The Economic Costs of Violence Against Women in the Developing World

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Chairman Kerry, Ranking Member Lugar and honorable members of the Committee, thank you for holding this hearing on such an important topic. Violence against women occurs in epidemic proportions in many countries around the world. It cuts across socioeconomic, religious, and ethnic groups, as well as geographic areas.[1] The United Nations estimates that one in three women around the world will be beaten, raped or otherwise abused during her lifetime.[2] One in four women will be physically or sexually abused while she is pregnant.[3] All over the world, women's organizations, and many men's organizations, are rallying around the issue of ending violence. Congress can take bold steps to help these organizations be more effective in their own internal programming and advocacy. On behalf of these women and men around the world, thank you for considering the steps that the United States can take to reduce violence against women – it is both the right thing to do and the smart thing to do.

I come to you today as president of the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). ICRW tackles the complexities of the world's most pressing problems — poverty, hunger and disease — by demonstrating that a focus on women is necessary for lasting social and economic change. Research is our work, but ICRW is different from other think tanks. We are a "do-tank" that translates research findings into concrete steps that program designers, donors and policy-makers can take. We develop practical solutions that achieve greater impact, ensure efficient use of resources, and most

importantly, empower women to change their own lives and their communities for the better.

The purpose of my testimony is to show the links between violence and economic development – how violence is not only a gross violation of human rights and a threat to a woman's health and well-being, but also a barrier to the economic development of families and communities. Furthermore, I want to discuss how economic empowerment – including working with men and boys – can be part of the solution to violence against women.

Economic Consequences of Violence

Violence against women has many direct consequences, including physical injury and emotional pain. A less immediate, yet equally damaging, consequence of violence is the economic injury to the individuals and households where violence occurs. The economic costs of violence against women are significant – to survivors themselves, to their family members and to their communities.

Costs to Individuals and Households

Families endure the direct financial costs of violence due to the expense of services used to treat surviors and apprehend and prosecute perpetrators. ICRW conducted a study of households in Uganda and found that each household incurs an average cost of $5 per incidence of violence. This is a substantial sum of money, considering that the average per capita income in Uganda is only $340.[4]

Individuals can also face broader economic effects of violence, including increased absenteeism from work; decreased labor market participation; reduced productivity; and lower earnings, investment and savings. A recent ICRW study shows that almost 10 percent of women who are victims of violence take time away from paid work, an average of 11 days annually.[5] Men who are perpetrators of violence also tend to miss work. After a particularly violent episode, men may flee their home and town for several

days, missing work and losing income in the process. Both circumstances amount to less money for food, clothing, medical care, and school fees.

Violence against women also affects their health, which in turn impacts their productivity and ability to earn an income. A World Bank study estimated that annual rates of rape and domestic violence translated into 9 million years of disability-adjusted life years[i] lost, including premature mortality as well as disability and illness.[6]

Violence against women has inter-generational impacts, and is often correlated with disruption in schooling for the children of survivors. A study in Nicaragua showed that 63 percent of children of female survivors of violence must repeat a grade in school. The same study showed that children of female survivors left school an average of four years before other children. Such delays in the educational development of children can have long-lasting economic consequences for individuals and households.[7]

Costs to Communities and Nations

Beyond the home, violence imposes a great monetary cost on the community. Valuable community resources must be spent on health services, court costs and social services to prevent violence, treat victims and apprehend and prosecute perpetrators. These costs are well-documented in industrialized countries such as Canada, where the annual monetary cost of violence against women has been estimated at Can$684 million in the criminal justice system and Can$187 million for policy.[8] However, these costs are also shown in other countries, such as Uganda, where hospitals reported spending about $1.2 million annually to treat women victims of violence.[9]

Countries, like households, also face economic multiplier effects of violence as high rates of violence against women diminish the potential economic value of nearly half the workforce. Studies in Chile show that domestic violence caused women to lose $1.56 billion in 1996, or 2 percent of GDP. In Nicaragua, violence against women cost 1.6

[i] "Disability-adjusted life year" is the measure of the loss of one year of full health, whether due to illness or premature death.

percent of the GDP, according to the same study. In both countries survivors of violence earned far less than other women, controlling for a number of factors likely to affect earnings[10].

Economic Empowerment as a Solution to Violence

Effectively reducing violence against women requires an integrated approach that involves international and national lawmakers as well as community leaders, families and individual men and women. This integrated approach, recognized by the World Bank and other global leaders, aims to increase women's access to judicial and support services as well as to prevent violence from occurring. Though much work remains, improvements have been made to the laws and policies to protect women and girls from violence and to facilitate women's access to necessary support services.

However, we are not doing enough to prevent violence from occurring in the first place. We *can* prevent violence. And one of the best strategies to do so is by economic empowerment. By economically empowering women, we can increase their status within the household and the community and decrease their chances of suffering violence. We can also engage men and boys to address the prevailing community norms that might encourage violence. Without examining these factors and implementing preventative strategies, we will never see a sustainable reduction in violence.

In my work with ICRW, I have met countless working women – including market hawkers, farmers, and managers of small businesses. They demonstrate incredible ingenuity and resourcefulness in finding ways to earn an income and provide for their families. However, they often lack access to the necessary tools and resources to increase their economic returns. For example, I met a market woman in India, who traveled, on foot, every day from her tiny village – carrying an infant on her back and loaded down by produce to sell in the local market. This journey took hours, was physically exhausting, and barely earned her a sufficient income to survive and feed her children. Without a decent road or transportation, without access to business training or capital, without childcare options for her children, her options for a better income were scarce or

nonexistent. Economically empowering women means giving opportunities where there are none and strengthening the contributions women already make to their communities by ensuring they are paid appropriately for their labor.

Developing strategies that lead to a better economic standing for women can ultimately help thwart violence. The violence they face is rooted in inequitable power dynamics within a household – men own the land, the home, all of the productive assets and control the income, even when women are the source of that income. Increasing a woman's economic independence can provide her the leverage to negotiate protection or leave a violent relationship. Additionally, women are more likely than men to spend their income on the well-being of their families, including more nutritious foods, school fees for children and health care.

One successful mechanism that is proven to empower women and reduce violence is microfinance. Microfinance consists of small loans usually given to poor people – mostly women – with little or no collateral to help them start or expand small businesses. Statistics show that women who received loans paid them back at rates close to 99 percent.

The benefits of these economic activities extend beyond the participants to their families and communities. Families can afford three meals a day rather than one. They can pay school fees and buy uniforms to send their children to school. They can expand their businesses and hire other community members as employees.

When microfinance is distributed in combination with other community programs, it can actually prevent violence. This is most clearly demonstrated by the Intervention with MicroFinance for AIDS and Gender Equity Project (IMAGE Project) in South Africa. Through the Small Enterprise Foundation, the program distributed small loans to women to start or expand small businesses and generate household income[11]. The program also provided training and skills-building sessions on HIV prevention, gender norms, cultural beliefs, communication and intimate partner violence. A random, controlled trial found

that, two years after completing the program, participants reported a 55 percent reduction in incidence of violence by their intimate partners in the previous 12 months than did members of a control group. Women also reported higher confidence, autonomy in decision making, better relationships with their partners and other household members and improved communication skills.[12]

In addition to access to financial services, women and communities benefit from increased access to land and property rights. They are not only able to reap more financial returns from their efforts; the ability to own and inherit property is clearly linked to decreased violence and increased security for women. Research in India found that 49 percent of women with no property reported violence, compared to only seven percent of women who owned property, even while controlling for factors such as economic status, education, employment and other variables.[13]

Groundbreaking work in Peru during the 1990s shows how land titling can empower and benefit women. The government set about to create land titles, and mandated that married couples receive joint land titles. More than 50 percent of the beneficiaries of this policy were women, who then gained access to government-provided credit, and saw an improvement of employment prospects.[14] If the data from India can be generalized, then we can assume that the land titling effort in Peru may have led to a decrease in violence against women.

However, I must also caution that there is evidence from Bangladesh and other parts of the world that programs increasing a woman's access to economic resources can put her at risk of increased violence. This is particularly true in settings where a woman's status is low, because increasing her income can lead to greater conflict within the family[15]. One of the ways to mitigate the risk of this kind of backlash by men is to engage them in economic development programs from the start.

During the 1980s and 1990s, men were viewed primarily as perpetrators, rather than potential partners in violence prevention. Accordingly, most programs focused on

teaching men how to deal with anger and conflict without resorting to violence. Most batterers' treatment programs are run in coordination with the criminal justice system, with attendance mandated by the court (as an alternative to a jail sentence). International research has found, however, that these programs are not as effective in reducing male violence against women as prevention-based programs because they do not address underlying causes. This is particularly true in a setting where violence against women is culturally accepted.[16]

Today, there are many successful programs that work with men and boys to reduce violence. Programs that target men are showing promising results - a recent review of 57 evaluated interventions with boys and men found that nearly two thirds showed evidence of behavior change. The programs that dealt with questions of masculinity and "what it means to be a man" were found to be most effective.[17] Rather than defining masculinity as violent and aggressive, the messages promoted through these programs are that caretaking and compassion are traits of "real men."

The key now is to scale up these small programs, and to increase our efforts to reach men and boys in schools, the workplace, sporting events, community centers and religious institutions.

The needs are particularly urgent in conflict and post-conflict settings. A recent meeting organized by ICRW and the World Bank called attention to the need not only to support survivors of violence, but also to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions, and to carry out prevention activities with men and boys who have witnessed or been involved in violence. While those men who use violence in conflict settings, including the brutal violence being carried out, need to be held accountable, it is important to acknowledge that there are many men who abhor such violence and could be engaged as agents of change if funding for programming were expanded.

Recommended Actions

The sheer scale and complexity of violence against women means that there is no single solution to the problem. The International Violence Against Women Act (IVAWA), introduced in 2007 by then-Sen. Biden and Sen. Lugar, captures best practices and lessons learned from more than 40 years of development. This bill, if reintroduced by this Congress, should be a strong statement by the United States that violence against women is unacceptable. Specifically, any legislation to combat violence against women must include the following components:

1. *Comprehensive, multi-sector strategies.* Strategies to combat violence against women must include:
    - Economically empowering women;
    - Legal and judicial systems that strengthens and enforces laws to protect women, while encouraging women to be active and equal partners in society without fear of repression or violence;
    - Health sectors that provide services to survivors of violence;
    - Education systems that work to ensure girls going to and from school are safe; and
    - Humanitarian efforts that recognize and prioritize the needs and and concerns of women.

    All programs should, where possible, engage men and boys as partners.

    One issue in particular that must be addressed is the issue of child marriage. Child brides are especially susceptible to violence, facing three times the risk of abuse compared to women who marry after the age of 18. Forcing children to marry is a violent act in and of itself, robbing girls of their education and freedom to decide when and who to wed. Child brides also tend to come from poor households and continue the cycle of poverty. There are programs that have raised the age of marriage in communities in relatively short periods of time. This committee should

support and pass S. 987, the International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act.

2. *Data Collection and Impact Evaluation.* As the president of a research organization, I know firsthand the importance of data collection, monitoring and impact evaluation. The only way to know that programs work is through the careful collection of inputs, outcomes and the evidence of their impact. Continued innovation and research into reducing violence against women is the best way to come up with long-term and sustainable solutions. Any bill that comes through this committee must include strong language to collect and systematize data from programs that deal with violence against women.

Members of this Committee, led by Senators Kerry, Lugar, Menendez and Corker, recently introduced the Foreign Assistance Revitalization and Accountability Act (S. 1524), a bill that places a high premium on research, data collection and evaluation. I applaud this committee for the leadership you have shown thus far, and encourage you to mandate and fund the evaluation of programs that address violence against women.

3. *Robust funding.* Successful programs require adequate resources. Evidence points to many programs that work – through microcredit, through land titling, through engaging men and boys and through many other multi-pronged efforts. Many programs are vastly successful on a small scale, and are in a perfect position to be scaled up on a regional or national scale, yet lack adequate resources. Any effort to combat violence against women in a comprehensive manner must include funding for programs on the ground, research and data collection, and humanitarian interventions during conflict and disaster situations.

A substantial portion of IVAWA funds should go to strengthen women's organizations based in developing countries, because those on the ground know what is needed, and can most effectively use the funds.

Funding for violence programs should also be viewed as an investment. Increasingly, business leaders from all parts of society are realizing what ICRW has been proving for more than 30 years – that investing in women pays the biggest dividend. Why else would Fortune 500 companies like ExxonMobil, the GAP, and Goldman Sachs spend time, energy and capital investing in women around the world? Partly for philanthropic reasons, but also because they know that it is worth the investment. So I encourage Congress to follow the example of the marketplace and invest in women to create prosperity and security – for women around the world and for the United States.

Conclusion

This august body deals with many of the most pressing needs of the day – from climate change to health care to threats from rogue states to an economy tinkering on the edge. And through this hearing today, you add violence against women to this list. You face tough decisions day in and day out, and you have the opportunity to bring about enormous change to this country and around the world. Oftentimes there is debate about which is the best way to move forward.

But right here, right now, there is no debate. The lines are clear. By not acting, by maintaining the status quo, millions of women will continue to face violence every day. And their enormous potential will continue to be suppressed by the yoke of violence.

But if you refuse to acquiesce to the notion that violence against women is inevitable or acceptable, and you instead choose to put your moral and political authority behind the dignity and rights of women, you can help create a cycle of prosperity and peace. With your help, women and girls can be the catalyst for the next great development innovation, the drivers of economic recovery, and the leaders of a more peaceful and just world.

ICRW stands ready to support your efforts. Thank you for your time and I look forward to answering your questions.

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