



# DATA ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: KEY MESSAGES



This publication provides an overview of key concepts on violence against women data that can be applied globally. It draws upon a longer report entitled “Guide to Better Understanding and Using Violence Against Women Prevalence Data,” authored by Henriette Jansen and published by UNFPA in 2023.

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**Cover photo:** Elena, 15, receiving counselling from Community activist Zaida, in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique © UNFPA East and Southern Africa / Mbuto Machili

*Note: Images used throughout this document are for illustrative purposes only and do not necessarily represent survivors of violence against women.*

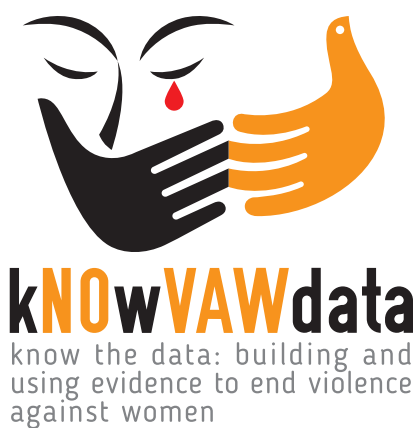
# Why do we need data on violence against women?

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- × Violence against women (VAW) is a public health crisis, a violation of human rights and a barrier to gender equality and development. Evidence – gathered and used in a way that places the needs of survivors at the center – is essential to make the elimination of VAW a policy priority and to design successful prevention and response programmes.
- × When countries lack data on VAW, the heavy burden of proving the prevalence and impact of violence lies with women themselves. Measuring VAW using safe, robust and ethical methods allows women to speak about their experiences and be heard, often for the very first time.
- × The Sustainable Development Goals highlight the centrality of ending violence against women and girls. The demand for measurement of the prevalence of violence to monitor country progress towards their commitments has increased the availability and visibility of data relating to the experience of women and girls.
- × The availability of high-quality, actionable data remains uneven across countries and regions. In places where data are available, the skills and knowledge to analyze and use them for evidence-based policies and programmes are often lacking.
- × As technology provides new and emerging spaces for the experience of violence, it is critical that these are captured in VAW data. In addition to national prevalence surveys, small-scale qualitative and quantitative surveys support a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of women affected by technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TF GBV) – including the experiences of adolescents, who are often excluded from prevalence surveys. Small-scale surveys help ensure that prevalence survey outcomes are contextualized and do not underestimate the prevalence of TF GBV, especially given its diversity and the emergence of new forms.
- × The kNOwVAWdata initiative addresses the need to both collect quality data and direct it into evidence-based policies, programmes and advocacy efforts.

## What is kNOwVAWdata?

- × The kNOwVAWdata initiative is improving the availability, quality and effective use of data on violence against women by training, supporting and enabling people to build and share their knowledge.
- × kNOwVAWdata was launched in 2016 by the UNFPA Asia-Pacific Regional Office with funding support from the Australian Government. It has now expanded to the Arab States, Latin America and the Caribbean, East and Southern Africa, West and Central Africa, and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, with support from UNFPA and the Spotlight Initiative (supported by the European Union).



The acronym and logo are designed to convey a message: in order to implement policies, plans and programmes leading to no more violence against women (NO VAW), we need to KNOW the data. The logo includes the face of a woman with a tear in her eye. One hand covers her mouth, symbolizing the secrecy and silence often surrounding violence against women, while the other hand is shaped like a dove, symbolizing the empowerment and the release she may experience when she is able to tell her story and be believed.

# How should evidence on violence against women be produced?

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- × Two main sources of evidence enable violence against women to be quantified: (1) administrative data, including records kept by health and social services, hotlines, shelters, legal aid services, courts and police, and (2) population-based surveys, which collect data about women's experiences from a subset of the population – a representative sample – to estimate what is happening across the entire population.
- × Whether derived from administrative data or prevalence surveys, VAW data should be collected and analyzed with women's safety and ethics first. That is, at every stage, from designing forms and questionnaires to collecting, safeguarding, analyzing, sharing and using the data, the safety and security of women is paramount.
- × Violence against women data must be collected using ethical and reliable statistical methods. Reliability means that a study's findings can be reproduced. This requires the use of global standards that are comparable, tested and validated in different contexts; adequate and appropriate sampling methods that respond to the sensitive nature of this topic and to the risks in collecting data; and rigorous, comparable and understandable analysis.
- × The extremely sensitive nature of the data collected from respondents requires interviewers to have a high level of ability, in both technical and soft skills, to ensure that women feel safe to disclose sensitive information. It also requires that their stories are valued, kept confidential and put to good use to create a better future for others.
- × Survivors can be retraumatized or put at risk of more violence because of their participation in a survey. Protecting respondents' safety and confidentiality, and providing support where needed, is fundamental to ethical data collection.
- × Given the risks to survivors, violence against women data must be used to inform action to prevent women from experiencing violence. Researchers have an ethical obligation to communicate their findings in ways that are readily understood, to disseminate them to stakeholders who can contribute to ending violence against women, and to put them to effective use – for instance, to educate, advocate, change policies, mobilize resources, improve and target prevention and response programmes, and support more research.

## What is population-based prevalence data on violence against women, and why is it important?

- × The prevalence of violence against women refers to the proportion of women who have experienced violence as part of the total population of women. As shown in the figure below, prevalence is usually calculated over two time periods (lifetime or current).

### How is the prevalence of violence against women calculated?

$$\text{How many women experience VAW?}^* = \frac{\text{Number of women subjected to (type of) violence}}{\text{Total population of women}} \times 100$$



\* As a % of the population of interest.

- × While information on violence against women is available from a variety of sources, the only way to measure prevalence is through population-based surveys that use global statistical standards and ethical protocols to minimize risk to respondents and interviewers.
- × Reliable and comparable VAW prevalence data can establish baselines, so that countries can monitor change over time and determine the impact of policies and programmes. Without baseline data, it is difficult to identify whether progress is being made towards ending violence against women.
- × The 2015 adoption by Member States of Target 5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has given rise to a growing call for reliable and comparable VAW prevalence data. SDG target 5.2 and its associated indicators build upon a core set of nine statistical indicators on the prevalence of violence against women adopted by the UN Statistical Commission in 2011.

### SDG target 5.2 and associated SDG indicators

**5** GENDER  
EQUALITY



## Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

### Target 5.2

**Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation**

#### Indicator 5.2.1

Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age.

#### Indicator 5.2.2

Proportion of women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence.

**UN statistical indicators on violence against women**

- 1** Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to physical violence in the last 12 months, by severity of violence, relationship to the perpetrator and frequency
- 2** Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to physical violence during lifetime, by severity of violence, relationship to the perpetrator and frequency
- 3** Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to sexual violence in the last 12 months, by severity of violence, relationship to the perpetrator and frequency
- 4** Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to sexual violence during lifetime, by severity of violence, relationship to the perpetrator and frequency
- 5** Total and age-specific rate of ever-partnered women subjected to sexual and/or physical violence by current or former intimate partner in the last 12 months, by frequency
- 6** Total and age-specific rate of ever-partnered women subjected to sexual and/or physical violence by current or former intimate partner during lifetime, by frequency
- 7** Total and age-specific rate of ever-partnered women subjected to psychological violence in the past 12 months by the intimate partner
- 8** Total and age-specific rate of ever-partnered women subjected to economic violence in the past 12 months by the intimate partner
- 9** Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to female genital mutilation

- × Quantitative data are a powerful tool that influence policies and programmes. The discourse and work of international organizations, donors and global agendas rely upon indicators that require quantitative data to reflect the progress of our collective efforts.



## Why is it important to disaggregate prevalence data on violence against women?

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- × The patterns and drivers of violence against women within a population can be diverse. An overall prevalence rate that comprises multiple forms of violence can be misleading if not well understood.
- × Disaggregations at the sub-national level may help inform the design of targeted and context-specific interventions to respond to and prevent violence.
- × Data on the prevalence of violence against women should be disaggregated by factors like age, geographical location, ethnic or language group, race, disability and household wealth – and also by type of violence and perpetrator.



Mother and daughter in Zaatari, Jordan © UNFPA Arab States / Sima Diab

## What are the limits of prevalence data?

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- ✗ VAW prevalence surveys always underestimate the reality of violence. The most severe cases of violence will be excluded from a household survey including women who live in institutions; those who fled their violent homes; those who are incapacitated, possibly due to the results of violence; those who are locked up; those too afraid to open their doors; and, in particular, those who have lost their lives due to violence.
- ✗ Data from prevalence surveys reflect only what women and girls were willing to disclose to their interviewers. Factors affecting willingness to disclose such sensitive information – such as stigma, shame or degree of comfort in revealing personal experiences – differ between contexts and cultures, and over time. The survey methodology is designed to make women feel comfortable to disclose their experiences, and the recruitment and training of interviewers is absolutely crucial.
- ✗ Quantitative data, indicators, measurements and standards are the result of political and practical choices, negotiations and social practices. They cannot be equated with objective realities. For instance, while a form of violence like marital rape is an undisputed reality, its translation into quantitative data largely depends on the indicators, operational definitions and methods used to measure it.



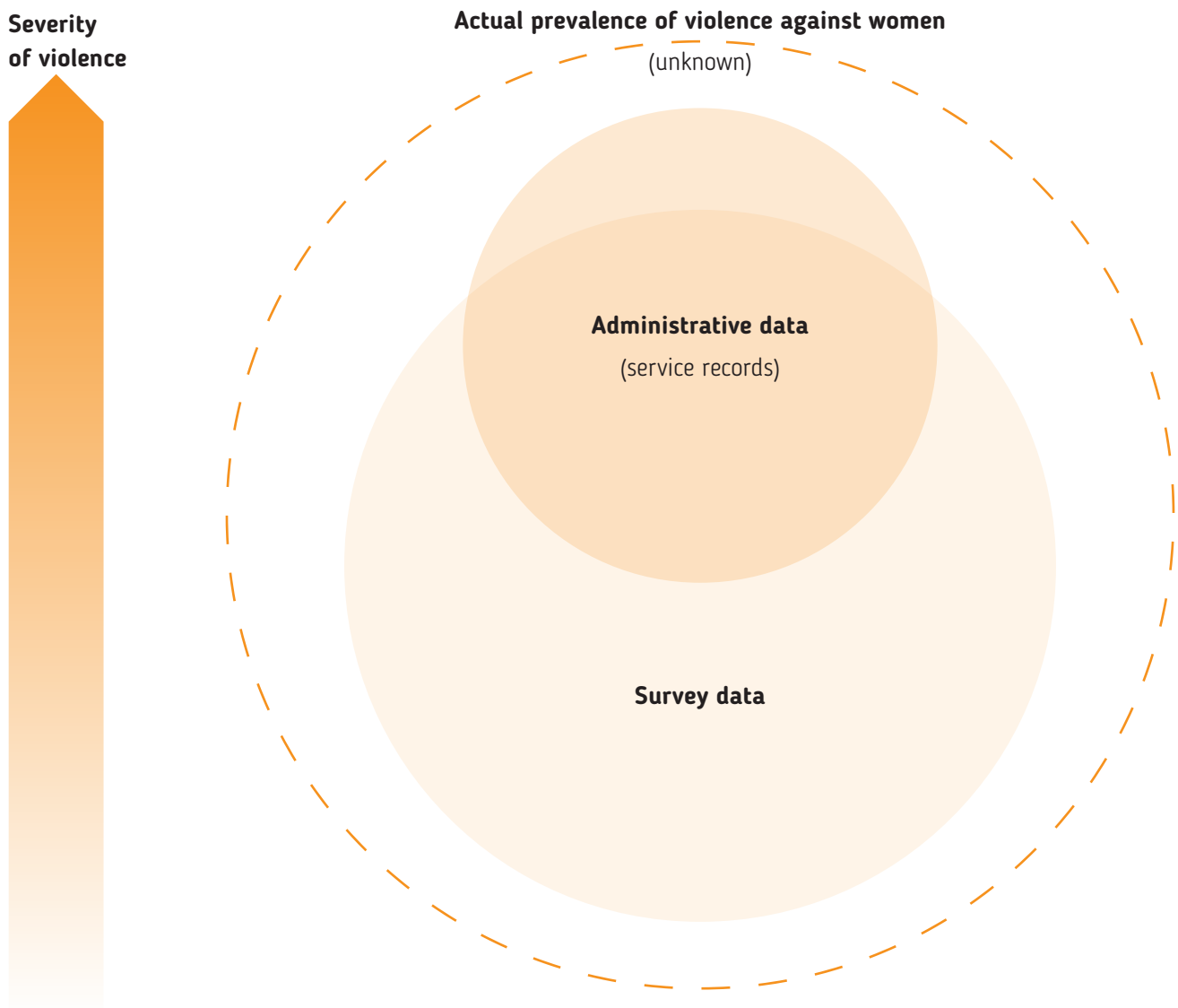
## What can administrative data tell us compared to population-based prevalence data?

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- ✘ Administrative records provide data useful for understanding the case management response to violence against women. Administrative data are produced by government and non-government service providers in the course of their work. These include police, courts, health centers, hospitals, housing services, and specialist services such as refugee crisis centers and help-lines. These data can be used to track effectiveness of response mechanisms over time, identify gaps in services and develop more effective interventions to prevent and respond to violence against women.
- ✘ Administrative data provide insights into the number of cases or incidents reported to a specific service, the response and service provided, and, in some cases, the effectiveness of resources allocated or the referral mechanisms put in place.
- ✘ For many reasons – including stigma, shame, economic and emotional dependence, fear, social barriers and limited availability of services – the majority of women who experience violence do not seek help at all, or only seek help when their situation becomes unbearable. Therefore, the data from administrative sources correspond to only a fraction of actual cases of violence – often especially severe ones – and cannot be used to estimate the prevalence of violence against women.



### Administrative data versus population-based survey data: How well do they represent the prevalence of violence against women?



- × In 2007, UNFPA, in partnership with UNHCR, UNICEF, IRC and IMC, launched the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS), an effective, offline system through which incident and referral reporting is managed to strengthen case management and better support survivors. The tool allows psychosocial case management personnel to safely collect, analyze and share data on GBV incidents, to inform programming, advocacy and reporting. An expanded version of the tool, including online case management functionalities, was launched in 2017 under the name Primero/GBVIMS+. Developed to ensure quality case management in humanitarian settings, this tool is now being expanded for use in broader contexts.

# Why do we also need qualitative data on violence against women?

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- × Prevalence and administrative data can never tell us about women's lived experiences. To understand them, we need to incorporate qualitative data and collaborate with other disciplines.
- × Qualitative data are non-numerical data that describe or characterize qualities, attributes or experiences. While qualitative data are not representative of a population, they have emotional power that can deepen understanding and motivate action, and they can describe local realities and lived experiences in a way that numbers and rates cannot.
- × Mixed-method studies - using a combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence - enable deeper analysis of violence against women. We can interpret the numbers in context, considering women's lived experiences as well as the cultural, gendered and social norms that shape the causes and consequences of violence within and across populations.
- × Qualitative evidence is useful for the development of relevant, culturally-specific and context-specific policies and interventions to prevent and respond to violence.
- × Research into the identification and perpetuation of gender norms is critical to support an understanding of the social, institutional and individual drivers of violence. It helps us identify what norms are operating in relation to violence against women in a given context, how they influence the perpetration of violence, and what opportunities and barriers exist to transforming those norms.



**kNOwVAWdata**  
know the data: building and  
using evidence to end violence  
against women



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