? Should this work be framed specifically around how HIV programmes should incorporate VAWC interventions? Or should VAWC be framed as part of the context of gender inequality and dealt with holistically by UNAIDS – and is this the role of UNAIDS?
- b) Who are the key players in the violence field that should form part of a future reference/expert group?
- c) What technical support/programmatic actions are needed to advance the agenda of VAW as it intersects with HIV programmes? How should the various recommendations be prioritized by the international community and by countries, keeping in mind resource constraints?
- d) How would the Reference Group advise WHO and UNAIDS to frame its work around violence (VAW; VAWC; GBV) and what are the implications of this programmatically?
- e) What recommendations would the group make to UNAIDS and WHO regarding the implications for VAWC in the context of expanding testing and prevention? Should UNAIDS prioritize research, guidelines, and recommendations within certain areas of the response?

¹ Garcia Moreno, C, Watts, C (2000). Violence against women its importance for HIV/AIDS.