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## Measurement and observation of gender-based violence and conflict-related violence in developing countries

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# DIALOGUE

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## Focus:

Measurement and  
observation of gender-  
based violence and  
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## Focus:

# Measurement and observation of gender-based violence and conflict-related violence in developing countries: summary of the first GDRI-Sud MOV workshop

Although the importance of combating gender-based violence and conflict-related violence is stressed by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and SDG 5: Gender Equality), the measurement and observation of this violence raises methodological and ethical questions, especially in the Southern countries. This DIALogue presents a summary of the first International Research Group workshop on Measuring and Observing Violence (GDRI-Sud MOV) held on 10 and 11 March 2020. The purpose of this GDRI workshop spearheaded by Olivia Bertelli is to develop new tools to collect data on the subject, since existing surveys such as the Demographic Health Surveys (DHS) are incapable of capturing the complexity of the phenomenon. The workshop was held with some 15 researchers, statisticians and development practitioners from Europe, Mali, Peru and the Democratic Republic of Congo to share their different experiences and draw up a work plan for the project's four-year timeframe.

## Presentations

The workshop presented seven different approaches and instruments.<sup>1</sup>

**Philip Verwimp** (Université Libre de Bruxelles) presented the survey module developed by the Households in Conflict Network (HiCN), the International Security and Development Center (ISDC) and the World Bank entitled the *Conflict Exposure Module*.

This module identifies the effects of conflicts on household welfare by adjusting standard survey modules (LSMS, DHS or similar) or including a

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<sup>1</sup> The presentations are available at: <https://dial.ird.fr/conferences-et-seminaires/conferences-scientifiques/workshop-mesurer-et-observer-les-violences-de-genre-et-de-conflit-dans-les-pays-en-voie-de-developpement>

specific module on conflict exposure. The module has already been used in Burundi.

**Arouna Sougane** (Malian National Statistics Institute – INSTAT) presented the Malian context followed by the Governance, Peace and Security (GPS) modules developed by DIAL researchers and applied by INSTAT. These modules contain questions on human rights, discrimination, and experience and perceptions of conflict and violence. They have been administered in Mali every year since 2014.

After describing the North Kivu context (massive population displacements, rape as a weapon of war, etc.), **Jacques Batenga** (HEAL Africa) discussed some of his NGO's interventions. HEAL Africa's main purpose is to care for victims of gender-based violence (GBV) relating to the ongoing conflict. The NGO also steers networks of women who are victims of violence to reduce their stigmatisation and build their capacity for resilience and sets up single-sex discussion groups in schools to gather the stories of child victims and eyewitnesses. It also conducts outreach work with religious and community leaders on violence issues, dialogue and conflict resolution.

**Susanne Alldén** (Linnaeus University) presented mechanisms based on a combination of surveys, discussion groups and semi-structured interviews with female GBV victims in South Kivu. These survey methods were set up by an international team of researchers monitoring programmes designed to empower and reintegrate victims. She pointed out, in particular, the importance of mixed methods and providing psychological support measures for interviewees and interviewers.

**Juan Leon** (GRADE) explained the findings of research conducted by the team of researchers at GRADE on violence against children in Peru. In addition to showing that violence against children is underestimated, if not totally overlooked by the standard surveys, this research suggests the existence of a link between GBV and child abuse: women who are victims of intimate partner violence are more likely to violently reprimand their children.

Impact evaluations also show that programmes to empower mothers (economically and within the household) improve the children's welfare and reduce intimate partner violence and child abuse.

**François Koné** (GREAT, Mali) presented a pilot quantitative survey conducted on 200 women in Mali developed in connection with the National Gender Policy. This tool is designed to analyse violence against women in the recent period (last twelve months) and since they were 15 years old. The questions concern episodes of physical, economic, administrative, sexual and mental abuse in and outside the home, the perpetrators and frequency of the abuse, triggers and perceived underlying causes of abuse, its impacts, the victim's reactions to the violence and the prevention strategies perceived as effective.

Lastly, **Nehara Feldman** (Université de Picardie Jules Verne) summed up her sociological research conducted on the subject of violence with members of a family from a village in Kayes Region, Mali. The region has strict social hierarchies and strict principles governing family organisation (patrilineality, patrilocality, distribution of tasks between women, etc.). The main mechanism perpetuating this social order is fear of repression for social transgressions in environments where violence is seen as a legitimate, routine control tool.

## Main lessons regarding the referral system, survey procedures and questionnaire content

### *Referral system*

A number of important elements emerge from these different experiences. First of all, great care needs to be taken when collecting this type of information to protect victims and earn their trust to speak out. However, the studies conducted in Peru and South Kivu show that these difficulties are not insurmountable. Operations have been conducted even in complicated contexts such as DRC.

Nevertheless, the set-up needs to be underpinned by a local and national network of victim and witness support structures. Assistance, for those who accept it, should be multidimensional. This does not imply solely psychological support. Assistance can also be legal, medical, socioeconomic and spiritual (as in the case of HEAL Africa's One Stop Centre in DRC). Services obviously need to be available to victims, but they should also be available to

eyewitnesses and the interviewers who collect the information. This is because data collection also needs to be conducted in such a way as to be able to help the work of local organisations with their support to victims and population outreach. Where such systems are in short supply, people need to be informed of their rights. To prevent interference in the social balances on the ground, this information could be provided to the community at large or in the form of information with respect to a survey question (on the local organisations available to help victims and witnesses of violence). Knowledge of each legal and social context is therefore key.

The networks surrounding these surveys are a significant asset: they facilitate upstream discussions ahead of questionnaire design. Discussions should be held with national experts and with representative groups of communities targeted by the violence in the form of qualitative interviews. These approaches are used to adjust question wording to local and national particularities.

It is important to give interviewers empathy interview training, as is conducted by HEAL Africa. Likewise, interviewers should be able to meet following each series of interviews to share their experiences in “debriefing groups”. A referral system should be available for all following each series of interviews. Setting up the surveys therefore calls for special training for interviewers to ensure compliance with the protocols and limit the risks of “re-traumatisation”. Older interviewers appear to find it easier to build trust. It is vital for GBV survey interviewers to be the same gender as interviewees. Similarly, it is preferable for conflict-related violence survey interviewers to be from the same regions/ethnic groups as the interviewees.

### *Survey procedures*

Another particularly crucial factor when collecting this type of data is to make clear the confidential nature of the interview – a key requirement irrespective of the type of survey.

Face-to-face interviews must be able to be conducted without other household members present. Although it may seem simpler to collect data at the

interviewee's home, it is sometimes preferable to collect data on neutral ground.

Using an existing survey mechanism makes not only savings on interviewer deployment costs, but also enables information on the social and economic context to be compared with information collected on the different types of violence. This is particularly interesting in the case of national surveys covering a representative sample of the population in that victims can be compared with the rest of the population. However, this implies compliance with the existing protocol, which cannot meet the optimal conditions for sensitive data collection. Likewise, collecting information in households on gender-related issues and intimate partner violence can be problematic due to the issue of trust and confidentiality.

Confidentiality and trust are factors that can seriously impact the response rate, as well as the reports of violence. Confidentiality can be respected more using survey methods other than the classic face-to-face interview. The use of tablets with ACASI software (Audio Computer-Assisted Self-Interviewing) enables interviewees to answer questions on their own with the help of audio and visual prompts. This limits interference with interviewers and therefore response biases. However, the use of this technique is only possible for questions with binary answers, since comprehension may otherwise be restricted by the interviewee's level of literacy. The list experiment technique prevents interviewers from focusing too long on painful subjects such as experience of violence. This technique obtains a violence prevalence rate in the sample that is potentially closer to reality than the rate measured by face-to-face interviews. However, this method cannot collect precise information on acts of violence.

Confidentiality can also take the form of coding responses to prevent a different interviewer from having knowledge of that information and collecting it again in a subsequent interview. Trust builds more naturally over time. Data collection on violence can therefore be used to best effect at the end of a survey.

## *Questionnaire content*

Wording questions in a roundabout general manner without addressing personal experiences head on can put the interviewee more at ease. To limit response biases, it is useful to start with questions on perceptions, norms and values before moving on to questions about experience.

For both gender-based violence and conflict-related violence, it is important to consider a broad spectrum of events, for example, including the indirect effects of events experienced such as economic loss in periods of conflict and covering events endured in adulthood, in the past and in childhood. Intimate partner violence is just one dimension, albeit important, of GBV. Economic and social violence, based on the hierarchies in place, and domestic violence generally (i.e. violence against children and between same-sex individuals) are also to be taken into consideration. These types of violence are likewise not restricted to the family, and can occur in the economic sphere, in the street and within the community.

Other prerequisites specific to surveys on conflict-related violence and GBV must be respected. In the case of surveys on conflict-related violence, it is inadvisable to refer to or explicitly ask for information on the perpetrators of the violence. However, perpetrators of GBV can be specified in order to identify the different types of violence (domestic or not, physical, sexual, economic, administrative or mental). Information on GBV cannot be collected from more than one member of a household due to the importance of confidentiality and to prevent the survey from becoming an aggravating factor in violence in households. However, it is important to collect information from both women and men in order to understand the economic and social drivers of violence. It is also sometimes easier for men to talk about certain existing violence, and vice versa. Surveys on conflict-related violence may include different members of a given household in order to observe any variations in perceptions and norms within the households.

It is generally simpler to identify the precise dates of conflict-related events on a long-term timescale. There is, however, the question of the feasibility of conducting such surveys of experiences before the end of the conflict.



Violence seen as legitimate and routine in societies, as is sometimes the case with GBV, is harder to identify accurately over a long-term period. It is sometimes preferable for these surveys to restrict questions to a relatively short reference period such as the last twelve months.

## *Outlook*

The workshop concluded with the presentation of the next steps for the International Research Group. A pilot questionnaire on GBV is due to be tested in Peru in 2020. There are plans to subsequently test the same tool, as well as a pilot questionnaire on conflict-related violence, in Mali in 2021 and DRC in 2022. These questionnaires will endeavour to broaden the spectrum of societal violence considered. A number of survey techniques will be tried and tested: the standard face-to-face technique, the ACASI method (Audio Computer-Assisted Self-Interviewing) and possibly the list experiment. Among the main challenges identified by the workshop in this regard are taking into account the constraints associated with the different countries and integrating the pilots into referral systems to provide support to victims and interviewers.

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