

‘the personal & public cost of domestic violence’ Conference

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I'm a researcher, mostly involved in researching on the subject of intimate partner violence, gender based violence, and particularly in the context of developing countries. So I bring a slightly different perspective to the conversation and I hope you'll find it useful. Often because we're so involved in the day to day struggles of meeting the needs of women who are experiencing violence, we forget that we've had a long journey and we've made significant progress. So I just want to take a moment to say we should all applaud ourselves for the progress that we've made, though we know that the journey is still extremely difficult and still a long one.

The important progress that we've made is that globally today 70 countries have legislation on domestic violence. It's not legislation that necessarily criminalises domestic violence but it is legislation that says societies do understand and accept that it is not okay, that violence is not acceptable. And it provides a certain amount of legal and civil and administrative reliefs to women. Almost all of these legislations have as an anchor or a fundamental element, Protection Orders. So we have this legislative framework, we have increasingly a recognition at the international global levels that violence is a fundamental human rights violation. But the problem is that we have focused so much of our energies on trying to get legislation, trying to get violence accepted as an international human rights violation that we haven't paid the same attention to ensuring that the right amount of resources are allocated to fund the services that are obligated under the different types of legislation that we have.

I think one of the important ways in which we can ramp up our efforts to actually translate commitment to end violence into concrete resources is having a more focused discussion on the private and public costs of violence- the costs of violence both the health consequences as well as the inter-generational consequences that Annie talked about but also at the level of economic and financial consequences of violence to families, to households, to communities and to the society overall.

I started this conversation almost 10 years ago. In 2001, we had a national survey on domestic violence in India, the first time we took the kind of rigorous empirical data on the prevalence of domestic violence in India. As part of that survey, we began to try to estimate what are the costs that are involved in domestic violence for the woman, in terms of getting treatment, as well as of her missing work, the impact on children missing school, etc. and

trying to quantify this into monetary costs. That very preliminary exercise showed us that violence resulted in a 25 - 30% loss in household income. In a poor country, among poor households, that is a significant cost. That cost can in fact undermine the government's efforts to eradicate poverty. Violence can drain household incomes.

I know at one level we all have a very fundamental distaste, to put it very frankly, for translating the enormous cost of violence into monetary terms – accepted. But in the context of resources getting constrained, of really difficult times when government leaders keep saying 'we have to make tough choices', I think we don't have an option but to engage in that conversation, to develop systematically robust estimates of the cost of violence to the economy. If you can demonstrate how significant are the costs then you can begin to say "look if you do not act, if you do not allocate sufficient resources to have effective responses that can begin to decrease let alone eliminate and that's a long, long journey, but to decrease violence you are in fact undermining your economic growth, you're economic sustainability".

I think it's extremely important to deepen our understanding of the cost of inaction. We know that the costs of violence are multiple and they're hidden and they're invisible. More and more research is beginning to establish the costs of health consequences and that's one form of costs that are important. We also are paying increasing attention to the inter-generational effects of violence, because we know that violence is a cycle. We've established, irrespective of cultural context, that experiencing or witnessing violence in childhood increases the likelihood that you will experience or perpetrate violence in adulthood.

But the economic impacts are much less understood. We have very little rigorous evidence to establish the impact that violence has on your labour force participation. Or whether labour force participation. We often talk about women's economic empowerment as a protective measure for the experience of violence, but we actually have very little evidence to show that the economic empowerment or workforce participation actually decreases the likelihood of violence. Some studies show that actually workforce participation increases the likelihood of violence. Why is that? Because women's workforce participation actually alters or disrupts gender relations and so leads to potentially increased violence. We don't have all of the data to really work through the variety of economic impacts that are possible due to violence but we do have some initial beginnings of data to begin to talk about some concrete outcomes that happen when women experience violence. We know that women who experience violence actually incur out-of-pocket expenditures. Women have to incur expenditure to go to the hospital, to buy medicines, to get treatment, to go to the police station, to go to the court, to go to the shelter, etc. So there are lots of costs that we can actually capture. We also know that violence does impact upon women's ability to participate in work, paid or unpaid work, and it impacts on their productivity. Violence then

can lead to a range of mental health consequences as well as physical health consequences that undermine your ability to work. We know that, and we can begin to calculate some of the costs due to that inability to work.

I want to give you some data in terms of estimates of these different economic costs that we know, and what's the extent of them, what's the magnitude. We did a couple of studies in Uganda, Morocco, Bangladesh and Vietnam and the first level of economic costs that we tried to estimate were the out-of-pocket expenditure for accessing services. We found that in Uganda, women who experience violence were spending the equivalent of 5 dollars per incident of violence which was almost three-quarters of their weekly income. So after an incident of violence, a significant proportion of income and this is particularly true for poor women, is spent on getting the minimum access to services. In Vietnam it was 30 dollars or 21% of the woman's monthly income. We did not think that these costs would be so high. There is this fear that by showing how expensive the services are the government will say this is too much, we can't afford to provide adequate services. But what we found was that the costs experienced and borne by women are significantly much more than the costs of any services. When we say these costs are borne by women then they have a ripple effect on the economy. If income is drained out of households that means it then has an impact on the demand within an economy and the demand within an economy has then an impact on the economic growth of an economy. In that sense, it was therefore very important to establish the costs at the level of the family and the household. In terms of lost income, what we found was that with an incident of violence both men and women missed work; women missed around 6.84 days in India and men missed 9 days. In Vietnam this was 5.5 days and 6.4 days. The monetary equivalent of missing work was around 13% of the woman's monthly income. In Vietnam, you had 21% lost because of the out-of-pocket expenditures and an additional 13% because she missed work. We also found that women were unable to do household work because of reduced wellbeing and reduced productivity and lost 2 days of work in Vietnam.

So what you begin to see is some significant economic costs are occurring at the level of the family. In terms of the level of the community, Walby's study which I think is frequently cited in England and Ireland, estimated that the loss of output due to violence was £2.7 billion, this was in 2004. In developing countries also we find that the loss of economic output is actually quite significant. In Vietnam, the productivity loss was equivalent to 1.71% of GDP. This is in a time when the economic growth rate we're talking about is increasing at .25% or .5% or less than 1%, that violence can result in a productivity loss of 1.71% is very significant. It is a figure that has really woken up policy makers in Vietnam. Trying to establish the economic effects of violence is actually very, very difficult, but we do have the beginnings of methodologies to estimate these costs. One of the big gaps in Ireland is that we don't have any kind of estimate of the economic costs of violence and I think it is actually extremely important in this particular context to try and develop some.

Because we have been in an economic crisis, what we have done is cut services, we've reduced our efforts to address violence. We can actually make a case to the government of 'you are shooting yourselves in the foot by cutting services' because the effect of violence is so significant in terms of its productivity impact. Productivity impact is the most critical element for sustainable economic recovery. This is an ideal time for service organisations to come together and agree and work out what are the economic consequences of violence. Then, you would have very powerful evidence with which to advocate with government.

So let me just quickly end with what I think are important interventions: one is women's economic empowerment still remains a fundamental intervention to help women who experience violence and that economic empowerment can act as a protective element in the experience of violence; effective legal response to ensure safety is also absolutely critical. And we need community support mechanisms for women experiencing violence and that is what all of you do but as Annie pointed out, the importance of coordination, of working together, of having actually effective referral systems. Across the globe, the one lacking intervention at ground level is to have effective referral. I look forward to your questions. Thank you.