

Transforming social institutions to prevent violence against women and girls and improve development outcomes

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Key messages

- **Reducing violence against women matters for development. Adolescent girls are twice as likely as boys to be infected with HIV in countries where there is no domestic violence law, compared to having similar rates in countries where there is a specific law.**
- **Laws alone will not reduce violence against women. Discriminatory attitudes are significantly related to the prevalence of domestic violence, even when taking into account the existence and quality of domestic violence laws.**
- **Governments should introduce a combination of measures to change discriminatory social norms including implementation and enforcement of laws; public awareness and community mobilisation programmes; and economic support for women and incentives.**

Violence against women has received growing global attention in recent months following high-profile and severe incidents in India and South Africa. The widespread and sustained public protests that have followed in both countries and beyond indicate that violence against women is an issue that been invisible on the agenda of decision makers for too long and more efforts are needed. While violence against women is not a new problem, this renewed attention has sparked a global conversation about how to create a world where women and girls in every country can live without the fear of violence. As the United Nations Secretary-General has said: 'Violence against women and girls makes its hideous imprint on every continent, country and culture'. As such, the 2013 United Nations Commission on the Status of Women focus on the prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls is a timely opportunity to reflect on the nature and extent of violence against women and what actions policy makers can take to stop violence from happening in the first place.

A major challenge for developing effective solutions to violence against women has been the absence of data and evidence about the nature and implications of the problem. This issues paper draws on the OECD Development Centre's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), a cross-country measure of discriminatory laws, norms and practices, to shed light on several dimensions of violence against women. First, the analysis finds that while countries are increasingly introducing laws, stark gaps in legal protection remain in many countries. Second, despite progress on laws, attitudes are a significant barrier to change. The SIGI data shows that attitudes accepting domestic violence are strongly related to the prevalence of domestic violence, even when taking into account the existence and quality of laws on domestic violence. Third, violence against women is linked to development outcomes such as HIV and child mortality. As such, there is a strong rationale for concerted action. Governments should introduce a combination of measures including the implementation and enforcement of strong laws, public awareness, community mobilisation programmes, economic support for women and incentives.



This issues paper begins with an overview of the SIGI data on violence against women setting out regional patterns, changes in laws and the relationship between attitudes and prevalence of violence. The second section explores how violence against women is related to development outcomes such as HIV and child mortality. The final section provides an overview of policy recommendations to transform discriminatory social institutions to prevent violence against women and girls.

Global perspectives on how to prevent violence against women

Wikigender.org, the OECD Development Centre's crowdsourcing platform on gender equality, hosted an online discussion on "Transforming social norms to prevent violence against women and girls" in February 2013. The discussion was organised by Wikigender, [Breakthrough, End Violence Against Women](#) (EVAW UK), Partners for Prevention (P4P), [Womankind Worldwide](#) and the [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland](#). The purpose of this online discussion was to bring together a range of perspectives and 'on-the-ground' experience on how we can transform social norms to prevent violence against women.

With 70 interventions from around the world, participants in this public consultation overwhelmingly agreed that tackling underlying social norms to prevent violence against women is a top priority, while pointing out the challenges and opportunities. The main messages from the discussion include:

- The media plays a role in perpetuating negative attitudes, but can be harnessed as a powerful tool for change;
- Defining the role of men and boys in challenging violence and shifting attitudes can be a very effective solution;
- Education and working with young people should be at the core of a prevention strategy;
- Laws prohibiting violence against women are insufficient, inadequate, not respected or poorly enforced but change is possible at the community level;
- Community level change can happen by targeting discriminatory cultural and religious practices;
- Ensuring women's economic empowerment is an essential prerequisite in the fight against domestic violence or other forms of violence;
- The need for greater cooperation between all stakeholders to tackle violence against women and girls is essential; and
- Improving data and evidence is key to fostering progress in this area.

For more information on this and other Wikigender online discussions, please visit www.wikigender.org

How do discriminatory social institutions relate to violence against women?

While typical measures of gender inequality focus on areas such as employment and education, the SIGI is unique in capturing discriminatory social institutions such as early marriage, discriminatory inheritance practices, violence against women, son preference, restricted access to public space and restricted access to land and credit. Social institutions are defined as formal and informal laws, social norms and practices that shape or restrict the decisions, choices and behaviours of groups, communities and individuals. *Discriminatory social institutions* are defined as those that restrict or exclude women and girls and consequently limit their access to opportunities, resources and power (OECD Development Centre, 2012). The literature on the causes of violence against women identifies strong social norms, gender stereotypes and discrimination against women as core factors (Heise, 2011; Hagemann-White, 2010). Given the role of social norms in contributing to violence against women, the concept of discriminatory social institutions and the SIGI holds relevance (Table 1).

What is the SIGI?

The SIGI is made up of 14 variables grouped into five sub-indices: Discriminatory Family Code, Restricted Physical Integrity, Son Bias, Restricted Resources and Entitlements and Restricted Civil Liberties (Figure 1). The SIGI provides data for over 100 non-OECD countries. The most relevant sub-index for the topic of violence against women is the Restricted Physical Integrity, which captures social institutions that limit and restrict women’s control over their own bodies. The sub-index is made up of three variables: Violence against Women (comprising of legal, attitudinal and prevalence components), Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and Reproductive Integrity. The Early Marriage variable, which captures forced marriages, and the Missing Women variable, which captures female foeticide are also relevant for the theme of violence against women.

Figure 1. Composition of SIGI

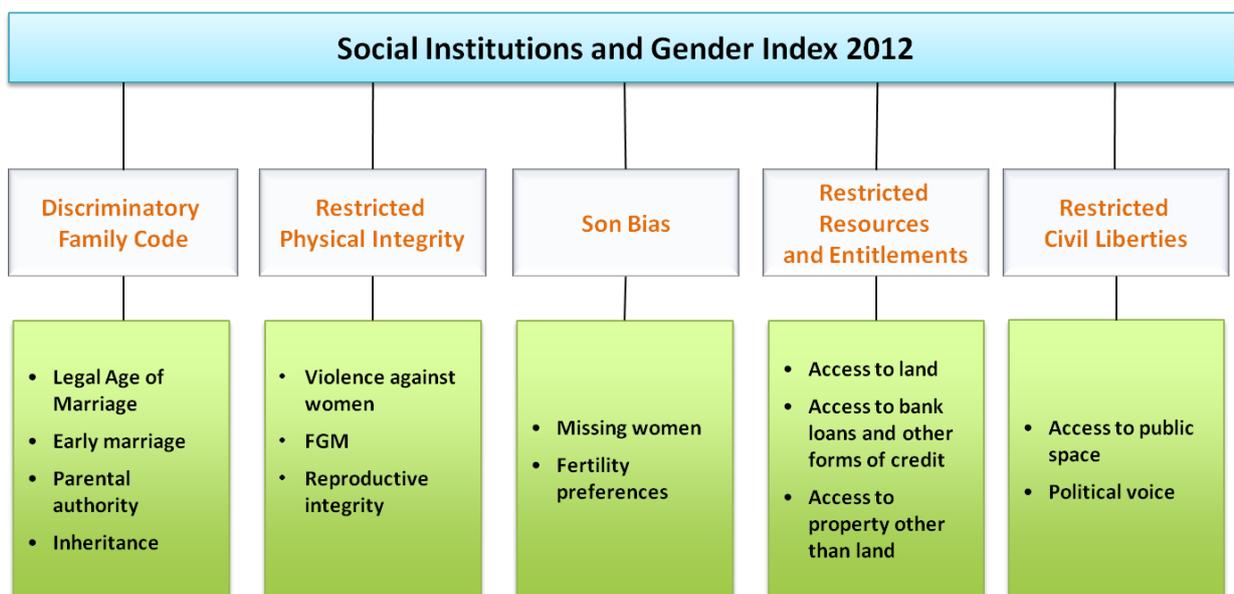




Table 1: Examples of social norms related to violence against women and relevant SIGI dimensions

Examples of social norms that contribute to violence against women (Heise, 2011)	Related sub-index of the SIGI (Figure 1)
A man is superior to women and has a right to assert power	Discriminatory Family Code, Restricted Physical Integrity
A man has a right to physically discipline a woman for 'incorrect' behaviour	Restricted Physical Integrity, Restricted Civil Liberties
A man is the head of the family	Discriminatory Family Code
Girls are worth less than boys	Son Bias
Sexual dominance is a marker of masculinity	Restricted Physical Integrity
Women should never refuse sex or sex is a man's right in marriage	Restricted Physical Integrity
Divorce is shameful	Discriminatory Family Code

What are the regional patterns for Restricted Physical Integrity?

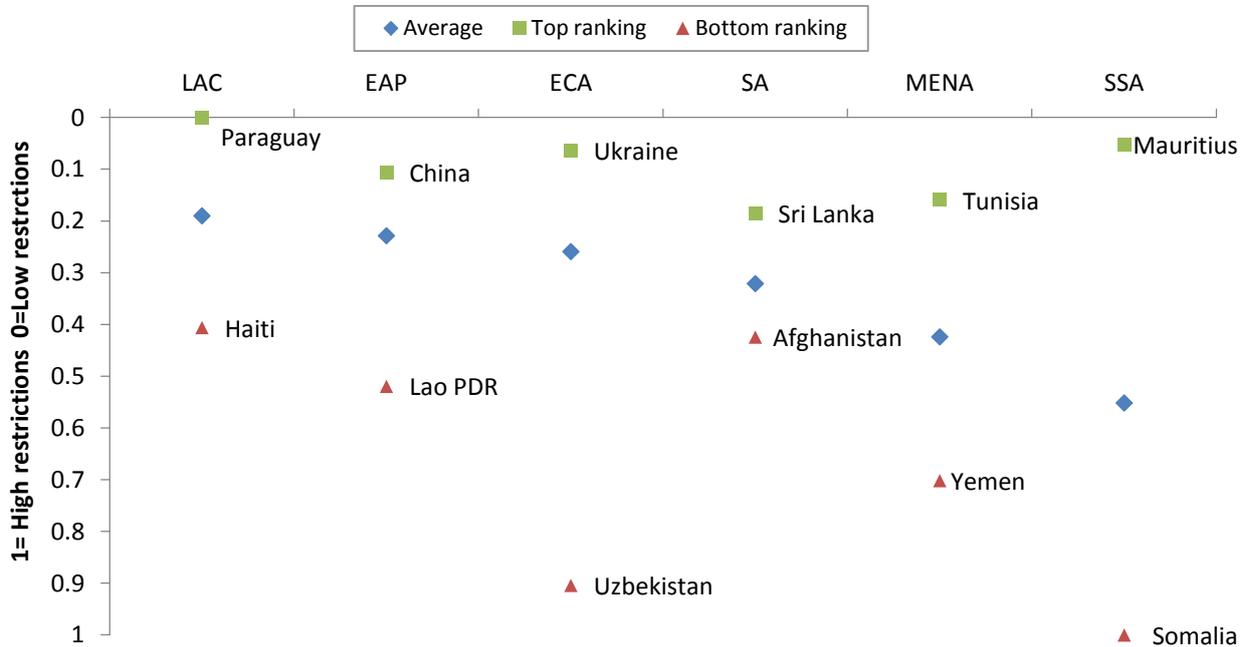
The SIGI data shows there are differences between and within regions in Restricted Physical Integrity (Figure 2). Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) shows the highest level of discrimination in this area, followed by Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Both regions have countries which perform relatively well such as Mauritius and Tunisia. However countries such as Yemen, Somalia and Mali are amongst the most discriminatory. Bottom-ranking countries for the Restricted Physical Integrity sub-index are most commonly without specific laws to tackle violence against women, have high prevalence of FGM and a high proportion of women with an unmet need for family planning. For example, Yemen has no legislation in place to combat domestic violence and the rape law does not recognise spousal rape. Women's reproductive integrity is also restricted with nearly 40% of women in Yemen reporting an unmet need for family planning. Similarly, Somalia has no laws addressing domestic violence, spousal rape or sexual harassment. Attitudes that normalise violence are also deeply ingrained, with close to 76% of women in Somalia believing that domestic violence is justified in certain circumstances.

East Asia and the Pacific (EAP), Europe and Central Asia (ECA) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are the regions with the least restrictions on women's physical integrity, although there is great heterogeneity within these regions. Paraguay, a top ranking country, has specific legislation in place to criminalise rape (including spousal rape), domestic violence and sexual harassment, although implementation and awareness remain a challenge. Further, the most recent survey data indicates that 19% of women in Paraguay report experiencing domestic violence in their lifetime, compared to an average of 34% for all SIGI countries where data is available. Mauritius, the top-ranking country in Sub-Saharan Africa, has fewer restrictions on women's reproductive integrity, with only 4% of women reporting an unmet need for family planning, compared to the average of 19% for all countries with data in the SIGI.



Figure 2: There is regional variation in women’s physical integrity

SIGI 2012 Restricted Physical Integrity sub-index score (0= Low restrictions 1= High restrictions), by regional average, maximum and minimum.



Source: 2012 OECD Gender Institutions and Development Database

What are recent trends in laws tackling violence against women?

In recent years, governments have increasingly introduced laws to combat violence against women. The SIGI measures the *existence and quality of laws* to address sexual harassment, rape and domestic violence as a proxy of social norms related to violence against women. Countries receive a score of zero (low discrimination) if there is a specific law in place with no reported problems of implementation. A score of 1 (high discrimination) is given for countries where there is no law in place. Figure 3 shows SIGI data on violence against women laws for 2009 and 2012. The overall trend is that all regions have improved laws, however no country or region has a perfect score, indicating that the implementation of laws remains a challenge.

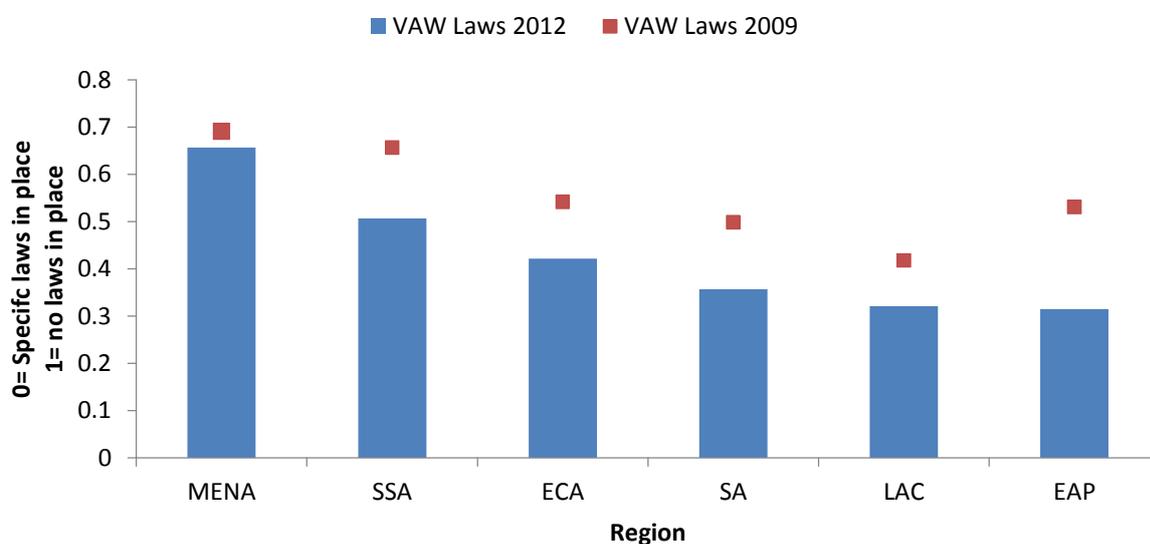
In 2012, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region had the worst level of legal protection against violence against women, also showing the least improvement from 2009. Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) was in a similar position to MENA in 2009 but has shown greater improvement, although the region is the second lowest ranked after MENA. Rwanda is one example where a new law has been introduced. The Law on the Prevention, Protection, and Punishment of Any Gender-Based Violence is Rwanda’s first comprehensive legislation on domestic violence. Despite progress in laws to tackle violence against women, in Sub-Saharan Africa, 12 countries remain without domestic violence laws.



Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and East Asia and the Pacific (EAP) regions had the best scores for 2012, with EAP showing a marked improvement from 2009 to 2012. This can be attributed to an improvement in violence against women laws in countries such as Cambodia, China, Fiji and Viet Nam. LAC has also made some notable advances, for example Argentina introducing a comprehensive law on violence against women and Jamaica improved rape laws. South Asia (SA) and Europe and Central Asia (ECA) also show improvement. Examples of legal reform in these regions include Azerbaijan, where a new domestic violence law has been introduced, and Pakistan, where two new sexual harassment laws have been introduced.

Figure 3: Every region has improved rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment laws, but gaps in protection remain

Scores for SIGI 2012 and 2009 violence against women (average score of laws on sexual harassment, domestic violence and sexual harassment) variables (0=specific laws, 1=no laws), by regional average.



Source: 2012 OECD Gender Institutions and Development Database



How are attitudes and prevalence of domestic violence linked?

Attitudes that normalise violence against women remain a persistent challenge, despite the improvement in laws. The 2012 SIGI includes an indicator of attitudes towards domestic violence, measured by the percentage of women who believe that domestic violence is justified under at least one of the following circumstances: going out without telling the husband, neglecting the children, arguing with the husband, refusing sex and burning the food. While data for women and men on attitudes would provide a more complete picture of attitudes, more data is available for women. Nevertheless, as women's perceptions are likely to be influenced by local norms, this data provides a good indication of the level of acceptance of domestic violence in a society.

For the countries scored in the 2012 SIGI, on average around 1 in 2 women believe domestic violence is justified in certain circumstances. Breaking the results down by region:

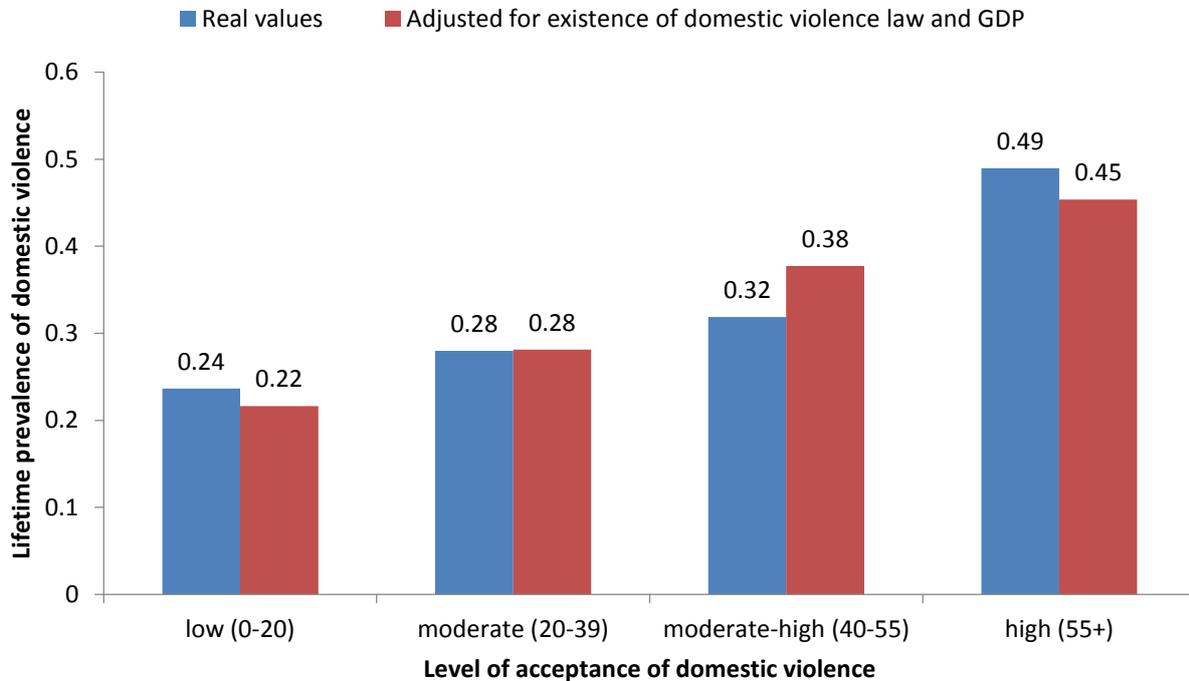
- MENA has the most discriminatory attitudes, with an average of 60% of women believing that domestic violence is justified in certain circumstances.
- SSA follows closely with an average of 57%.
- LAC has the least discriminatory attitudes, with an average of 12%, with the limitation that data is available for only eight countries in the region.

The literature on violence against women identifies social norms and attitudes that accept violence as normal or justified as a central part of the "social ecology" of violence against women (Heise, 2011). The SIGI data shows that discriminatory attitudes are significantly related to the prevalence of domestic violence. The average prevalence of domestic violence in countries where there is a high acceptance of domestic violence is more than double the average of countries where there is a low acceptance of domestic violence. The relationship remains strong and significant even when taking into account the existence and quality of domestic violence laws and country income level, signaling that laws alone will not reduce violence against women. As such, while laws are a necessary first step and foundation for combating violence against women, a greater focus on attitudes is needed to achieve a change in the level of violence.



Figure 4. There is a higher prevalence of domestic violence in countries where domestic violence is more accepted.

Real and predicted values of SIGI 2012 variable on prevalence of domestic violence (percentage of women who have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner at some time in their life), by SIGI 2012 variable on attitudes towards domestic violence (percentage of women who agree that a husband/partner is justified in beating his wife/partner under certain circumstances), controlling for GDP and the SIGI variable on domestic violence laws.



Note: The R-squared of the regression is 0.4640. Regression results available upon request.
Source: 2012 OECD Gender Institutions and Development Database

Why does violence against women matter for development outcomes?

There is clear evidence that gender equality is an important driver of economic growth and development (OECD, 2012; Duflo, 2012; World Bank, 2011). Previous OECD Development Centre analysis based on the SIGI has found a relationship between discriminatory social institutions and development outcomes such as child nutrition, maternal mortality, primary school attainment and girls' education (OECD Development Centre 2010; OECD Development Centre, 2012). The following analysis examines the relationship between violence against women and selected development indicators: HIV prevalence and child mortality. The analysis is not intended to be exhaustive, but to show the connections between violence against women and some indicators of development.



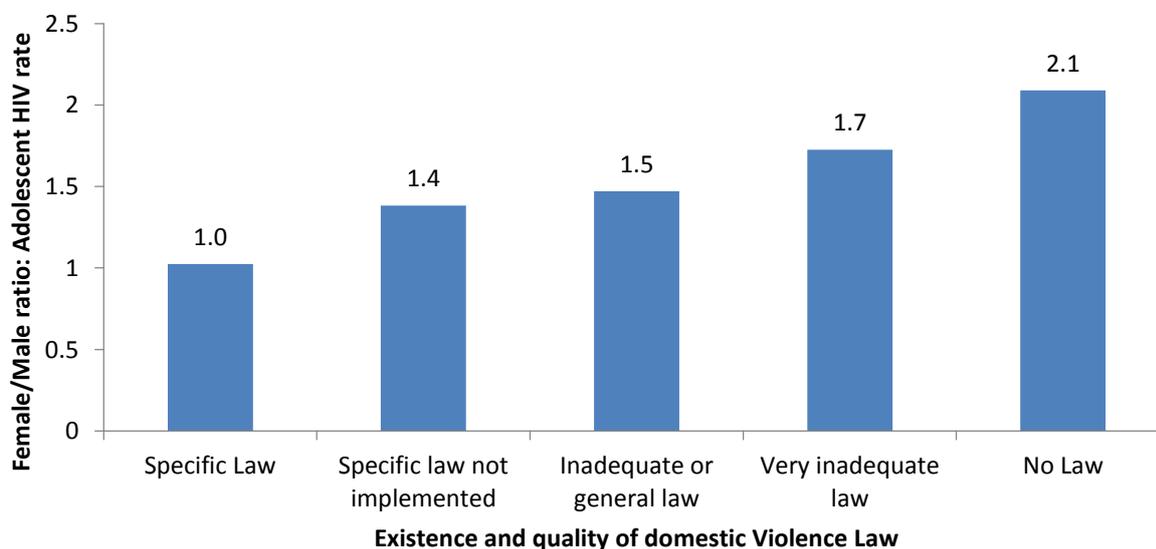
Violence against women and HIV

HIV remains a significant global public health challenge. Millenium Development Goal (MDG) 6 aims to combat HIV, with a target of halting and reversing the spread of HIV by 2015. Yet, in 2011 around 2.5 million people became newly infected, and 1.7 million died of AIDS, including 230 000 children (UNDP 2012). There is evidence of the relationship between gender-based violence, women’s limited sexual agency and increased HIV rates amongst women. Violence against women facilitates the spread of HIV as women are more likely to become infected through forced sex and women in violent relationships may not be able to negotiate safe sex. A study from South Africa found that abusive men are more likely than other men to impose risky sexual behaviors, such as unprotected intercourse, on their partners (Dunkel *et al.* 2004). Further, population-based studies in Botswana and Swaziland have found that women’s lack of control over sexual decision-making, including the decision of whether or not to use condoms, is a key factor influencing their vulnerability to HIV (Physicians for Human Rights, 2007). At the same time, research indicates that being HIV positive makes women more vulnerable to violence in the household.

Power dynamics in relationships related to age can also make adolescent girls more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, compared to adolescent boys. In Southern Africa, adolescent women are 2 to 3 times more likely to be infected than males of the same age. Examining the relationship between the SIGI indicator on domestic violence laws and the female/male ratio of adolescent HIV prevalence shows that adolescent girls are twice as likely to be infected with HIV in countries where there is no domestic violence law (Figure 5) compared to countries where there is a specific law. A similar pattern can be observed with the SIGI variable on attitudes towards domestic violence and the Restricted Physical Integrity sub-index. Interventions tackling violence against women are therefore an important part of the response to HIV.

Figure 5: Girls are more vulnerable to HIV in countries where there is no domestic violence law

Female/male ratio of HIV prevalence (aged 15-24), by SIGI 2012 variable on domestic violence laws (0=specific law, 1=no law).



Sources: 2012 OECD Gender Institutions and Development Database, World Bank World Development Indicators (2011 data)



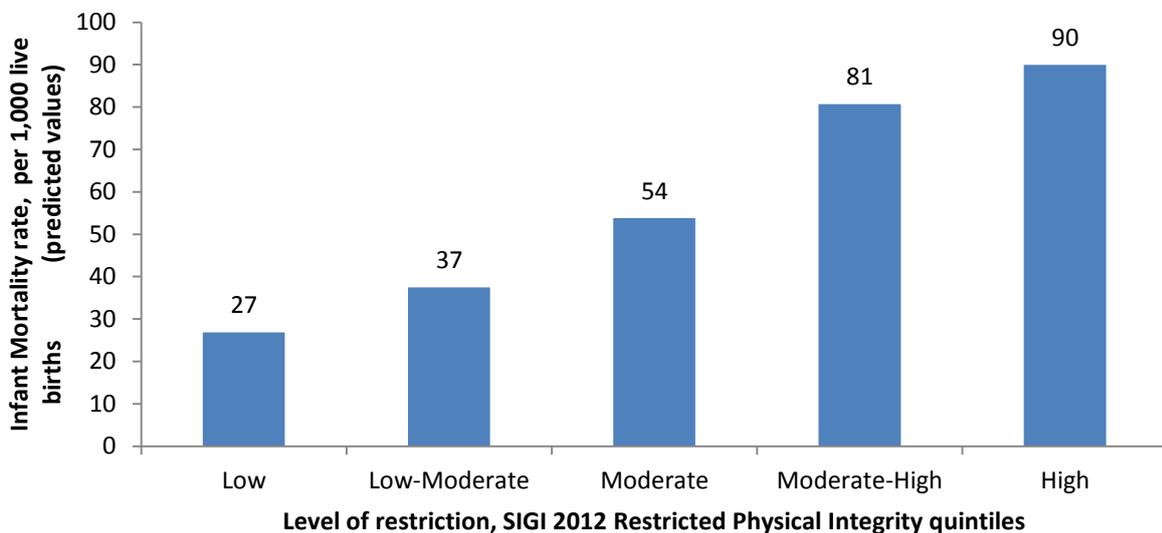
Violence against women and child mortality

Improving child health outcomes is a cornerstone of the current MDGs framework. While many countries are on-track to meet the targets on this goal, UNICEF estimates that 19,000 children under five were dying every day in 2011. Several studies have demonstrated the link between aspects of women’s empowerment, child health and mortality. Hossain et al. (2007) found that women’s enhanced autonomy and authority (the two dimensions of women’s status used in the study) significantly reduced post-neonatal mortality and child mortality respectively. Similarly, Bhagowalia et al. (2012) found that there is a significant relationship between child stunting (the measure of child nutrition used in the study) and attitudes towards domestic violence, maternal height, maternal education and age at first marriage. A study in Nepal also found a strong association between women’s land ownership and improved child health (Allendorf, 2007).

The SIGI data shows a positive and significant relationship between women’s physical integrity and child mortality. Countries with high levels of restrictions on women’s physical integrity also have high levels of infant mortality, even when controlling for the fertility rate, SIGI Son Bias sub-index scoreⁱ, country income level and urbanisation. Figure 6 shows that countries with high levels of restrictions on women’s physical integrity (measured by Violence Against Women, Female Genital Mutilation and Reproductive Integrity variables) have an average infant mortality rate more than three times the rate compared to countries with low levels of restrictions. This can be explained by violence reducing women’s decision-making power and access to resources, thus preventing them from investing in the health and care of their children. Reducing violence against women therefore also has positive implications for child health and well-being.

Figure 6: There are higher child mortality rates in countries where women’s physical integrity is highly restricted

Predicted values of Infant Mortality rates, by 2012 Restricted Physical Integrity sub-index quintiles. Controlling for country income level, urbanisation, fertility rate and 2012 Son Bias sub-index value



Sources: 2012 OECD Gender Institutions and Development Database, World Bank World Development Indicators (2010 data)
Note: The R-squared of the regression is 0.81. Regression results available upon request.



What policies are needed to transform social norms to prevent violence against women?

Multiple and intersecting factors contribute to violence and as such, a multi-faceted approach is required. However, shifting social norms regarding the acceptability of violence and broader gender stereotypes is critical. While there are limited evaluations of interventions tackling violence against women, the following three policy approaches emerge from the literature and the Development Centre's recent Wikigender online discussion as particularly promising:

1. Implementation and enforcement of laws;
2. Education, community mobilisation and awareness-raising; and
3. Economic support for women and incentives (both economic and non-economic).

Implementation and enforcement of laws

Legal reform, including the harmonisation of laws to ensure equality before the law for women and men and specific laws to criminalise violence against women is a critical first step for changing discriminatory social norms and practices. Laws, along with social norms, provide a set of standards by which behaviours and practices are considered acceptable and unacceptable in a society. While legal reform is a necessary first step in tackling discrimination, it is not sufficient to achieve the objectives of gender equality without proper mechanisms for enforcement and steps to improve women's access to the judicial system. There is also a great need for gender sensitisation of the legal systems and practitioners, including judges, to promote greater gender justice, especially within the family courts system.

Promising examples:

- In 2010, **Azerbaijan** adopted the Law on prevention of Domestic Violence. The law defines domestic violence broadly, provides for court orders and legal assistance, and also sets out measures to prevent domestic violence.
- The **Philippines** Rape Victim Assistance and Protection Act of 1998 establishes rape crisis centers in every province and municipality to provide support and legal assistance for rape survivors. It also provides for government to train law enforcement officers, public prosecutors, lawyers and other personnel associated with legal cases on gender sensitivity and legal management of rape cases.
- In 2007, **Venezuela** enacted a law prohibiting rape, spousal rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment. The law not only includes includes punishment and prosecution, but also requires that the authorities implement a programme to raise awareness and change attitudes. Special Courts for Violence against Women were created to improve women's access to justice.



Education, community mobilisation and awareness-raising

Education, community mobilisation and awareness-raising to change attitudes, norms and stereotypes have shown to be effective for reducing violence against women. Through localised approaches in schools, workplaces or communities, mobilisation or awareness raising programmes can tackle myths or assumptions about violence and establish social norms that do not accept violence as the norm. Large scale media campaigns or ‘edu-tainment’ can also reach broad audiences with messages challenging violence. Community mobilisation and awareness raising programmes play a particularly important role in contexts where enforcement of gender inequality laws has proved particularly challenging as a result of deeply engrained social norms and practices (Jones *et al.*, 2010).

Promising examples:

- Promundo and partners implemented a programme called H/M consisting of group education and youth-led campaigns in public schools (reaching middle school age youth) in two states in **Brazil** (Rio de Janeiro state and Bahia). Reaching more than 2100 teachers and 5000 students, evaluation results show an improvement in knowledge and attitudes regarding gender equality and violence against women.
- Bell Bajao!, launched in **India** in 2008 by Breakthrough, is a campaign that calls on men and boys to take a stand against domestic violence. The campaign seeks to reduce domestic violence and the stigma and discrimination faced by women living with HIV/AIDS, and to highlight the role that men and boys can play in reducing violence. Evaluations show that Bell Bajao! has influenced public discussion, increased knowledge and changed individual and community attitudes towards domestic violence and reached more than 130 million people.
- Implemented by the **Ugandan** women’s NGO, Raising Voices, the SASA! project (Start, Awareness, Support, Action) is a community-mobilisation project designed to transform gender relations and power dynamics as a way to address HIV and violence against women. Activities are targeted to women, men, cultural and religious leaders, local officials, police and health-care providers in local communities to bring about changes in social norms through local activism, media, use of communication materials, training, and advocacy.



Economic support for women and incentives

Improving women's economic status has been found in some cases to be a promising approach for reducing violence against women (Heise, 2011). Specifically, women's economic empowerment can improve women's decision-making power in the household (Duflo, 2012). While current evidence suggests that microfinance programmes or cash transfer programmes alone may not always reduce gender-based violence, when paired with empowerment and educational strategies, such programmes can be effective.

Promising examples:

- The Alola Foundation and Oxfam in **East Timor** provide practical support for the economic empowerment of women to enable rural women's groups to set up income-generating cooperatives. The village-based workshops include a discussion of violence and discrimination experienced by women and then help women identify income-generating strategies to reduce their economic dependence on men.
- The IMAGE programme in **South Africa** combines group-based microfinance with a 12-month gender and HIV training curriculum delivered to women at fortnightly loan repayment meetings. The evaluation found that the intervention led to women having greater autonomy in decision-making and a 55% reduction in physical and/or sexual violence in the previous 12 months. The intervention is a joint effort between Small Enterprise Foundation (SEF), the School of Public Health, University of the Witwatersrand, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Anglo-Platinum Mines.

Conclusion

While countries are improving laws to combat violence against women, a greater focus on shifting attitudes is needed. This is important not only for improving the lives of women and girls, but also because violence against women is related to development outcomes. Violence against women is a deep-rooted and complex phenomenon that requires a sustained focus from governments, donors, international organisations, civil society and the research community.

Looking forward, a more investment is needed on evaluating programmes to create stronger evidence of what works to prevent and reduce violence against women. Importantly, there is a need improve the quality and coverage of data, particularly at a sub-national level, on all forms of violence and attitudes to enable better monitoring of change over time.



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ⁱ There is also a significant and negative relationship with the Son Bias sub-index which can be explained by the SIGI's two measures of son preference (Missing Women and Fertility Preferences). Fertility Preferences (measured by share of boys as the last child) is significant and negatively associated with child mortality but Missing Women is not significant. In countries with a higher share of boys as the last child (high son preference) it is likely that parents are investing more care and resources into sons, thus implying a lower infant mortality rate.