

**Recommendations to the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women,
its causes and consequences**

28 February 2019

The following recommendations are made to Ms. Dubravka Simonovic, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences:

- 1. Comprehensive Sex Education: Promoting comprehensive sexuality education as a means to combat violence against women.**
- 2. Shifting Pedagogy: Promoting an understanding of violence against women in its larger context to identify root causes and long-term solutions.**
- 3. Men as Agents of Change: To highlight the key role of men as agents of change in combatting violence against women/ Addressing men's issues as a means to eradicate violence against women**

1. Comprehensive Sex Education: Promoting comprehensive sexuality education as a means to combat violence against women.

The United Nations recognises the importance of sexual and reproductive human rights and The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as well as the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) have both clearly indicated that women's right to health includes their sexual and reproductive health. The Beijing Platform for Action states that "*the human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.*" Furthermore, The CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation 24 recommends that States prioritise the "*prevention of unwanted pregnancy through family planning and sex education.*" However, despite these existing principles, women's sexual and reproductive rights are often violated. For instance, while CEDAW propagates prevention through sex education, there is no mandate ensuring the implantation of sex education within curriculums.

The discourse around sex needs to be challenged. UNESCO (2018) has been promoting their Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), which is both inclusive and non-stigmatizing in promoting gender equality. There is a great need of comprehensive sex education or modules focusing on sexual violence and sexual exploitation awareness. Introduction of such modules in the curriculum at both school and college levels can empower the students from a young age by highlighting women's changing roles in society, addressing distorted views of masculinity and create awareness on violence against women. A comprehensive curriculum-based sexuality module not only makes young boys and girls understand their bodies and the age-related changes better but also informs them about consent and respecting each other's personal space. The global review of the comprehensive sexuality education¹ found positive evidence that sex education was key to gender equality and reproductive health. Along with learning about menstruation, sexual intercourse, sexually transmitted diseases and risks of pregnancy, young people also need to learn about the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse, which in turn will allow them to recognise these should they occur and also to protect themselves. Parents also need to be involved in this process as the findings from my own research in India indicate the significance of parents and homes as a gender socialization site. Sexuality and sexual violence are closed door topics in most parts of the world, particularly in South-East Asia and young children fail to find a safe environment to discuss these issues, both at home and in schools. Sensitising children and giving them a safe environment to discuss these issues are essential steps in tackling sexual violence. UNESCO's CSE is an excellent example of the kind of commitment that need to be made for achieving long-term change. There should be strong call to action around universal access to comprehensive sexuality education and this also needs to be promoted through the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women.

2. Shifting Pedagogy: Promoting an understanding of violence against women in its larger context to identify root causes and long-term solutions.

Violence against women, particularly with regards to societies subjected to economic poverty, like those of the Global South, exists on a multitude of levels. Though they all stem from the same root causes, it is important to understand the different ways in which violence is felt from a gender perspective. Outward manifestations of unequal power dynamics coupled with deeper, somewhat unexplored emotional factors on the part of men, are representative of only one piece of the puzzle. In order to formulate informed and successful strategies to end violence against women, it is crucial to form a solid understanding of the different ways gendered violence is experienced, which inevitable includes what can be considered as

¹ UNESCO (2015) Emerging evidence, lessons and practice in comprehensive sexuality education: a global review.

‘invisible’ or ‘symbolic’ violence (Bourdieu, 2001) within the structures of societies. As a scholar who has developed a deep understanding of gendered symbolic violence, its contributing factors and root causes, as well as its felt consequences in terms of physical and sexual violence as acted out by men against women, we urge the Special Rapporteur to consider the wider contextual background of these human rights infringements and to place this knowledge at the core of preventative solutions. In practical terms, this means considering the fact that violence against women does not exist in a vacuum, but rather, is a consequence of a number of different contextual societal factors in which men play a central part. Therefore, not only including men, but also addressing the reasons why violence is an inherent part of social understandings and embodiments of ‘masculinity’, are crucial approaches to eradicating violence against women.

The very structure of global society is patriarchal, and its consequences are felt strongest in the Global South. The current world order is inherently violent, however, the power structures in place are so embedded and universally prevalent that they barely require force to implement (Millet, 2005). It is an extremely unfortunate fact, that violence against women is the felt effect of a trickle-down system of a patriarchal structure of hierarchical power on an intimidating large global scale and that tackling that is the only way peaceful relations between men and women will be a natural and inherent component of human society. This has deep connection with ‘trickle-down’ economics together with gendered structures of power that place women as those most likely to feel and live the consequences of poverty. The term ‘feminization of poverty’ (Chant, 2006) points to the fact that women make up the majority of the world’s poor and that poverty is thus gendered. ‘Symbolic violence’, a result of gendered hierarchical structures of power, as mentioned above, refers to the ways that experiences of poverty and all the associated physical, mental and emotional factors are inherently violent. It is therefore crucial to identify the different but related ways women experience violence and to shift the pedagogy of development and human rights work accordingly, in order to conceptualise long-term rather than short-term solutions.

3. Men as Agents of Change: To highlight the key role of men as agents of change in combatting violence against women/ Addressing men’s issues as a means to eradicate violence against women

It is only natural to assume that violence against women is a women’s only issue and an immediate response to such a problem are programmes targeting women’s empowerment. However, prevention approaches can focus on shifting the unequal power relations in our society by including men in this dialogue and empowering them to prevent violence against women. There is no dearth of research literature highlighting the need to address men’s role

in ending violence against women². The idea is to bridge the gap between the two genders, wherein normative male behaviours are often synonymous with rape culture. There is a strong need to engage men as allies.

There are a number of solutions to addressing gender dynamics on local levels which involve shifting the focus from female to male empowerment. This sounds like a controversial approach; however, it is rooted in thorough research (particularly de Hoog's research in Haiti and Pandey's research in India) that establishes the undeniable links between crises of 'masculinity', particularly in contexts of severe economic poverty, and violence against women. It revolves around the idea that the root causes of violence ought to be understood and addressed and that those can be found in the disempowerment of men through a patriarchal system that provides them with only superficial power, ultimately creating a dangerous paradox through the juxtaposition of supposed male supreme power and ultimate powerlessness in the face of societal expectations of masculinity. It is the binary understanding and world view (rooted in Western thinking), that genders have opposites, male and female, and therefore should have opposite roles and power dynamics, that results in violence. Violence is used as an enforcing mechanism (i.e. rape and women's fear of rape) as well as an outlet for frustration caused by unrealistic gender roles and expectations, and it is made possible by unequal power distribution. Scholarly research including Connell's (1987) notion of 'hegemonic masculinity' (as well as de Hoog and Pandey's respective doctoral research) has provided a foundation for understanding how men are oppressed through unattainable projections of masculinity that are to be asserted through violence and domination over women. Expectation around economic autonomy and a 'provider' identity, in the context of economic poverty, creates a very significant and dangerous mental and emotional battle within male identity. We therefore urge the Special Rapporteur to prioritise addressing men and masculinity as a crucial means to protect women and children from violence.

Overall, we suggest:

- Promotion of curriculum based comprehensive sex education as a means to combat violence against women and implementation/integration of such a module within the high school education system of the member countries.
- Promotion of and support for organisations that work with male youth on a grassroots level.

² See Joyce Wu's *Involving Men in Ending Violence Against Women: Development, Gender and VAW in Times of Conflict* (2018).

- Addressing the pedagogy around women's issues and human rights to form better understandings of the important contextual frameworks at play; promoting a holistic approach to women's access to rights that prioritises the agency and inclusion of men.
- Continuing to support initiatives that address women's economic power and autonomy, but also incorporating a wider gender element through which men can be ascribed supporters of women.
- Prioritising development methodologies that have explicit long-term goals for gender equality over those that provide short-term results.

We would like to express our thanks to Ms. Dubravka Simonovic, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, for the opportunity to make a submission and we look forward to further discussions in the area of combatting violence against women.

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