

UN study tackles violence against women in Arab region using economic model

6 October 2017 – An economic model to estimate the costs of intimate partner violence – the most common form of violence against women in the Arab world – was spotlighted this week at the United Nations regional commission, based in Beirut, Lebanon.

“Our ultimate goal has always been to translate the findings of our studies into practical projects with a view to empowering women and enhancing their position in society,” said Mohamed Ali Alhakim, the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia ([ESCWA](#)), which serves 18 Arab States.

According to the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)), 37 per cent of “ever married women” in the East Mediterranean region – which encompasses most Arab States – have experienced physical or sexual partner violence.

Speaking at the [opening](#) of ESCWA’s [Committee on Women](#), Dr. Alhakim noted that despite progress in developing national plans to address gender-based violence, Arab countries need to do more to end the grave violations still being perpetrated against women.

To support these efforts, ESCWA and [UN Women](#) developed a regional project to estimate the cost of violence against women and use the costings as an instrument for policy reform and advocacy.

“We aim to utilize it as an advocacy tool with policymakers to substantiate that if we work in a holistic manner to end violence against women, it will not only be the right thing to do, but it will also be the smart thing to do,” said Mohammad Naciri, the Director of UN-Women’s regional office in Egypt.

“My heart aches when we try to quantify [the violence] because the emotional and psychological scars that women and girls live with as a result of the violence exerted on them cannot necessarily be quantified,” he continued. “That’s why I said it’s a smart thing to do, but the right thing to remember is that it’s the absolute right of every single woman and girl to end the violence against them.”

According to UN-Women, the dire economic, political and security situation in many Arab countries fuels the problem given direct correlation between crises and domestic violence. During the last conflict in Gaza, intimate partner violence reportedly rose by 700 per cent due to feelings of hopelessness, humiliation, and lack of opportunities.

While the drivers of violence are not contested, there are multiple

approaches to costing the phenomenon. The two main methods involve estimating the cost of inaction—measuring the direct and indirect, tangible and intangible costs of violence to survivors, their families, and the community, including missed paid or unpaid work; and estimating the costs of implementing policies to prevent and address the violence – or the cost of the solution.

Dr. Nata Duvvury, the Director for Global Women’s Studies at the National University of Ireland, has been working closely with ESCWA to develop the model and create this important “accountability tool.”

“Direct costs have been largely focused on the costs of service provision incurred by governments to provide police stations, health services, social services, and others,” she explained.

“But there is another aspect of direct costs that has not been captured very carefully across countries, which are the costs incurred by women to access services,” Dr. Duvvury stressed, noting that paying bribes is not uncommon for women in the Arab region, in addition to other fees to access physical and psychosocial support.

As the eighth session of the Committee on Women inched to its end on Thursday, small pins were distributed by Dr. Naglaa Al-Adly from Egypt’s National Council of Women, featuring an Arabic letter called the *Taa Marbouta*.



Dr. Naglaa Al-Adly, Representative of Egypt’s National Council of Women, speaks to the media wearing the Taa Marbouta campaign pin on her jacket. Photo: ESCWA/Daniela Abraham

“We use this letter as the secret of our power as women,” Dr. Al-Adly explained. “We’re stressing the idea to not be afraid, fight for your rights, be strong, we are behind you.”

‘Taa Marbouta’ is added to words that are feminine to denote grammatical gender; it is also associated with several powerful words in the Arabic language such as ‘dignity,’ ‘power’ and ‘willingness.’

Launched one year ago by Egypt’s National Council of Women and the UN, the ‘Taa Marbouta’ campaign promotes women’s social, political and economic empowerment in the North African country.

“Because it’s an Arabic letter it is also relevant to women in many other countries,” she added, indicating that the “secret” of women’s power can only be stronger when they come together.