

COUNTING THE COST:

The Price Society Pays for Violence Against Women

REPORT



Acronyms and terminology

This report focuses specifically on violence against women, often referred to as VAW. Other common acronyms include VAWG (violence against women and girls) and GBV (gender-based violence).

However, most of the studies featured in this report deal with violence against women, and not with violence against girls under the age of 15 years or with violence faced by men and boys.¹ The report also refers to intimate partner violence (IPV), rather than domestic violence (DV) as the latter is broadly defined to also include violence in the home by family members who are not partners/spouses, and most comparable global statistics on violence against women focus on IPV. Most of the costing studies featured in this report focus primarily on the cost of violence borne by women who have faced violence at the hands of their male spouses/partners. However, the studies conducted in Cambodia, Peru and Bolivia focus on sexual harassment at the workplace. The study conducted in the USA focuses on the lifetime economic burden of rape on American adults.

¹ Violence against girls and boys is a significant human rights violation, which has long-term consequences and costs. It is beyond the scope of this report to examine this, but it is critical that it be considered in policies, programmes and services.



Executive summary

Imagine a room full of women. Now imagine that every third woman in the room will be raped, beaten or otherwise abused² in her lifetime, mostly by her male partner. This scenario is a fact. Global statistics on violence against women show that, on average, 35% of women have experienced either physical and/or sexual violence by someone who is an intimate partner or sexual violence by someone who is not a partner. Furthermore, as many as 38% of all murders of women are committed by male intimate partners ([WHO, 2013, p.2](#)). And this is just the tip of the iceberg. This figure does not even account for all the other forms of violence against women such as sexual harassment and abuse against girls under the age of 15, the damage to children and extended families, and the anguish and psychological trauma that can last for years.

Violence against women is a global pandemic affecting all countries, from low- to middle- and high-income countries ([Ki-Moon, B., 2014](#)). **Violence against women is a fundamental human rights violation that requires immediate and much greater attention, investment and action by governments, donors and the private sector.** This includes funding civil society organizations, particularly women's rights organizations, whose prevention and response work have made a real impact in the lives of women and girls and whose advocacy efforts have proven to change laws positively ([Weldon & Htun, 2013](#)) Governments that have ratified relevant

² This includes all forms of sexual and physical violence. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines '**Sexual Violence**' as "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. It includes rape, defined as the physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration of the vulva or anus with a penis, other body part or object" and '**Physical Violence**' as "the intentional use of physical force with the potential for causing death, injury or harm. This includes beating but also includes a range of other acts such as slapping, pushing, shoving, biting, hair pulling, kicking, throwing things, choking, burning and the use of, or threats to use, a weapon including a gun, knife or other object" ([WHO, 2017](#)).

international treaties, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Convention on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), have clear obligations to protect citizens. Likewise, it is important that donors invest/continue to invest in addressing this issue, since low- and middle-income countries often lack resources to effectively combat violence against women. The role of the private sector is also critical. The prevention of violence against women within the workplace is not only a good ‘investment’ but also reflects a commitment to social and legal responsibility in addressing issues that are faced by employees.

Failure to take action has many implications for the individual, her family, community and society. This report focuses in particular on one significant implication for society: the costly price tag attached to violence against women. In 2016, the global cost of violence against women was estimated by the UN to be US\$1.5 trillion, equivalent to approximately 2% of the global gross domestic product (GDP), or roughly the size of the entire Canadian economy ([UN Women, 2016](#)).

Drawing from 13 studies – three of them conducted by CARE International – this report presents the economic costs of violence against women in relation to its impact on national economies and the rates of violence against women in these countries. Figure 2 presents a global map with data on forms of violence against women, and their costs, in both absolute (billions of US\$) and relative (% of GDP) terms, based on available data from the last 10 years.³ It clearly busts the myth that violence against women is a low-income country problem, as the map highlights the global scale and costs of violence against women in high-income countries too, such as Australia, Canada, the EU and USA.

CARE believes that violence against women is a fundamental human rights violation and deserves condemnation. This in itself is sufficient justification for action. Understanding the costs of violence against women provides additional arguments for why preventing and responding to violence against women should be a top priority for governments, donors and the private sector.⁴ While survivors of violence bear the highest burden of costs, including social, emotional and economic, states bear significant costs in terms of service delivery after violence occurs and the private sector bears the brunt of reduced productivity resulting from this violence against women. Costs and lives are saved when violence is prevented from ever occurring in the first place (primary prevention).

³ Data from one country cannot be directly compared to another due to variations in measurement methods.

⁴ In addition to investing in prevention it is critical that government and donors continue to support high quality response and support services to prevent re-occurrence of violence against women. Since this report focuses on prevention of violence, for more information on comprehensive response systems to support women affected by violence, please see the Essential Services Package for Women and Girls Subject to Violence ([UNFPA, UN Women, UNODC and WHO, 2015](#)).

Studies show that investing in the prevention of violence is a cost-effective approach for states. Simply put, by investing in the effective implementation of behavioural, legal and regulatory solutions, states will save on the cost of responding to violence ([Laxminarayan et al., 2006, p.48-49](#)). Furthermore, studies have shown that preventing violence against women can improve productivity gains for the private sector ([CARE Australia, 2017](#) & [CARE International Sri Lanka, 2014](#)).

This report concludes that there is an urgent and overdue need for action on the part of governments, donors and the private sector to prevent and address violence against women. This requires acknowledgement of the scale and importance of the problem, commitment to deliver solutions that work, and investment in these solutions. Further they should commit to monitoring and learning from efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women to ensure the goal of an end to this abuse of rights is achieved. We call upon:

- **Governments to ensure gender-transformative budgeting** to strengthen and implement national laws, policies and programmes that prevent and respond to violence against women.
- **Donors to commit long-term funds annually** in support of programmes conducted by national governments and women's rights NGOs, *specifically* to prevent and respond to violence against women.
- **Private sector companies** to make resources available in business practice and plans for prevention and response to violence against women at all stages and levels of the business, such that a safe and positive workplace environment is created.

CARE's commitment to preventing violence against women is an integral part of its work over 20 years in 60 countries, in both development and humanitarian contexts. The three studies by CARE that aimed to cost violence against women examined two types of violence: intimate partner violence in Bangladesh and Zambia, and sexual harassment in the workplace in Cambodia. In Bangladesh and Zambia, both social and economic costs were identified, at multiple levels – to the individual, family, society and country. CARE's experiences in these costing studies, and how we used these efforts as part of broader strategies to tackle violence against women, are also discussed in this report.

These figures – both the billions of US dollars and the more than one billion women likely to suffer violence in their lifetime – point to one inescapable conclusion: violence against women has a devastating and lasting impact on all of us, and demands that we pledge support and take urgent action.

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Nigeria. © Josh Estey/CARE

Introduction

One in three women worldwide is beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused, mostly by her male intimate partner ([WHO, 2013, p.2](#) & [UNODC, 2013, p.13](#)), in the course of her lifetime. When combined with sexual violence against women by non-partners as well, this goes up to 35% ([WHO, 2013, p.2](#)).⁵

Violence against women is a fundamental human rights violation, rooted in unjust and unequal power and gender relations and structures in our societies. These are upheld by rigid and unjust social, economic, legal and cultural norms that determine a woman's, often unequal, role in her home, her community and her workplace. Violence against women is a form of gender-based violence, which is *"a harmful act or threat based on a person's sex or gender identity. It includes physical, sexual and psychological abuse, coercion, denial of liberty and economic deprivation whether occurring in public or private spheres."* ([CARE, 2015, p.1](#)). Evidence has found that communities with higher levels of violence against women share the following expressions of gender inequality: condoning of violence against women; men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence; rigid gender roles and identities; and male peer relations that emphasize aggression and disrespect towards women ([Our Watch, 2015, p.8](#)).

Millions of women have died, been disabled and suffered psychological trauma as a result of this violence. Women and their families bear the highest burden of social and economic costs, including shame and stigma. It affects their participation in education, employment, civic life and politics, and impedes their access and control over resources – increasing poverty and inequality. Patriarchal institutions and systems that view violence against women as a 'private problem' have meant that this violence is often made invisible, resulting in solutions being under-funded, including by governments and private companies. But as this report shows, governments also bear a significant burden of costs in terms of service delivery, as do companies in lost productivity in the workplace.

The fact that violence against women is a fundamental human rights violation is, in itself, sufficient justification for action. Understanding the cost of violence against women provides additional arguments and evidence for why preventing and responding to violence against women should be

⁵ The WHO estimates have been informed by the data from 155 studies in 81 countries. WHO reviewed data on the prevalence of two forms of violence against women: physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner (intimate partner violence) and sexual violence by someone other than a partner (non-partner sexual violence) ([WHO, 2013, p.10](#)).

a top priority. This report is also, therefore, an urgent call to governments,⁶ donors and the private sector to prioritize and make budgetary allocations to prevent and address this violation. The costs can also be saved when violence is prevented in the first place (primary prevention). Investing in the prevention of violence is a cost-effective approach for states: studies show, for instance, that by investing in the effective implementation of behavioural, legal and regulatory solutions, states will save on the cost of responding to violence ([Laxminarayan et al., 2006, p.48](#)).

Some governments and donors are already making efforts to cost interventions as well as adopt gender-responsive budgeting to assess how public resources are allocated and spent to tackle violence against women.⁷ The results from these efforts provide policymakers with direction on how resources could be best allocated and mobilized towards violence prevention.

Drawing from 13 studies – three of them conducted by CARE International in Bangladesh ([2011](#)), Zambia ([2017](#)) and Cambodia ([2017](#)) – this report presents the economic costs of violence against women in relation to its impact on and the rates of violence against women in these countries.

While some of the costing studies captured both social and economic costs of this violence, only the economic costs (such as direct and indirect costs incurred for medical and legal fees as well as loss of income due to illness or injury)⁸ are reflected here. This report further discusses CARE's experiences with costing violence and provides illustrative examples of types of costs and lessons learned on process. It also presents costs of solutions where available. It concludes with urgent calls to action for government, donors and the private sector.

6 "Under international human rights law, and particularly the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), States are compelled to prevent and respond to all acts of violence against women, including an obligation to 1) prevent acts of violence against women, 2) investigate and punish all acts of violence against women, 3) protect women against acts of violence, and 4) provide remedies including reparation to victims of violence against women... The fulfillment of the human rights of women also requires political will and an adequate allocation of resources to address existing inequalities and discrimination. In undertaking these endeavours States should act without discrimination, and must commit the same efforts and resources to preventing, investigating, punishing and providing remedies for acts of violence against women as they commit to address other forms of violence" ([Statement by Rashida Manjoo, Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, 2011, p.2-3](#)).

7 Gender-responsive budgeting seeks to ensure that the collection and allocation of public resources is carried out in ways that are effective and contribute to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. Implementing commitments towards gender equality requires intentional measures to incorporate a gender perspective in planning and budgeting. It should be based on in-depth analysis that identifies effective interventions for implementing policies and laws that advance women's rights. It provides tools to assess the different needs and contributions of men and women, and boys and girls, within the existing revenues, expenditures and allocations and calls for adjusting budget policies to benefit all groups. Gender-responsive budgeting is a step not only towards accountability to women's rights but also towards greater public transparency, and can shift economic policies leading to gains across societies.

8 For a more detailed discussion on the types of costs and methodologies of the studies analysed for this report, please see Annexure on Costing Methods.



Why highlight the costs of violence against women?

Bangladesh. ©Nancy Farese

Progress on reducing violence against women globally has been slow, and much more will need to be done to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on gender, particularly goal 5.2 on the elimination of violence against women and girls.⁹ Compounding this situation is the fact that funding allocations to specifically address violence against women are often inadequate.

In Indonesia for example, net official development assistance to address violence against women in 2011 was just 0.1% of gross national income, compared to 0.2% in 2009 and 2010. The decline in international donor support followed Indonesia's emergence as a middle-income country. This has led to a greater dependence on national funds to address the issue of violence against women and push related policies forward ([UN Women, 2013, p.31](#)). However, state budgetary allocations to address violence against women are also often low. For instance, studies in India highlight the lack of specific state budget allocations for the implementation of the national law on domestic violence ([Duvvury et al., 2016, p.7](#))

In 2014, donor funding for violence against women prevention and response efforts was just a tiny fraction of aid: under 1% for most donors, with only Sweden allocating nearly 1.5% and Ireland allocating more than 2.5% of their total official development assistance ([Development Initiatives, 2014, p.2](#)). A joint UN programme has identified and agreed upon a minimum set of essential services to address violence against women, which is currently being tested and could be a useful point of departure for governments and donors wanting to commit budgets to this end ([UNFPA, UN Women, UNODC & WHO, 2015](#)).

Economic costs help us understand, at least to some extent, the scale of a problem in financial terms, to individuals, families, communities and society. Prioritizing scarce resources is a fundamental duty of governments as there is an obligation to citizens to provide the best infrastructure and services for

⁹ [SDG Target 5.2](#) is to "eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation".

the common good effectively and efficiently. By investing in the prevention of violence, some secondary costs (services responding to violence) are prevented, which could in turn create budgetary savings. This is a clear indication to national governments, including finance ministries, as well as private corporations and other entities as to why investment in this area is critical. As discussed elsewhere in this report, studies show the benefits far outweigh the costs of investing in prevention of violence. By more effectively prioritizing resources towards prevention, states can better fulfil their obligations to their citizens.

Resources must be mobilized to support, assess and scale up promising interventions to end violence against women. This must occur at the level of governments, who are primarily responsible to citizens, as well as other stakeholders such as the private sector and donors.

“ Sometimes, I think about not going to work anymore because of this [sexual harassment]. But then I think about my family condition and I know I cannot quit. ”

Female garment worker from Cambodia (CARE Australia, 2017, p.4)

Key messages

Progress on reducing violence against women globally has been slow.

Funding allocations by governments and donors to prevent and respond to violence against women have been inadequate.

Placing an economic cost on this violence helps us understand, to some degree, the scale of the problem in financial terms, helping prioritize scarce resources.

Investing in prevention of violence is a cost-effective approach, while also recognizing that good response could prevent reoccurrence.



Prevalence of violence against women

Cambodia. ©Charles Fox/CARE

Violence against women – particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence – is a violation of women’s human rights and a major public health problem ([WHO, 2013, p.2](#)). In 2012, “almost half (47%) of all female victims of homicide were killed by their intimate partners or family members, compared to less than 6% of male homicide victims. Thus while a large share of female homicide victims are murdered by people who are expected to care for them, the majority of men are killed by people they may not even know” ([UNODC, 2014, p.14](#)). The prevalence of violence against women in Bangladesh, Zambia and Cambodia – the three countries where CARE has carried out costing studies – is shown in *Figure 1*.



Bangladesh. ©Jennifer Bose/CARE



DRC. ©Jake Lyell/CARE

Prevalence of violence against women in Bangladesh, Zambia and Cambodia



65% of women aged 15-49 have ever experienced physical violence by an intimate partner during their lifetime

(Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2013).



43% of Zambian women aged 15-49 have ever experienced physical violence by an intimate partner since the age of 15

(Central Statistical Office, 2014).



21% of women in Cambodia who have ever been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner at least once in their lifetime

(Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2015).



Nearly **1 in 3** female garment factory workers have experienced sexual harassment in the past 12 months

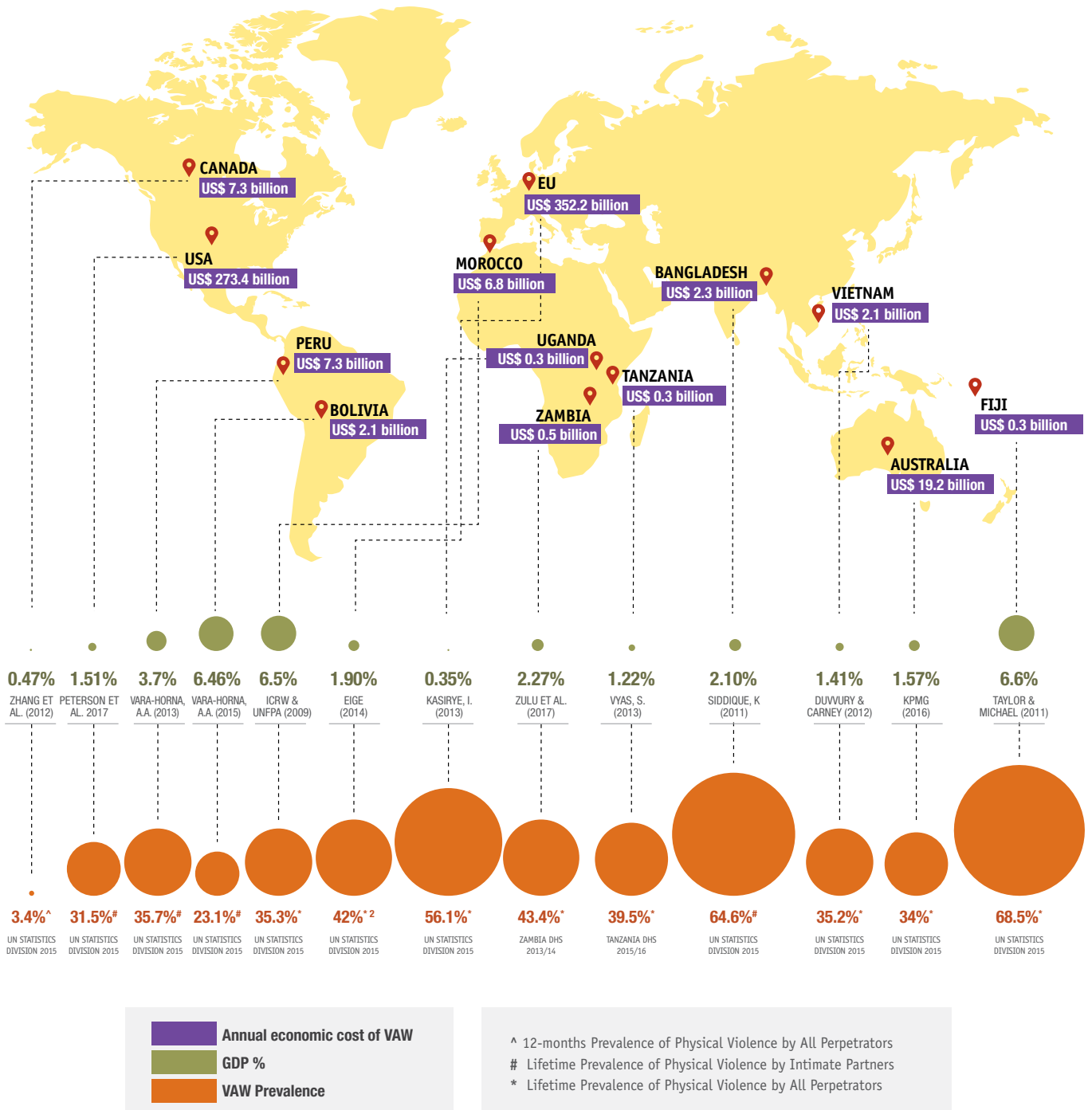
(CARE Australia, 2017).

* The data from Cambodia is supplemented with national level data on sexual harassment of female workers in the garment industry. A point to note is that the data on experiences of sexual harassment faced by female garment factory workers is over a period of 12 months, while the data on prevalence of violence against women is in relation to lifetime prevalence.

FIGURE 1: Prevalence of violence against women in Bangladesh, Zambia and Cambodia.

How much does violence against women cost the global economy?

This graphic shows the range of estimates on how much violence against women (VAW) costs the national economy. We show figures in US\$ billions from 13 studies ranging from 2009 - 2017, from both the global south and global north, both in terms of the % of gross domestic product (GDP) that violence against women costs the country, and in terms of the prevalence of violence against women.



1 While the studies used in this graphic all deal with the economic cost of violence against women, the focus of each study was not necessarily the same. The range of focus areas included the following: costs of gender based violence; costs of domestic violence to individuals, non-state actors, and state actors; cost of lost earnings due to partner violence; costs for businesses due to a reduction in labour productivity as a result of violence against women; and costs of intimate partner violence to households and communities.

2 The VAW prevalence figure for the EU is the figure for the UK, as the EU costing study (EIGE 2014) extrapolated a costing to the whole of the EU from UK figures, from a UK-specific study.

FIGURE 2: How much does violence against women cost the global economy?

While the costs shown in *Figure 2* are not directly comparable to each other due to differences in the types of violence studied, different costs considered, and differences in population and GDP sizes, it is evident that the cost (however studied) of violence against women is universal and significant.¹⁰ All of the costs cited relate to violence by men against women, except for two studies (Canada and Australia), which included intimate partner violence within same-sex relationships as well as intimate partner violence faced by men. Broadly, however, the map illustrates the scale of the problem worldwide and how costs to each country fall within broader estimates of the cost to the global economy as a whole. This global cost has been estimated at approximately 2% of global GDP, or US\$1.5 trillion. That's roughly the size of the Canadian economy ([UN Women, 2016](#)).

An estimated total of US\$12 trillion could be added to global GDP by 2025 by closing the gender gap and advancing women's equality in the public, private and social sectors, which in turn will have a positive impact on stopping violence against women. US\$12 trillion is equal to the combined GDPs of Japan, Germany, and the United Kingdom in 2015 ([Woetzel et al., 2015, p.vi](#)).

Inaction translates to an immense global cost. Highlighting costs and the potential benefits shows the critical importance of accelerating efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women across the world.



Key messages

- Violence against women is prevalent worldwide, in countries of the global north and south.**
- Estimates of the costs of violence against women to the global economy is 2% of global GDP or US\$1.5 trillion.**
- By advancing gender equality in public, private and social spheres, US\$12 trillion could be added to global GDP by 2025.**

¹⁰ See Annexure on Costing Methods. Costs were converted into US\$ (& % of GDP) at the prevailing exchange rate for the year of data collection in the study, and then updated in value to 2017 US\$ figures.



What are the costs and who bears them?

Bangladesh. ©Nancy Farese

“ He used to beat me every now and then. One day, he beat me too much and I fainted. Then he decided to apply for divorce at the court. He engaged a lawyer and I lost all the property, all the five houses that we built together. ”

28-year-old female survivor from Zambia (Zulu et al., 2017, p.39).

Costs of violence against women can be both direct and indirect, and are incurred by women and their families, by perpetrators and their families (considered by two of the 13 studies in this brief), and by state and non-state institutions.¹¹ Women who survive the violence bear the brunt of costs – as much as six times the cost to the state ([Walby, 2009, p.97-98](#)).

These overall costs of violence against women are comparable to state budgets for essential services. In Bangladesh, the cost of domestic violence at US\$2.3 billion (equivalent to 2.1% of GDP in 2010) was equal to the health and nutrition budget for the whole country in that year ([Siddique, 2011, p.51](#)). In Zambia, the cost of gender-based violence¹² at 2.27% of GDP or US\$473 million was comparable to the entire health budget for the country in 2016 ([Zulu et al., 2017, p.7](#)).

11 Direct costs are in relation to goods and services for which there is a monetary exchange. Indirect costs are those costs for which a monetary value can be calculated even though there is no monetary exchange, such as foregone benefits or opportunity costs.

12 The Zambia study considered the direct and indirect costs of domestic violence as its main objective, but costs are expressed in terms of gender-based violence (GBV).

In Uganda, the US\$22.2 million costs borne by providers of public services for domestic violence was 0.75% of the country's national budget in 2010/11 ([Kasirye, 2012, p.4](#)).¹³

While different studies on the costs of violence have considered direct and indirect costs in different ways, the two CARE studies conducted in Bangladesh and Zambia have defined direct and indirect costs as below:

DIRECT COSTS of violence against women are those incurred to treat or respond to that violence, and include the following costs:

1. To survivors and their families: these include costs related to seeking medical and health support, including counselling; legal advice and action; and travel, board and lodging costs associated with seeking medical and legal support. In some cases, direct costs include those related to relocation and seeking refuge from violence.
2. To perpetrators: these direct costs included monetary costs to pay fines and legal fees.
3. To the state: direct costs include prevention and support services provided by relevant government agencies, as well as the effects of lost productivity on national GDP due to absenteeism by survivors and perpetrators.
4. To non-state actors who bear costs related to prevention and response to violence against women, costs to advocate for the creation and implementation of laws and policies, and costs due to lost productivity and absenteeism at work.

INDIRECT COSTS are those that follow on from an act of violence against a woman. These include opportunity costs incurred, for instance, when a person can't participate fully in economic activity as a result of violence. The specific indirect costs considered in the two studies conducted by CARE are:

1. **For survivors:** those associated with loss of income and productivity due to injury, inability to work/being compelled to take leave as a result of the violence.
2. **For perpetrators:** loss of income due to imprisonment or hiding.

¹³ The cost borne by service providers of UGX 55.6 billion was converted to US\$ using the following exchange rate for 2012 of US\$ 1 = UGX 2521. 3

The two infographics below (Figure 3 and Figure 4) summarize both direct and indirect costs, incurred at individual level, as well as to state and non-state actors, in Bangladesh and Zambia.

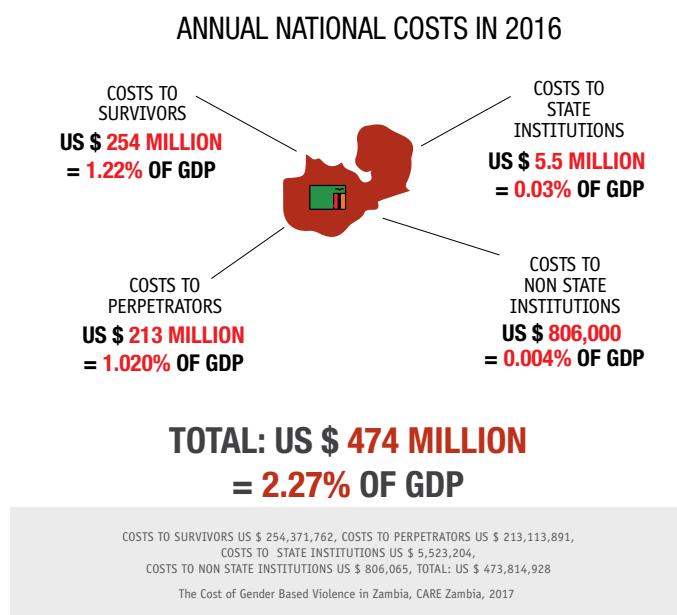
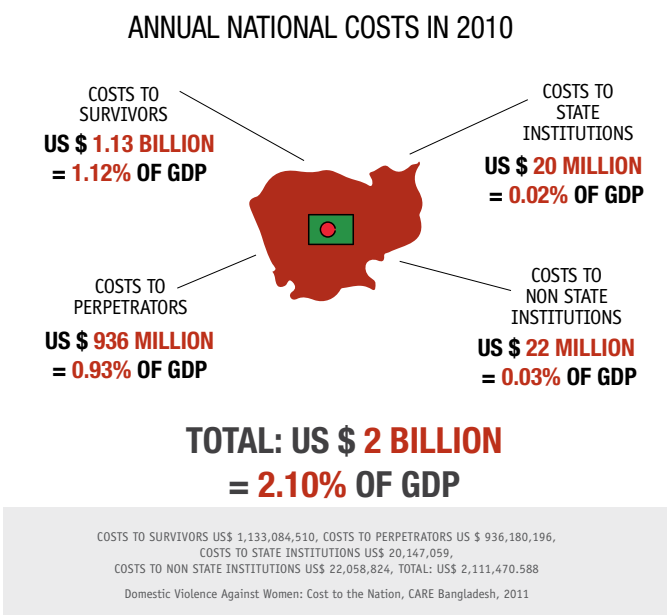
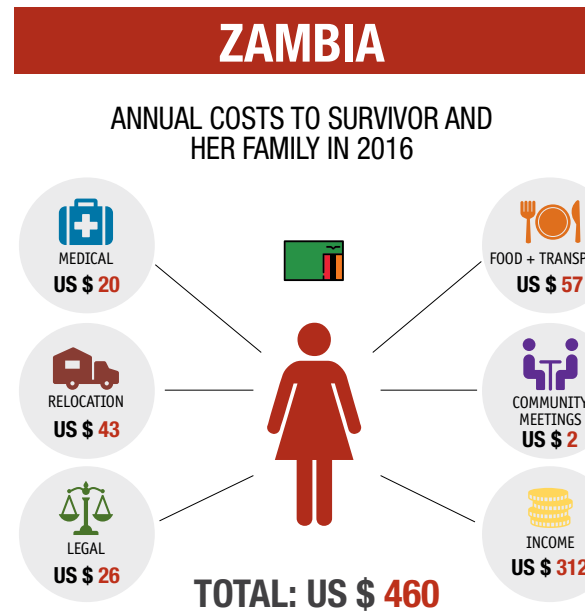
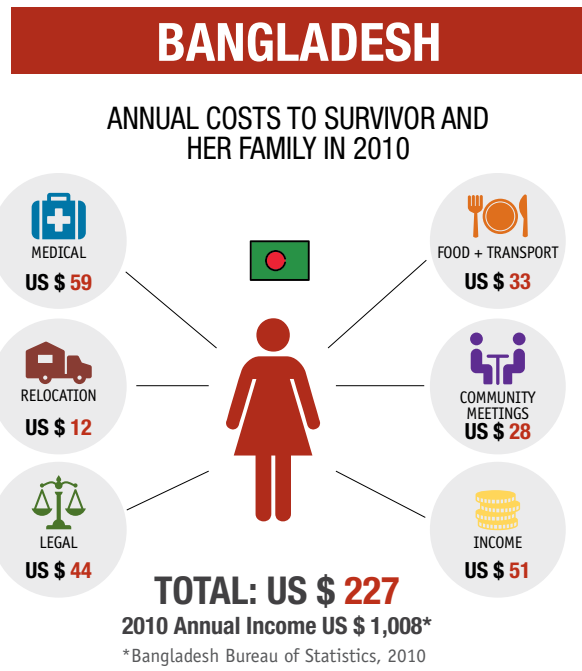
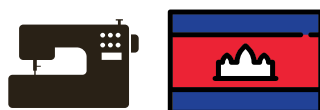


FIGURE 3: Bangladesh costs to survivor and state

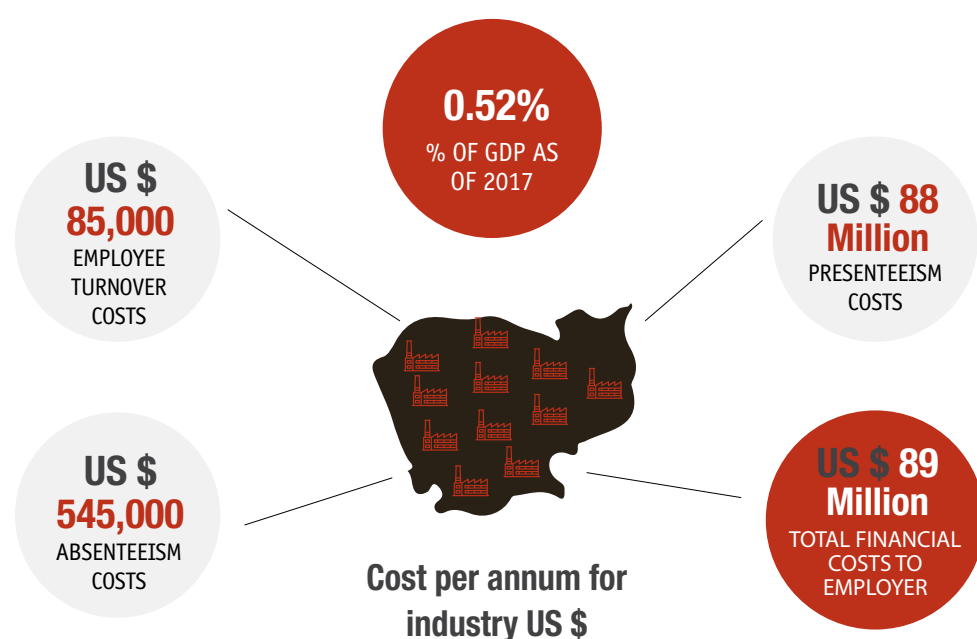
FIGURE 4: Zambia costs to survivor and state

Some costing studies have also looked at costs of violence against women in the workplace. A study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Hoel et al., 2001, p.5) showed that losses from stress and violence in the workplace were estimated at 1% to 3.5% of GDP. This study broadly defined violence in the workplace to include psychological violence, such as sexual harassment and bullying.

In cooperation with the Garment Manufacturing Association of Cambodia (GMAC), CARE published a nationally representative study in 2017 that found that nearly one in three female garment factory workers had been sexually harassed in the past 12 months, at a cost of US\$89 million per year (see Figure 5). Costs analysed included those relating to turnover, absenteeism and presenteeism.¹⁴ This figure is equivalent to 0.52% of Cambodia's GDP (CARE Australia, 2017, p.4). Businesses in Peru and Bolivia lose billions of dollars a year in lost productivity due to violence against women. In Peru, companies lose more than US\$6.7 billion a year – equivalent to 3.7% of GDP (Vara-Horna, 2013, p. 13). In Bolivia, companies lose nearly US\$2 billion a year, which is as much as 6.5% of GDP (Vara-Horna, 2015, p.14).



Summary of estimated costs incurred to employers in garment factories in Cambodia due to sexual harassment in the workplace, in 2017



Cost per annum for industry US \$
EMPLOYEE TURNOVER COSTS US \$ 85,184, ABSENTEEISM COSTS US \$ 545,000, PRESENTEEISM COSTS US \$ 88,112,511,
TOTAL FINANCIAL COSTS TO EMPLOYER US \$ 88,742,695

'I know I cannot quit': The Prevalence and Productivity Cost of Sexual Harassment to the Garment Industry,
CARE Australia, 2017

FIGURE 5: Estimated costs incurred by Cambodian garment factories.

¹⁴ 'Turnover costs' include "costs of workers leaving the factory due to sexual harassment, including time to fill a vacancy, training for new workers and other costs"; 'absenteeism' includes "costs of days missed from work due to sexual harassment"; and 'presenteeism' includes the "cost of days lost to productivity from working while not in a fully functional state of mind due to sexual harassment" (CARE Australia, 2017, p.4).

It is worth noting that 40-50% of women in European Union countries have also experienced unwanted sexual advances, physical contact or other forms of sexual harassment at their workplace. Small surveys in Asia-Pacific countries indicate that 30-40% of women workers report some form of harassment – verbal, physical or sexual ([UNDPI, 2011, p.2](#)). In a study in selected districts of Sri Lanka, 16% of women who experienced intimate partner violence had to take days off work and 32% had to seek medical attention for injuries ([de Mel et al., 2013, p.58](#)).

Key messages

Costs of violence against women are incurred by survivors and their families, perpetrators and their families, state and non-state institutions.

Women who survive the violence often bear the brunt of costs – as much as six times the cost to the state; governments bear the bulk of the costs of service provision; private sector bears significant costs in terms of lost productivity.

Costs are both direct and indirect. Direct costs include those associated with seeking medical and legal support and refuge for survivors. Indirect costs include opportunity costs, such as income/productivity lost due to the violence.

Losses from stress and sexual harassment in the workplace are estimated at 1% to 3.5% of GDP over a range of countries.



Cost of solutions

Democratic Republic Of The Congo. ©Jake Lyell

Preventing violence is a critical and cost-effective investment. For instance, the Violence against Women Act 1994 in the United States has resulted in an estimated net benefit of US\$16.4 billion, including US\$14.8 billion in averted victims' costs ([Rosenberg et al., 2006, p.764](#)).

TAKING ACTION TO PREVENT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Preventing violence against women refers to a range of actions that address the root causes of this violence. Violence against women stems from deeply ingrained gender inequalities and social norms that perpetuate men's power over women and girls and tolerance for violence. Some actions to prevent violence against women include:

- Education for young people in schools and awareness-raising among communities, including for men and boys, to challenge harmful gender stereotypes and social norms, promoting positive, equal and respectful relationships;
- Making homes, workplaces and public spaces accessible, respectful and safer for women;
- Enacting and enforcing policies and legislation that embed gender equality and zero tolerance for violence against women;
- Media communications that challenge damaging gender stereotypes and promote positive alternatives.

There are several promising interventions around tackling violence against women, including prevention efforts. Some strategies adopted in low- and middle-income countries around intimate partner violence that are well supported by evidence include school-based programmes to address gender norms and attitudes. Others with emerging evidence include social marketing to modify social norms, screening and referral programmes ([Mercy et al, 2014, p.84 - 85](#)). Evidence reviews by What Works¹⁵ have highlighted varied approaches, such as mobilizing at individual and community levels to challenge social norms around violence ([Fulu & Kerr-Wilson, 2015](#)).

TAKING ACTION TO RESPOND TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Responding to violence against women means providing effective and sustainable support services for women who are survivors of violence. These include:

- Shelter and housing for victims and survivors of violence
- Legal services/aid (subsidized or free)
- Medical services including psychosocial therapy and counselling and access to support groups
- Childcare support
- Job training and/or other forms of economic support for survivors.

A joint programme by UN agencies recently launched an *Essential services package for women and girls subject to violence*. This outlines service delivery guidelines for the core elements of essential services to be provided by the health, social services, police and justice sectors, and identifies guidelines for coordination to ensure the delivery of high-quality services ([UNFPA, UN Women, UNODC, & WHO, 2015](#)).

There have also been some efforts to cost interventions that address violence against women, with some governments and donors adopting an approach of gender-responsive budgeting. A gender-responsive budget can be used to assess how public resources are allocated and spent on advancing gender equality, which includes prevention of and response to violence against women ([UN Women, 2013, p.3](#)). In prioritizing violence prevention, policymakers can mitigate some of the secondary repercussions as well, such as mental illness and chronic disease.



DRC. ©Jake Lyell



Cambodia. ©Charles Fox/CARE



Guatemala. ©deBode/CARE

15 What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls Programme is a global programme from the UK Department for International Development. See www.whatworks.co.za

GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING (GRB)

“Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) is a tool used in mainstreaming a gender focus into government budgets, the planning, execution and reporting (budget cycle), as well as other steps in between. It analyses the budgeting process from a gender perspective. It requires full knowledge of what VAW services are planned and available, as reflected in current legislation or national action plans; full knowledge of the national budgeting process, including processes of decentralization; and engages non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with expertise in VAW and which receive public funding. A GRB approach to costing can identify gaps and weaknesses in VAW-related services or policies... for better management of specialized and general public and private services that survivors might access. In sum, it requires knowledge at different levels of intervention, from the legislative and police levels to budgeting and services.” ([UN Women, 2013, p.9](#))

Some countries have attempted to cost a package of essential support services to prevent and respond to violence against women, which gives us some understanding of the scale of investment required. Lao PDR and Timor-Leste both experience widespread violence: prevalence rates in Timor-Leste are higher than global averages – nearly 59% of women report that they have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate or non-intimate partner since the age of 15, and just over 46% in the past 12 months ([UNFPA, 2017, p.2](#)). In Lao PDR, a 2015 national study of 3,000 women reported that almost one in three women have experienced physical, sexual or emotional abuse by a partner ([Duvvury et al., 2016, p.6](#)).

Yet the costs of intervention are relatively low. In Lao PDR, the cost to establish and operate a package of such services over a three-year timeframe is estimated at US\$13.5 million, or 0.25% of GDP; in Timor-Leste, this package of services would cost approximately US\$6 million over a three-year period or 0.31% of GDP. In the latter, this is less than 0.5% of the national budget based on current service utilization and just 1.9% of the combined budgets of the ministries tasked with providing these services ([Duvvury et al., 2016, p.13](#)). Compare this minimal investment to the widespread prevalence of violence in these countries – and the associated costs – as noted above.

The costs of interventions are relatively low when compared to the cost of violence. For example, in Uganda, implementing the provisions of the Domestic Violence Act of 2010 for both prevention and response was expected to cost just over US\$8 million¹⁶ over a period of three years, versus the cost of domestic violence, which was estimated at US\$30.7 million¹⁷ per year ([Kasirye, 2013, p.16-19](#)).¹⁸

16 The total cost to implement the DV Act of 2010 across a three-year period was UGX 21.43 billion. This was converted to US\$ using the exchange rate for 2012 of US\$1 = UGX 2,521

17 This annual cost of domestic violence in Uganda was estimated at UGX 77.5 billion which was converted to US\$ using the exchange rate above.

18 These estimated costs are for provision of the four key services under the DV Act: Raising awareness and preventing DV; developing standard procedures, guidelines and training manuals for DV duty bearers; strengthening the capacity of duty bearers; providing rehabilitation services through DV shelters. The annual cost of raising awareness makes up the bulk of the costs (58%), followed by establishment and running of DV shelters (34%).

Key messages

Preventing violence against women is cost-effective and by prioritizing prevention efforts, governments can mitigate secondary repercussions as well.

There are promising initiatives to prevent violence, including school-based programmes to address gender norms and attitudes, and mobilizing individuals and communities to challenge social norms.

Countries have taken different approaches to prioritize resources: some have used gender budgeting to assess how public resources are being allocated and spent on advancing gender equality. Other countries have costed a package of essential services.

The required investments are far less than the costs of violence, and minimal relative to the scale of the problem.



Using evidence for action – Experiences from CARE

Uganda. ©Jennifer Bose

CARE and partners conducted three costing studies in Bangladesh, Zambia and Cambodia. CARE sought to improve understanding of the financial impacts of violence against women, as part of broader programmes to tackle the problem. CARE has used these studies to advocate for greater resource commitments by governments and industry stakeholders to prevent and respond to this violence; to lobby for adoption of national legislation on violence against women, such as in Bangladesh; and as a means to discuss the issue with communities. Some of these best practices and results are discussed briefly below.

1. Building strategic partnerships

CARE helped build strategic partnerships, such as with women’s rights groups and industry bodies, both in conducting studies as well as in the resulting advocacy. This meant that the studies had greater acceptance from critical stakeholders who went on to use the findings in their own activism and advocacy. Some key partnerships included with women’s rights organizations in Bangladesh and Zambia.

Partnerships with the women’s rights movement were considered critical so that research on violence was done ethically and in alignment with feminist activism. In Bangladesh, women’s rights activists were on the advisory board for the CARE study and were involved from the design phase. In Zambia, the 2017 Cost of Violence study built on an earlier pilot study ([ZARD, 2014](#)) carried out with the Zambia Association for Research and Development, a leading research organization within the women’s movement in Zambia. Another leading women’s rights organization, Women and Law in Southern Africa – Zambia, was an additional partner in this study.

In Cambodia, the study on sexual harassment in garment factories engaged with the Garment Manufacturers Association of Cambodia (GMAC). This allowed a larger and more rigorous survey through GMAC's facilitation of access to 1,300 garment workers in the country, creating a more compelling evidence base.

2. Key outcomes of CARE costing studies

Bangladesh

- a) The findings are being used to push for implementation of the Domestic Violence (Prevention & Protection) Act 2010, alongside ongoing efforts of the women's movements in the country.
- b) There are ongoing advocacy efforts with lawyers and judges to use the costing study as a basis for calculating compensation for survivors of domestic violence.
- c) The social and economic costing components of the study were integrated into community discussions for group reflection on the costs and consequences of violence against women. During the final evaluation of the project, the participants reported that these discussions were particularly helpful in understanding violence and its costs in a way they had not previously considered.

Zambia

- a) The costing study is being used to advocate strongly for implementation of the Anti-Gender Based Violence Act 2011, and build a case for resource allocation through an Anti-GBV Fund, as per the Act. Women's rights groups in Zambia have also committed to developing a joint advocacy plan to urge governments and donors to increase funding for preventing and responding to violence against women.
- b) The study gained significant recognition and the Zambian president referred to the findings of the 2014 pilot study to argue for increased funds to address gender inequality.¹⁹



¹⁹ National Launch of the 16 Days of Activism against GBV by the President of Zambia, CARE Zambia Facebook Page, 24 November 2016 (available online [here](#)).

Cambodia

- a) The findings have been used to inform a new project, the STOP project, aimed at reducing sexual harassment of garment factory workers in Lao PDR, Vietnam, Myanmar and Cambodia. This includes the development, adaptation and rollout of a comprehensive sexual harassment prevention package for garment factories. The package in Cambodia includes a workplace sexual harassment policy, an implementation guide, and five multimedia training sessions, so that factories not only can respond to harassment, but can educate their employees so that harassment is prevented in the first place.²⁰
- b) The findings from the report have been shared with donors, civil society, the private sector and the International Trade Union Confederation campaign. This is part of an ongoing civil society and trade union initiative to urge adoption of a proposed ILO Convention on the Prevention of Violence and Harassment Against Women and Men in the World of Work.²¹

Key messages

CARE has conducted three studies to cost violence against women in Bangladesh, Zambia and Cambodia, with important advocacy and learning outcomes.

Findings have been used:

- **To lobby governments for increased resource allocation to address violence against women;**
- **To lobby for enactment and implementation of anti-violence against women legislation;**
- **In the rollout of prevention of sexual harassment packages in Cambodian garment factories;**
- **In advocacy for adoption of an ILO convention against workplace violence.**

Strategic partnerships with women's rights groups have been critical in gaining acceptance of the study results and for ensuring the use of the findings.

²⁰ This package is currently being implemented under CARE's Enhancing Women's Voice to Stop Sexual Harassment (STOP) project, which will now be scaled up across Cambodia, Myanmar, Lao PDR and Vietnam.

²¹ ILO Convention on the Prevention of Violence and Harassment Against Women and Men in the World of Work (available online [here](#)).



Recommendations

Jordan. ©deBode/CARE

Given the scale and prevalence of the problem globally, and the related social and economic costs, it is critical that governments, donors and the private sector work actively and collaboratively to end violence against women. This report makes the following recommendations:



Governments

1. Commit or increase resources for relevant government institutions to prevent and respond to violence against women, and task these relevant institutions with monitoring and reporting on their progress.
2. Invest in regular surveys on intimate partner violence and its economic impacts, and enhance capacity of national statistics offices to integrate questions relating to intimate partner violence during household surveys.
3. Commit resources and collaborate with women-led grassroots movements and organizations to scale up their best practices in preventing violence against women.
4. Support the proposed ILO Convention on the Prevention of Violence and Harassment Against Women and Men in the World of Work, which is pushing for strong international standards and policies to address workplace violence.



Private sector

1. Ensure workplaces are compliant with relevant conventions and legislation regarding violence against women.
2. Proactively introduce and implement policies to prevent all forms of sexual harassment (including verbal, emotional, physical and sexual) in the workplace.
3. Ensure that advertisements do not perpetuate harmful gender norms that objectify women or reinforce stereotypes.
4. Support the proposed ILO Convention on the Prevention of Violence and Harassment Against Women and Men in the World of Work, which is pushing for strong international standards and policies to address workplace violence.



Donors

1. Ensure targeted, multi-year funds for prevention of violence against women, funding projects that are rights-based, survivor-centred and based on feminist principles. Also, promote accountability and learning on these issues.
2. Support women's movements, women's rights organizations and research organizations in their advocacy and programming on gender-based violence, including costing studies where these have not been carried out.
3. Commit to costing and addressing the issue of violence against women in both global north and global south countries, given the global nature of this violence.
4. Ensure greater accountability and transparency of spending, by applying the OECD Development Assistance Committee Gender Equality Policy Marker²² introduced in April 2016. This would enable better tracking of donor investments in prevention of violence against women, by country, for future years.

²² Handbook on the OECD – DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker (Available online [here](#)).



Annex: Costing methods

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Costing violence against women is still an emerging area of research, and requires collection of sensitive information from women who have been victims of violence. The studies referenced in this brief – those conducted by CARE as well as others – have used different methods to determine the costs to survivors and their families, and to the public and private institutions that are working to prevent or respond to violence against women. Some of the studies draw directly from existing national level demographic, health and other surveys. Others have carried out a detailed analysis of previous costing studies to select figures based on the best methodological approaches, or conducted surveys and then extrapolated to the national level. Costs have primarily been measured over a 12-month period, providing the basis for an annual cost estimate. In some studies, the annual cost estimate has been converted to a percentage of GDP. For studies where this has not been done, we have calculated the percentage of GDP based on GDP figures and exchange rates at the time the data was collected for the study, and updated US\$ figures to 2017.

The studies include direct costs, including the provision of services and resources for survivors, such as crisis support, income support, health, medical, legal and judicial services; increased costs on businesses due to absenteeism, 'presenteeism'²³ (working while sick) and labour turnover; as well as lost earnings for women due to violence. Indirect costs are included in some of the studies, including pain, fear, and suffering incurred by women, girls and children living with violence. The Bolivia and Peru studies focus on costs to businesses, while the US study is limited to the costs of rape. For the EU, costs across the EU were extrapolated from the case of one member state (UK) with a solid costing exercise.

There are always limitations to attempts to carry out an economic costing of violence against women, such as the dangers of variables being left out due to insufficient or fragmented data, and the overestimating or underestimating of variables. What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls, a five-year programme by DFID, provides a more detailed discussion on best practices in costing methodologies.²⁴

23 "Presenteeism" is the ability to be present and in a fully functional state of mind.

24 Methodological Approaches for Estimating the Economic Costs of Violence Against Women and Girls, What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls (available online [here](#)).



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