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Poverty reduction and violence against women: exploring links, assessing impact

Geraldine Terry

In 1993 the international community acknowledged for the first time that violence against women (VAW) is a human rights issue, while VAW is also increasingly recognised both as a global public health issue and a barrier to sustainable development. However, even where they are committed to reducing VAW through their programmes and advocacy activities, development practitioners are sometimes unsure about where this fits into the poverty-reduction agenda. This article tries to situate VAW in the poverty discourse, drawing from a range of documentary sources to outline the conceptual links between VAW, poverty, and human development. It then goes on to look at issues surrounding the impact assessment of programmes aimed at reducing VAW, and offers examples of how specific programmes have been evaluated.

Introduction

At the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993, the international community acknowledged for the first time that violence against women (VAW) is a human rights issue, while VAW is also increasingly recognised both as a global public health issue and a barrier to sustainable development. However, even where they are committed to reducing VAW through their programmes and advocacy activities, development practitioners sometimes express doubts about where this fits into the poverty-reduction agenda. Moreover, NGOs such as Oxfam International (OI) have struggled to ascertain what impact their programmes are having on VAW, thus making it difficult to identify effective interventions.

This article tries to situate VAW in the poverty discourse, drawing from a range of documentary sources to outline the conceptual links between VAW, poverty, and human development. It then goes on to look at issues surrounding the impact assessment of programmes aimed at reducing VAW, and offers examples of how specific programmes have been evaluated. The article is based on a study commissioned by OI with the aim of supporting programme staff interested in addressing VAW.

In its 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the UN defined VAW as ‘any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm done towards women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life’ (UN General Assembly 1993)

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VAW is not a marginal or trivial issue in relation to development. Although it is difficult to measure, for a variety of reasons that will be touched on below, a brief survey of the literature suggests it is perpetrated on a huge scale. Whether it takes the form of an act, or an explicit or implicit threat, VAW both arises from and underpins power imbalances between the sexes. It occurs at personal, household, community, and state levels. On all these levels, men use violence to compel or constrain women, and also use it as a tactic during armed conflicts. VAW is an important human rights issue, both in itself and because certain men use it to prevent women from realising other rights—be they economic, social, cultural, civil, and/or political.

Women experience gender-based violence in different ways, depending on factors such as income and who controls it, social status, occupation, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality. It is also manifested differently according to a person's life stage, starting with, for instance, sex-selective abortion and infanticide in countries such as Korea and India, to dowry murder in India and elder abuse in industrialised countries such as the USA.

The UN Declaration was in large measure the product of years of campaigning by women's NGOs and was an important milestone. It was followed by the Beijing Platform for Action (UN 1995), which declared that 'governments are now obligated to respond to women's demands to be free from violence, to take steps to prevent violence, and to adopt measures to punish perpetrators when women's human rights are violated'.

Other important recent events have been the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Military Sexual Slavery, held in Tokyo in December 2000, and the subsequent establishment of the International Criminal Court in 2003. One of the purposes of setting up the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia was to prosecute crimes of sexual violence. The tribunal was the first to recognise crimes of sexual violence as war crimes and as 'grave breaches', imposing on states the duty to search for the allegedly guilty individuals and bring them to court or extradite them for prosecution elsewhere.

Poverty and VAW: cycles of cause and effect

Poverty as a causal factor in VAW

Poverty and VAW interact in complex cycles of causality. Poverty can be a causal factor in VAW, and vice versa. However, the role of poverty in VAW is a sensitive topic, a matter of debate among feminists and Gender and Development (GAD) practitioners. In part, this may be due to a common conflation of VAW with domestic violence. Some GAD specialists are wary of making a link between poverty and domestic violence, in case this leads to the stigmatisation of poor men as perpetrators of VAW. They argue, correctly, that it is not only poor women who experience domestic violence, and that not all women living in poverty are abused.

Of course, this is true. However, VAW is not limited to domestic violence and has many other manifestations. Moreover, while VAW may have many different determinants, it is still the case that poverty can increase women's vulnerability to VAW by increasing their exposure to potentially violent situations and reducing their ability to avoid or escape from such situations. The perpetrators of this violence may be from the same social group, or from different social groups, as with female workers who experience VAW at the hands of male employers and managers. A 2000 World Bank study brings to life this relationship between poverty, vulnerability, and VAW. The researchers found that poor women often cite violence as a factor in their poverty. Although poor men as well as poor women have to search for work, credit, and assistance, women and men both reported that women face special vulnerability, because they are exposed to the humiliation of sexual abuse (Narayan et al. 2000).

Focusing on domestic violence, there is evidence that it is linked to threats to men's traditional breadwinning role, or other forms of masculine identity, arising from poverty. According to a message on Novib's 'Combating Violence' e-mail discussion list sent by *Casa de Passagem* (The Passage House) from the Brazilian city of Recife, unemployment causes the husband to feel that he is not a man because he cannot maintain the family. He beats his wife to show he still has the power, that he is still in charge.

In emergency situations, too, women's poverty, especially when coupled to childrearing responsibilities and/or the lack of male protection, can render them vulnerable to VAW. In the same discussion list, an Acord staff member gives the example of widows trying to meet their children's needs after the tragedy of the Rwandan massacres in 1994: 'There have been cases where to obtain a job, credit, or another favour, the woman/girl had to sleep with a man' (Message 103).

Many other examples could be cited to illustrate the causal role that poverty can play in relation to VAW, including women trafficking in Eastern Europe, female bonded labourers in Pakistan, or girls in Nepali carpet factories who endure sexual harassment in order to keep their jobs (Human Rights Watch Asia 2000).

VAW as a causal factor in poverty

While poverty plays a causal role in relation to VAW, the converse is also true. That is, VAW is a causal factor in women's poverty, and also poverty more generally. This is perhaps clearest if we use UNDP's concept of 'human poverty', which is based on the work of Amartya Sen. According to this definition, poverty means that 'opportunities and choices most basic to human development are denied—to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-respect and the respect of others' (UNDP 1997:15).

Based on this definition, it is evident that male violence helps to create and perpetuate women's 'human poverty', on several counts. First, injuries, mental illness, and death from VAW prevent millions of women from living long, healthy, and creative lives. Men use both actual violence and the threat of it to deny women opportunities, choices, and freedom at many levels: the example of sexual harassment at the University of Dar es Salaam, cited later in this article, illustrates this point. VAW undermines and may even destroy women's dignity and self-respect. Lastly, VAW can prevent women from enjoying 'a decent standard of living'.

The link between VAW and human poverty seems clear. However, even if we use a purely material definition of poverty, one concerned only with consumption and expenditure, it is still the case that VAW plays a role in creating, maintaining, and deepening poverty. In order to explore how VAW helps to shape and maintain poverty, it is helpful to think of the process as it plays itself out on three levels: the individual, the household, and society.

For individual women, VAW and economic dependence can interact in a vicious circle. Actual and threatened VAW can maintain and deepen women's economic dependence on men, which renders them vulnerable to VAW, which in turn maintains and deepens women's economic dependence. At the household level, VAW can constrain women's choices, limit their productivity, and prevent them from bargaining effectively with their husbands or partners, all of which can undermine the health of these women and their children. This household-level poverty then has wide-reaching consequences. If we look beyond individuals and households to communities and societies at large, we see that VAW entails both actual socio-economic costs and 'opportunity costs' for development. These often go unrecognised by policy makers and development practitioners.

Analysing the ways in which VAW creates and maintains poverty is therefore complex, for at least two reasons. First, we can look at the relationship between poverty, well-being, and VAW from several different perspectives, e.g. health, economic, or social development. Second, VAW creates, maintains, and worsens poverty in indirect ways as well as direct ones.

Health impacts of VAW on women and children

VAW affects both women's health and the health of their children, both directly and indirectly. In turn, health is a key factor both in material poverty and in the broader concept of 'human poverty'.

It has been estimated that VAW causes more death and disability among women between the ages of 15 and 44 than cancer, malaria, traffic accidents, or war (Panos Institute 1998). As well as being the direct cause of injury, ill-health, and death, VAW affects women's health in other, indirect ways, for instance through unwanted pregnancies, and their attendant health risks, arising from rape. In addition, girls who have been sexually abused in their childhood are more likely to engage in risky behaviour such as early sexual intercourse, and are thus at greater risk of unwanted and/or early pregnancies. A study in the USA has shown that women who were sexually abused as children were three times more likely to be pregnant by the age of 18 than those who were not (Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs 1999). Another adverse health impact arises from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS. The role of VAW in the transmission of HIV/AIDS is explored in a later section.

The experience of abuse, especially where it is repeated over many years, erodes women's self-esteem and puts them at greater risk of mental health problems. For some women, the burden of abuse is so great that they take their own lives, or try to do so: domestic violence is closely associated with depression and suicide (Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs 1999).

The health impacts of VAW are not limited to the women who are victimised. There is evidence from various parts of the world that domestic violence against mothers also threatens the survival of their children. In other words, VAW is a causal factor in infant mortality. For instance, a study in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh found that women who had been beaten were significantly more likely than non-abused women to have had a pregnancy loss from miscarriage, stillbirth, or abortion, or to have lost an infant (Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs 1999).

Aside from infant mortality, children who have witnessed domestic violence or have themselves been abused tend to show health and behavioural problems. The effect of witnessing physical violence can be just as severe as if they had been victims of violence themselves. These include problems with their weight, eating habits, and sleep, as well as difficulties at school (UNICEF 2000). Such effects on children's educational attainment represent the erosion of future human capital.

Economic impacts of VAW on women and children

In many cases, the negative health outcomes of VAW subsequently lead to negative economic outcomes for women and children, as women's productivity and earnings are lowered. VAW also brings about negative economic outcomes for women in other ways. For instance, family violence may force women to flee the home, and settle for low-paid work (in effect a 'distress sale' of their labour) to support themselves. Ruth Finney Hayward cites the story of a young woman in the Indian state of Gujarat who left her marital home and was forced to become a

migrant labourer after her father-in-law raped her and her husband subsequently attacked her (Finney Hayward 2000:241).

On the other hand, gender-based violence may be used to prevent women from working outside the home. This may take the form of sexual harassment in markets, on the streets, or in the workplace: according to the ILO, 'many women find it unsafe to work in the fields, sell on the markets, or perform any economic activity outside the house because of the threat of violence' (ILO 1999). VAW may also take the form of domestic violence used to enforce women's seclusion. A study in rural Bangladesh cites the case of a woman who took a job at a rice mill just outside her village in order to support the family after her husband fell ill. Her cousins accused her husband of dishonouring their family and, as a result, her husband beat her up (Schuler et al. 1996).

Similar examples can be found in other parts of the world. Researchers have estimated that in Chile, in 1997, the notional 'lost earnings' of women who did not seek paid work due to their experience of domestic violence amounted to US$1.2 billion. They also found that in Santiago, the country's capital, those women who worked and also experienced domestic violence earned less than women workers who did not experience abuse, even after other determinants of earnings were controlled for (Morrison and Orlando 1999).

In some contexts, VAW is used to prevent women from controlling assets. In South Asia, women are prevented from claiming their inheritance rights to assets such as land, or forced to give them up to men, because of actual or threatened violence from male family members, e.g. brothers and husbands. A staff member of Oxfam (India) reports 'many examples of women being chased out of their homes as witches after their husband's death, and subsequently killed, because they would have been entitled to their share in the land and property had they been alive' (Kanchan Sinha, Oxfam GB, personal communication).

Looking at another manifestation of VAW—trafficking in women—the adverse socio-economic consequences for the girls and women involved may well include the perpetuation of illiteracy, an increased school drop-out rate, low self-esteem and social status, and the consequent reproduction of poverty.

VAW as a causal factor in poverty for communities and societies

Some commentators have tried to estimate the costs of VAW to communities and societies in narrow socio-economic terms. Others have taken a wider view and looked at the way in which VAW undermines development and acts as a barrier to positive social change.

Socio-economic costs

Although it may seem cold to try to calculate the economic cost of women's suffering due to VAW, it can be a useful strategy. It helps policy makers to become more aware of the impact of domestic violence and the need to prevent it. Thinking about VAW in socio-economic terms makes it clear that it affects all sectors of society, not only the women who are its direct victims. More studies to estimate such costs would help to change the commonly held view that VAW is a private concern.

So far, most attempts to count the public cost of VAW have focused on domestic violence and have been confined mainly to rich countries such as the USA, New Zealand, and Canada, although there have also been some studies in Latin America. Estimates differ widely depending on what costs are included in the calculations. One study for the London Borough of Hackney estimated that the cost to the borough of dealing with domestic violence during 1996 amounted to £5,130,000 (approximately US$8,708,000) (Stanko 2001). This study

looked only at the direct costs of just one form of VAW. Direct public costs comprise expenditures directly related to the violence, such as medical treatment and psychological counselling, police services, criminal justice, providing shelters for women and their children, etc. Costs such as these are incurred only in countries where such services exist. The more services provided, the higher the costs. However, there is also a range of indirect socio-economic costs flowing from VAW. These arise from decreased participation by women in the labour market, lower earnings, absenteeism, and staff turnover. Women who are less productive earn lower incomes, and these lower incomes in turn mean lower spending and lower economic demand. There are also inter-generational effects, such as the impact of domestic violence on children's future earnings.

Indirect socio-economic costs are difficult to quantify. However, it is even more difficult to measure opportunity costs—all that is lost to human development because of the blight of VAW. Men who attack and abuse women undermine the human capital that nations depend on, thus jeopardising development. According to Novib, 'when people cannot fulfil their potential, a country stalls—economically, socially. When this happens, you are dealing with a development issue' (Novib 2001). What follows is a brief outline of some of the ways in which VAW undermines development and positive social change.

The spread of HIV/AIDS

According to the South African Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, VAW and HIV/AIDS are dual epidemics 'overlapping in women's lives' (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation 2001). Women involved in violent relationships, or relationships characterised by a persistent implicit threat of violence, are less able to refuse unwanted sex with a partner or negotiate safer sex, even if they suspect that their partner is infected. In Zambia, high rates of sexual violence and coercion against girls is a significant factor in the very high rate of HIV infection in this group (Human Rights Watch 2002). Meanwhile, the Indian Health Organisation estimates that over 60 per cent of Bombay sex workers, many of them trafficked from Nepal, are infected with HIV. According to Human Rights Watch, 'women trafficked from Nepal are powerless to negotiate any terms of sex in order to protect themselves from HIV infection' (Human Rights Watch Asia 2000).

The rise of HIV/AIDS has itself created a new impetus for VAW, specifically the sexual abuse of young girls. In Bombay's brothels, 'awareness of AIDS among potential customers has driven the sex industry to supply more and more young girls, who can be sold as virgins and therefore AIDS-free' (Human Rights Watch Asia 2000). In some parts of Africa there is a widespread belief that sex with a virgin can cure a man of HIV/AIDS. According to UNICEF, this so-called 'sexual cleansing' is practised in extended families in Western Kenya, Zimbabwe, and parts of Ghana, with girls as young as eight years of age being selected, to ensure their virginity and freedom from infection (UNICEF 2000).

Perpetuating violence from generation to generation

There is considerable research evidence suggesting that, for boys, experiencing or witnessing chronic violence against their mothers can be the start of a long-term pattern of using violence to exert social control over others, both inside and outside the home. In other words, domestic violence tends to be self-perpetuating, and is also linked to social violence. For girls, witnessing and experiencing repeated domestic violence as children may mean that they are more likely to accept violence from their partners in adult life (UNICEF 2000). In both ways, the cycle is continued.

Constraining women's agency and positive change

According to Amartya Sen, 'there is nothing more important in the political economy of development than the adequate recognition of women's participation and political, economic, and social leadership' (Sen 1999:103). He goes on to point out that women are agents of change, promoting social transformations that can alter everyone's lives, not only their own. As examples, he partly attributes two very positive South Asian trends, falling fertility rates and improved child survival rates, to women's increased agency. By curbing women's agency, in other words limiting the choices women can make, VAW puts a brake on positive social change for whole societies, as well as the women concerned and their families.

There are many ways in which VAW, in limiting women's agency, also hampers social progress. Take girls' education, for instance. In recent decades, this has been identified as one of the most important drivers of socio-economic development, translating into better nutrition and healthcare for the whole family, declining fertility, and the reduction of poverty. Yet in some countries, gender-based violence prevents girls from attending, and doing well in, school. This can be due to parents' well-founded fears about security during the journey to school; for example, in parts of Ethiopia, the abduction of girls on their way to school is a major social problem. In other cases, girls are vulnerable while they are at school: for instance, the widespread sexual violence and harassment of girls reported in South African schools constitutes 'a discriminatory barrier' (Human Rights Watch 2001:1). This is also a problem at the higher education level. There is evidence, for instance, of systematic sexual harassment of female students at the University of Dar es Salaam in the early 1990s, culminating in the suicide of Levina Mukasa, a first-year education student (Possi 1996).

Women's participation in development

Many researchers and activists have pointed out that VAW limits women's ability to participate in development and to take up leadership roles. For instance, during a meeting in Uttar Pradesh in India, women activists commented that 'violence is not only a violation of human rights but also deprives women from contributing to the development of the country, by affecting their confidence and self esteem' (Oxfam GB Impact Report 2001). A recent report notes that in Angola, violence or the threat of it deters women from participating in the public sphere and exercising their rights as citizens. This in turn means that Angolan institutions are deprived of women's potential contribution (Jacobson and Pereira 2001).

Global issues such as persistent poverty, deforestation, and public health problems cannot be solved without women's full participation. However, the burden of violence borne by many women means that they cannot contribute fully, thus acting as a brake on progress.

In response to the magnitude of VAW and its significance as a rights and development issue, many international and national agencies are seeking to tackle the problem. The next section looks at how these agencies are attempting to assess their impact.

Assessing impact against VAW

Despite much interesting work since the 1990s, VAW is under-researched. There are several reasons for this, such as male bias in the development world, and the hidden nature of much VAW. More specifically, impact assessment in the VAW field is in its infancy: one Novib report pointed out that little is known about the results of programmes designed to reduce VAW (Novib 1999). We need good quality information about the prevalence and forms of VAW, and about the difference our initiatives are making, for two main reasons. First, reliable baseline

data on the magnitude and consequences of VAW would help to raise awareness of VAW, and put the issue on policy makers' agendas. Second, we need to be as rigorous as possible in assessing impact. It is important to identify what does and does not work in different contexts, and share good practice in the VAW field. This involves the collection of baseline data in order to compare situations before and after interventions.

However, there are many problems involved with attempts to gather information on VAW in general and, more specifically, assess the impact of programmes addressing VAW. For instance, women who suffer from violence, and even researchers themselves, may be at risk if those gathering the information do not pay due regard to safety and security, and to the likelihood of male backlash. Women may be reluctant to discuss VAW because of the possibility of violent reprisals by the perpetrators: feelings of embarrassment, shame, and fear of stigmatisation may also present barriers. In some cases, women's routine experience of violence affects their subjective perceptions of what constitutes violence, which makes it difficult to uncover the true picture.[1] On the other hand, in societies where certain forms of VAW, such as wife beating and sexual harassment on the street, is the norm, it may not be so difficult to collect information from male perpetrators. Researchers have sometimes been surprised at the numbers of men willing to disclose wife abuse, for instance (Shrader 2001).

Another difficulty, and one that VAW programmes share with other types of social intervention, is that such programmes do not lend themselves to simple models of cause and effect that make it possible to link projects to outputs and impact. When assessing their impact on VAW, programmes and projects need to be situated within much wider processes of change involving other social, economic, and political factors (Roche 2000). This means that the ubiquitous logical framework ('logframe') approach has severe limitations. In addition, VAW is a pervasive and complex phenomenon, expressing deeply rooted power inequalities. As such, it presents a particular challenge to development and humanitarian workers. Measuring the changes brought about by anti-VAW initiatives must take into account that significantly reducing VAW is likely to be a long process, reflecting fundamental changes in male and female attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours.

The choice of methods and tools used to assess impact depends on the intervening organisation's resources and capacity, as well as the type of intervention being evaluated. The following types of initiative have been identified from OI project records: provision of services (e.g. advice and counselling centres or refuges for battered women), raising public awareness and altering attitudes, changing the practice of institutions such as the police or the judiciary, and working on VAW in connection with a mainstream development programme such as microfinance or 'women's empowerment'.

What follow are some real-life examples showing how evaluators have tried to assess the impact of different types of project. They are heavily weighted towards the UK, because research yielded few examples of documented impact assessment from the South or from the so-called transitional economies of Eastern Europe.

Evaluating service provision

The Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust in South Africa provides counselling to women who have been raped. The Trust uses a range of internal information to monitor and evaluate its services, such as statistics on the number of calls and clients, client evaluations, case reports, records of calls, and reports of meetings. In addition, information sources from outside the organisation are used, such as police and court statistics, and newspaper articles. According to its director, the Trust has struggled to develop indicators of impact as opposed to activity. She suggests that

impact indicators should be clearly measurable, e.g. the number of women who move out of abusive relationships (Leslie Riddell, Director of Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust, personal communication). Her comments highlight the challenge of how to assess the impact of this type of intervention.

Domestic Violence Matters (DVM) was a three-year project, which ran in north London in the 1990s. The project had three aims: to establish civilian 'crisis interveners' working alongside the police force, to encourage the police to prosecute perpetrators, and to develop links among different agencies in the area, in order to encourage a consistent and coordinated response to domestic violence.

To assess whether the project had met its first aim, evaluators obtained information from people using the service about what they wanted from it, their experience of abuse, where they had gone for help in the past, and their opinion of DVM. To assess progress towards changing police practice, they compared arrest and charging rates before and after the DVM project, asked users to assess how the police and the criminal justice system dealt with their case, and obtained information from police officers about their attitudes and responses to DVM. For the third aim, better networking, evaluators looked at a number of things, including the amount of formal and informal contact between agencies and their staff. Various evaluation methods were used, including questionnaires to police officers and DVM users, and interviews at regular intervals with key players such as senior staff. The evaluation went on at the same time as the project was being implemented, with feedback being provided regularly to DVM so that evaluation findings could inform the subsequent development of the project.

Raising awareness and changing attitudes: Zero Tolerance Trust, UK

It is particularly difficult to assess the impact of awareness-raising campaigns, especially if they are carried out on a large scale. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that few organisations have the resources to carry out systematic research to measure changes in community or public attitudes. The Zero Tolerance Trust in the UK is one organisation that has tried to evaluate its success in raising awareness of VAW, and changing public attitudes towards it. The Trust ran a public awareness campaign in eight regions in the UK. During the first phase, advertisements were used to get its messages across. These advertisements were intended to highlight the prevalence of violence against women and children, promote a criminalisation strategy and send out a clear message that these forms of violence should not be tolerated, and debunk some of the myths around these crimes. Campaign evaluations were carried out, and an academic specialising in family abuse was later commissioned to 'evaluate the evaluations'.

Among other things, evaluators tried to assess the impact of the campaign, investigating whether it had reached its target populations, what messages men and women took from the posters they saw, and their reactions to those messages. The evaluators used indicators such as the proportion of respondents who remembered seeing a campaign poster, which posters they had seen and where, what they remembered about the posters, and what they thought of the Zero Tolerance message. They also looked at changes in the numbers of people contacting relevant local services, e.g. Social Service departments, and attitudinal changes among staff working in these agencies. Another element of the research looked at people's general awareness of, and attitudes to, VAW, using indicators such as whether or not people agreed that VAW was a crime, which forms of behaviour people regarded as VAW, people's estimates of the proportion of women who experienced VAW, and their ideas about the root causes of VAW.

The evaluations used different methods, or combinations of methods, including street surveys, focus groups with different segments of the public and with workers in relevant agencies, and a media survey. In the UK, street surveys are a good way of finding out the basic attitudes of a large number of people quickly. Focus groups, on the other hand, are geared to exploring what people think and why. Combining the two methods can be very effective. However, the report on the evaluations noted that many of the questions asked about people's attitudes were phrased in such a way that only a very small minority was likely to state that they thought VAW was acceptable. She suggested that the questions should have been phrased differently, to draw out subtle differences in attitudes between different groups, according to gender, age, ethnicity, etc. (Kelly 1997, 1999).

Changing institutional practice

The indicators used to assess the impact of this type of intervention vary widely, according to projects' objectives and context. A review of OI project reports offers several examples. For instance, in Nepal, Women against Domestic Violence cited as an achievement the fact that the police and local authorities had begun to register trafficking cases in official records. The Chilean coordinating committee of the Women's Global March 2000 cited as an indicator of success the government's decision to open nine refuges for victims of VAW, while the project officer concerned with a similar campaign in Uttar Pradesh cited the state government's agreement to support the campaign's second phase as an important impact indicator.

Addressing VAW in mainstream development interventions

Mainstream grassroots programmes such as microfinance schemes, or those focusing on 'women's empowerment', often also entail addressing VAW. This might happen as an unintended consequence, perhaps because domestic violence is jeopardising a programme's objectives, or because the programme has helped to create a 'space' in which local women can raise the issue for the first time. Alternatively, an NGO might deliberately set out to tackle VAW, using other types of intervention as entry points. A survey of Oxfam GB's impact assessment reports suggests that it is common in these contexts to use anecdotal evidence as indicators of success. While it may not be best practice according to the logframe method of project planning, this approach may be better suited to the contexts, resource levels, and ways of working of many grassroots projects. Here are two examples of the kinds of indicators cited in different OI project reports:

> *Two women were subjected to wife beating from their alcoholic husbands. The women's group personally counselled the husbands and since then they are behaving themselves.*
>
> *Women are aware of their rights. They protest any types of domestic violence against them and others.*

Ad hoc anecdotal indicators like this are helpful for informal project monitoring. They relate directly to women's daily lives and vividly illustrate change processes on the ground. However, more systematic evidence of change is usually needed in order to convince development organisations, and donors, of the effectiveness of specific approaches. Without the allocation of sufficient resources to assess impact in this area, progress in identifying good practice may be slow.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has tried to show that the issue of VAW is central to the poverty discourse as well as to rights-based approaches to development. In order to scale up examples of good practice, however, better impact assessment is needed, so that successes can be disseminated and adapted for replication elsewhere. In order for this to happen, more resources will need to be directed towards this area of development practice.

Acknowledgements

The article is based on an unpublished study Oxfam International commissioned from the author in 2002 with the aim of supporting programme staff interested in addressing VAW. A copy of this study, titled 'Violence Against Women (Parts I and II)', may be obtained from Adrienne Hopkins, Gender and Diversity Communications Officer, Oxfam GB, at 274 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7DZ, or by email at <ahopkins@oxfam.org.uk>.

Note

1 For instance, as a Burundian NGO reports, 'physical and psychological violence is part of the marital privileges of the husband. This cultural principle limits the range of behaviours that women consider as violent' (Message 87 in Novib's End Violence e-mail discussion).

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The author

Geraldine Terry worked for Oxfam GB for several years. She is currently Senior Social Development Adviser for a large engineering company and also as an independent consultant specialising in Gender and Development and supporting civil society organisations. Recent assignments have included working with staff and local organisations on Oxfam GB's Gender Equitable Education Programme in West Africa. She is writing a book on women's rights and development, planned for publication in 2004/05. Contact details: <Geraldine.Terry@btinternet.com>.