

## **Some Insights on Policy Implications and Methodology of Quantitative Measurement of Domestic Violence**

**Luay SHABANEH**

**President, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics; E-mail:**

**[loay@pcbs.gov.ps](mailto:loay@pcbs.gov.ps)**

### **Abstract**

Domestic violence refers to all acts and intentions of a household member against another member for the purpose of causing harm, pain or abuse. Different terms have been used in the literature to indicate levels of violence such as abuse, assault, aggression; however, they mean the same with respect to causing harm. Most studies use the term *violence* to illustrate harm-causing. It is difficult to quantify domestic violence as most incidences go unreported. A number of authors discussed underreporting, analyzed its reasons and policy implications

There has been an excess demand recently on violence based official statistics. In recent years there have been many surveys on domestic violence and violence against women. In particular, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) conducted a Domestic Violence Survey in 2006. The survey targeted women, children and elderly and aimed to provide comprehensive and accurate statistics about domestic violence. The survey showed some 62% of ever married women were exposed to psychological violence, 23% exposed to physical violence, and 12% to sexual violence by husband. Furthermore, more than half of the households of the Palestinian society have been exposed to political abuse by Israeli forces. About 25% of unmarried females were exposed to physical violence compared with 53% exposed to psychological violence by one of the household members, and more than half of children have been exposed to violence. In addition some 6% of elderly people were exposed to physical violence and 18% were exposed to emotional abuse. But the survey showed on the other hand that some 28% of women give right to a husband punish his wife if she left the house without his permission, and 11% if she fails to prepare food appropriately. In addition, substantial proportion of the Palestinians do not classify parent's harm-causing against children as violence. An assessment of the Palestinian experience identified three main challenges to be addressed in measuring domestic violence; lack of sound methodology of qualitative measurement, under-reporting in quantitative measurements, and lack of common understanding at society and research levels with respect to violence related terms and concepts. The assessment indicated also the need to involve official statistics in measuring and monitoring domestic violence to quantify this phenomenon for policy intervention, and to combine quantitative and qualitative methods in the measurement and analysis to understand the insights and dynamics. Partnership with civil society stakeholders particularly those involved in anti-violence advocacy during planning, implementation and dissemination stages is quite important.

From methodological point of view, the Palestinian experience confirmed the importance of localizing international practices to develop a set of indicators for surveillance purposes, and localizing the terms and concepts according to local culture and circumstances. Involvement of specialists in violence measurement during the training stage of fieldworkers is vital, and the testing the methods and piloting the tools are extremely important. Finally A nationally accepted anti-violence strategy is key for influential policy intervention.

**Key words and phrases:** Official statistics, quantitative-qualitative methods, domestic violence, psychological-physical-sexual violence, emotional abuse.

## **1. Concept, Approach and Operational Aspect<sup>1</sup>**

### **1.1 Conceptual Framework**

Domestic violence refers to all acts and intentions of a household member against another member for the purpose of causing harm, pain or abuse. Different terms have been used in the literature to indicate levels of violence such as abuse, assault, aggression; however, they mean the same with respect to causing harm. Most studies use the term violence to illustrate harm-causing.

There is a distinct feature in international literature, including that of the discourse of the universal human rights, in dealing with violence against women. Such feature is inherent in their negligence of the structural economic factors as well as the political and social factors that enforce the relations of dominance over women and using violence against them. Moreover, colonialism is overlooked as a key factor affecting the aforementioned structural factors and consequently the situations of the women. The discourse of the international organizations on violence against women focuses on the overlapping between culture and politics as factors that work together on oppressing women and justifying use of violence against them. The focus of a research and the analysis would then be on the beliefs, social values, and patriarchal control structures that support and justify oppressing women and using violence against them. The failure to enact constitutional, legislative, and legal measures to eliminate discriminating against women is explained by being the outcome of the obstacles that are inherent in the values, traditions, and cultural "traditional" practices that empower inequality between both sexes; hence, justify violence against women.

The intervention of the international community in the issue of discrimination against the woman, like its intervention in other issues, comes in the form of monitoring based on periodic reports provided by the governments to the monitoring committees. The international community would then be able to try to impose adherence to international agreements through critical reports and exerting pressure by other countries and non-governmental organizations. The claim would be that the "benefits" the state that passes the test of "being civilized" would gain such as aid, relations, and external investment would be defined in accordance with the aforementioned indicators (democracy, human rights, and woman rights).

As for women themselves, the international community focuses on the reports that are submitted to it on violence and discrimination against women in these societies. Conferences, researches, and workshops on human and civil rights, the democracy of the authority, and human rights violations are considered the most appropriate methods of dealing with these issues. The maximum achievement of such methods is the amendment of the laws. Such amendments would be among other bargains and political interests beyond those of organizing conferences and workshops. Some researchers argued the way the international community deals with the issues of violence and discrimination against the woman which is based on an inclination for reform and modernism that demands from countries to replace

---

<sup>1</sup> The review is a summary of quoted from an analytical study published by PCBS on the *Domestic Violence in the Palestinian Territory* prepared by Institute for Women's Studies/ Birzeit University.

culture and traditional practices with laws. The international human rights discourse has been unable to deal with the fact that the material, political, social, and economic situations that lead to subjugating women, discriminating against them, and using violence against them stems from being part of a universal capitalist system based on dominating and exploiting marginalized and vulnerable categories including women. Therefore, discriminating against the woman is institutionalized in the social system of modernism and its various institutions. The high rate of violence against women especially in the United States shows that there is discrimination against the woman. For instance, one-third of American women have been subjected to physical and sexual violence by close people including husbands and partners though the effective laws criminalize violence against women<sup>2</sup>.

## 1.2 Approaches

There is an argumentation among feminists and feminists' institutions on the appropriateness of the discourse of the universal human rights and its sub-conventions. The argumentation is concerning dealing with discrimination and violence against women and the reform approach of such discourse and the way it deals with the basic issues that lead to oppressing women and using violence against them, which makes its capacity and seriousness of dealing with women subjugation questionable. Many feminists criticize the universal human rights discourse of general impartiality that fails to address gender, ethnical, and cultural differences. The discourse is also criticized for failure to address the power relations that cause not only subjugating women but also subjugating many groups of people on class, national, and ethnic basis.

Some developing countries have laws protecting women from violence and discrimination. The governments of such countries carry out awareness campaigns on issues related to violence against women; however, the use of violence against women in these countries continues especially at rural areas. This continuation of violence is explained by liberal feminists by culture and family patriarchy without noticing the economic and social structural problems resulting from engaging these countries in the universal capitalist system where rural areas in southern countries remain the weakest before the changes that happen in order to serve universal capitalism and the population of these countries pay the price. The populations lose their economic activities and have to adapt to the economic pressure and destructive effects of globalization on sufficient economy as well as the violence of the capitalist country against them without paying attention to the crisis caused by introducing specific forms of modernism into these societies.

In the Palestine for example, the literature on domestic violence perceives such violence as deeply rooted in the society as a method of patriarchal domination and that the Palestinian society is patriarchal. The discrimination between men and women is the basic element of men violence against women. Dealing with the occupation as an indirect source of violence against women is represented in speaking of lack of independent judicial system and lack of police force due to obstacles placed by the occupation. Other views say that the violence of the occupation against Palestinians makes men take out their anger and frustration on women. In fact, some researchers such as Holt and Peteet argue that violence against Palestinian women is based on the fact that when a husband, a brother, or a father are unable to contain the anger, humiliation, and frustration resulting from the occupation, they take it out on women. Though this argument is repeated in literature about violence against women, such

---

<sup>2</sup> Domestic Violence is a Serious, Widespread Social Problem in America: The Facts” [December 2006]  
<http://www.endabuse.org/resources/facts/>

literature does not refer to in depth study that links between the occupation and violence. However, the focus is on the individuals' psychology to explain and understand violence in Palestine. Moreover, violence against women is explained through abstracts such as culture and patriarchy in a manner that assumes one general definition for each concept regardless of the historic and social context where they exist and obtain their main features.

The criticism of the generality and impartiality of the human rights discourse; and the discourse of the liberal feminists on violence against women and demanding taking the differences between women and their contexts and concerns into consideration does not mean ignoring the violence women are subjected to in their societies. It means; however, that defining such violence, the method of research, determining its causes, the factors that assumingly lead to it, women experiencing it, and the way it is dealt with must stem from the experiments of these women within their societies with their special circumstances. These must be linked to other oppressions women are subjected to but are not considered by the human rights discourse either by blaming culture and religion of the societies for discrimination and violence against the woman.

### **1.3 Operational Aspects**

Operationally, it is difficult to quantify domestic violence as most incidences go unreported. A number of authors (*Cantos et al (1994)*, *Bachman et al (1995)*, *Kishor and Johnson (2005)*, *Koenig et al (2003)* and *Shabaneh (2006)*) discussed underreporting, analyzed its reasons and policy implications. Some national statistical offices define domestic violence as a sensitive issue in which respondents do not intend to report about particularly in the more conservative societies; therefore NGOs were the main player in reporting about such issues in these societies. But this reporting was mainly based on qualitative research focused on specific case studies rather than quantifying the size of the phenomenon at the national level.

Recent years witnessed an excess demand on official statistics about domestic violence. Accordingly, there have been many surveys on domestic violence and violence against women in a number of countries. In particular, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) conducted a Domestic Violence Survey between December 18, 2005 and January 18, 2006, on a sample of 4,212 households. The main objective of this survey was to explore the nature, forms and acts of violence, and to identify the socioeconomic profile for individuals exposed to violence, in addition to illustrating any connection between the political violence and practicing different acts of domestic violence. The survey aimed also at exploring the demographic and social characteristics of the individuals who are practicing violence and the methods that a Palestinian woman uses to counter domestic violence against her. The survey targeted women, children and elderly.

The survey showed that 61.7% of ever married women in the Palestinian Territory were exposed to psychological violence, 23.3% exposed to physical violence, and 10.9% exposed to sexual violence at least once by husband during the year 2005. About 58.4% of ever married women in the Palestinian Territory with secondary education and more were exposed to psychological violence, 19.1% exposed to physical violence, and 8.5% exposed to sexual violence at least once by the husband during the year 2005. More than 61% of ever married women with secondary education and more were exposed to psychological violence, 28.2% exposed to physical violence, and 13.4% exposed to sexual violence at least once by the husband during the period preceding 2005, and 27.9% of women agree that a husband could

punish his wife in case she left the house without asking for that. Some 10.5% of women agree that a husband could punish his wife in case she fails to prepare the food on time.

The survey showed that 25.0% of unmarried females (aged 18 and over) in the Palestinian Territory were exposed to physical violence compared with 52.7% exposed to psychological violence at least once by one of the household members during the year 2005, and 29.9% of unmarried females (aged 18 and over) in the Palestinian Territory were exposed to physical violence compared with 52.6% exposed to psychological violence at least once by one of the household members during the period preceding 2005.

Mothers stated that more than half (51.6%) of their children have been exposed to violence during the year 2005. About 5.7% of elderly people (65 years and over) were exposed to physical Violence, and 17.5% of elderly people (65 years and over) were exposed to emotional.

## **2. Role of Official Statistics**

In an assessment of existing statistics on domestic violence, one can observe that, like most of human rights related statistics, there is lack of comprehensive studies about domestic violence based on survey data. Administrative records about domestic violence are incomplete and mostly not reliable due to under reporting and lack of harmonized definitions, classifications and coding system as well as the lack of sound scientific ground for rational debate about domestic violence<sup>3</sup>.

On the other hand, policy intervention requires quantification of the phenomenon, therefore most of statistical reporting by advocacy NGOs was unable to satisfy the policy intervention requirement. NGOs usually focus on case studies and qualitative measurement, while governmental intervention requires the size of the phenomenon, its boundaries, geographic distribution, age-sex distribution and by other selected variables. Henceforth, the role of national statistical offices (NSOs) become more vital to overpass the quantitative measurement informational gap. NSOs usually have the technical capacity and the international concepts, definitions and classification inventory which is a pillar for establishing sound statistics on domestic violence that is coherent with the statistical system. It is therefore, quite important that NSO re-visit the boundaries of official statistics to make sure that domestic violence and violence against women are included and it would be recommended to locate such statistics under the umbrella of gender statistics in accordance with the deliberations and recommendations of the 40<sup>th</sup> united nations statistics commission held in March 2009.

At the international level, and while some initiatives has been taken by a number of international and regional bodies to create an agreed upon statistical framework on violence against women, there is still an argument that there is no consensus on the list of indicators, their definitions and computational guidelines. Therefore, it is vital that international agencies to put more efforts to create such an internationally or regionally accepted operational statistical framework. It is also needed to disseminate good practices and national

---

<sup>3</sup> Suesser and. Suarez de Miguel, 2008 in Asher et al (eds).

experiences to provoke and promote quantitative measurement of domestic violence and violence against women.

Methodological guidelines form an important step to promote the quantitative measurement of domestic violence. A number of NSOs expressed their will to go ahead with the quantitative measurement of gender-based violence, but they lack the know-how and the sound methodological guidelines. Therefore, another task that is facing us is to promote such guidelines and disseminating them worldwide in order to promote the role of official statistics.

### **3. Assessment of Quantitative Measurement**

Sample surveys is the most widely used method to provide quantitative measurement for domestic violence. This method compile data using selected population using certain sampling techniques; it is therefore subjected to two main sources of errors: sampling errors (statistical errors) and non-statistical-errors. Sampling errors are those resulting from the design of the sample. Non-statistical errors may occur at any stage of the project; during compiling or entry of data. The errors can be summarized in non-response errors, response errors (respondent), interview errors (interviewer), and data entry errors. Modified sampling frames and selecting “enough” sample units are used to minimize sampling errors and training is the most common technique that is employed to minimize non statistical errors. While domestic violence shares other social related surveys with the mentioned two sources of errors; we present additional dimensions and specificities that should be taken to account:

#### **3.1 Lack of operational definitions**

Operational definitions is an obstacle; in the Palestinian experience for example there was lack of national experience in the country for resource people in operational definitions for violence, gender-based violence; violence against children and women, as well as abuse against elderly people. In most of the cases the national experiences are either academic or experimental but very rarely able to mobilize experience with scientific background that is able to adapt and customize operational definitions for other regional and international experiences.

#### **3.2 Sampling frames**

Most of sample surveys use regular household sampling frame to draw the samples for domestic and gender-based violence, but the practical experience assume the need to particular sampling frames that could produce enough observations that allows to deep analysis. In the Palestinian experience for example, while the total sample units was enough to conduct the survey, the number of completed interviews with selected population was not enough to conduct rigorous analysis such as factor analysis and latent class analysis about specific topics such as incest violence, violence from parents against unmarried women, and the physical abuse against elderly people by type of locality.

#### **3.3 Sensitivity of questions**

One of the challenges that faced the Palestinian experience is the level of sensitivity of certain questions about domestic violence. In fact there is lack of inventory of questions that could be classified as sensitive. During the survey piloting and designing, the technical staff

was trying to identify the cutoff point between the details needed for specific issues and willingness to interviewees to respond for sensitive questions in a quantitative manner.

### **3.4 Lack of internationally accepted modules**

Another challenge is the lack of internationally agreed modules or toolbox that could be employed at the national level. Studying the literature was one of the time consuming steps in the Palestinian experience due to the shortage of well documented and tested tools.

### **3.5 Complexity of problems**

The designing of the survey is also another challenge taking into consideration policy requirements that oblige the researcher to answer the core questions related to any phenomenon including domestic violence; these questions are related to the size, distribution, reasons, and mechanisms of interaction with other factors and/or problems. Therefore, violence as an outcome of multidimensional accumulated behavioral process requires a complex process to analyze the problem and identify its factors, which makes the designing of survey tool not obvious straightforward process.

Therefore, while quantitative measurement is a must for policy interventions. Its methodological insights are complex and requires a well tested adaptable toolbox so that NSOs could utilize and employ in the national experiences to promote the measurement and monitoring of domestic violence. This applies to the minimum list of indicators, inventory of questions, sampling techniques, methods of analysis and dissemination. It is also important to compile the qualitative and quantitative approaches to draw a comprehensive picture at the country level about domestic violence.

## **4. Lessons Learned**

It is obvious that there is a need to quantify violence phenomenon. Our experience confirmed the need to combine quantitative and qualitative methods in the measurement and analysis of domestic violence and gender-based violence. Following a summary of lessons learned from the Palestinian experience at different levels.

### **4-1 Approach**

Violence as a multidimensional community issue, therefore, any measurement and monitoring process should include all stakeholders. In particular, a steering committee or advisory body could be a wise step due to the for the following considerations:

- Enhancing community participation through civil society organization related to gender based violence.
- Enhancing and strengthen collaboration and sharing experience of expertise of different institutions regarding violence issues.
- Including urgent needs of involved institutions in dealing with violence victims.
- Integrating approach of official stat with civil society maximizes the utilization
- Integrating national-international dimensions in a participatory approach is important.
- Involving policy maker from the very beginning is extremely important
- Localization of terms and concepts according to local culture and circumstances

### **4-2 Methods**

There is no universal tool or method that could be utilized, therefore careful review for the international literature is quite important to accumulate on. But national customization is a need to respond to national needs and absorb national cultural, social and religious specificities. It is important to identify the cutoff point between the research innovation thinking and the requirement of producing official statistics which should rely on robust examined and scientifically supported methods. Very well examination of tools and methods including the pre-testing and piloting is extremely important. Attention should be made also training; in particular substantive training should be undertaken by specialists in violence measurement.

### **4-3 Policy Intervention**

Policy intervention requires three main consideration that should be made; the first is to involve policy makers at the early beginning of designing the tool for quantitative measurement. In statistical terms, policy makers should be involved at the inception phase of designing and consultation. It is important to listen carefully to policy makers on their concerns in the stage of developing the indicators. Secondly, it is wise to consult policy makers during analysis stage to explore modalities to implement the recommendations, and thirdly, wide dissemination in the form of communication strategy that targets different users with different dissemination modality is quite important in order to create a situation where the policy intervention becomes a response to national need that has been expressed by different actors.

## **5. Conclusions and Recommendations**

Official statistics should cover domestic violence particularly gender-based violence. International practices should be localized, and a set of indicators should be developed for surveillance purposes. There is a need to train junior researchers on the methods of analyzing gender-based violence. It is important also to use finding in drawing policies, intervention and making legislations. Civil society NGOs should share their community experience contribute in enriching indicators and concepts. They should also provide commitment and support of national efforts and avoid duplication of work. It is important to continue coordination and communication to conduct studies and survey. Strengthening inter-sectoral collaboration with governmental concerned institutions and combine quantitative and qualitative outcomes in their intervention is a wise step. UN agencies should continue to mobilize technical and financial support to collect data to monitor gender-based violence. They should also support and provide specialized training to upgrade the capacity in the know-how and analysis of domestic violence data. In particular, UN agencies should assist in analyzing and disseminating results for policy purposes.

Donor community should provide financial support to strengthen capacities of statistical offices to include domestic violence within the official statistics system according to the international standards. It should encourage coordinated initiatives between civil society and statistical offices for measurement and analysis of domestic violence statistics. Availing continuous funds for continuity of covering gender-based violence area for purpose of monitoring and interventions.

At the substantive level, the Palestinian experience indicated a number of important issues that we pointed out in the following:



- It is important to conduct in depth qualitative research on women to introduce a definition for violence so that the definition would be the result of the special context of women and the way they see violence in its different types. This would allow defining the different dimensions of violence and the indicators assessing these dimensions. It is also important to assess the cultural and religious factors that are relevant to using violence as a disciplinary method. Then study the relationship of these views concerning the customs and traditions and the phenomenon of violence. Statistical surveys should examine the economic situation of the household and its relation with domestic violence. The economic situation could be an effective factor in domestic violence. It is necessary to examine the intersection between the factors of education, work, and economy.
- Since enacting legislations in any given society without changing the economic, political, social, and cultural structures of the society is not sufficient to cause real change, this confirms that enacting laws to limit violence against women and punishing the perpetrators of violence is just an initial step that may lose its significance unless the laws are implemented.
- It is important to conduct surveys that targets husbands and wives of the same households to see how close are the statement on practicing violent conducts and being subjected to violent conducts, and to spread awareness programs in the official audio, visual, and written media on violence against children. The programs would be aimed at parents and their children. The violent children programs must be censored.

## References

1. Al Hawati, Mahasin, *Domestic Violence: Characteristics and Treatment*, International Migration Office, Ministry of Expatriates Affairs
2. Al Masri, Ibraheem, *Violence against the Woman*, an analytical study, Palestinian Working Woman Society, 2000
3. Aranki, Sana, *Domestic Violence against the Woman*, a seminar during Amnesty International campaign to end violence against the woman.
4. Asher Jana, Banks David and Scheuren Fritz, 2008. *Statistical Methods for Human Rights*. Sringer New York
5. Bachman, Rone; Coker, Ann L, 1995. Police Involvement in Domestic Violence: The Interactive Effects of Victim Injury, Offender's History of Violence, and Race. *Violence and Victims*, Vol 10, No. 2, 1995 , pp. 91-106(16).
6. Domestic Violence is a Serious, Widespread Social Problem in America: The Facts” [December 2006] <http://www.endabuse.org/resources/facts/>
7. Kishor S, and Johnson K, 2004. Profiling domestic violence: a multi-country study. POPLINE Document Number: 273450
8. Koenig et al, 2003. Domestic violence in rural Uganda: evidence from a community–based study. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, Print ISSN 0042-9686.
9. Madi, Yusif, *A Study on the Violence Phenomenon in the Society, School, and Household*, Central Bureau of Statistics and Natural Resources, 2004
10. Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2006. *Domestic Violence in the Palestinian Territory. Analytical Study*. Ramallah – Palestine.
11. Palestinian Working Woman Society, *Violence against the Woman in the Palestinian Society*, Sep. 2005

12. Shabaneh, L, 2006. Country Experience on the Role of Official Statistics in Collecting and Disseminating Gender-Based and Domestic Violence Statistics, UNFPA *symposium on Gender-Based violence, Brussels-2006*.