**ISSUE BRIED: Addressing Domestic Violence**

**PROBLEM OVERVIEW**

Violence is used to exert power and control over another individual and occurs at all levels of society. Domestic violence is one of the most serious and pervasive forms of violence against women.

Over the past two decades, violence against women, including domestic violence, has come to be understood as a form of discrimination and violation of human rights. This is clearly expressed in international legal and policy documents and instruments related to the prevention and combating of domestic violence and violence against women.

The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) is a comprehensive international instrument providing for protection prevention, prosecution and policy-making in the area of combating violence against women and domestic violence.

Istanbul Convention determines “Domestic violence” as all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim.

Domestic violence is committed in a household or family setting, predominantly by an intimate partner but also by other family members, such as parents/children or other relatives.

Domestic violence leads to serious health damage, physically and emotionally, and may end fatally. Apart from physical injuries, it causes fear, distress and loss of self-confidence. Physical and sexual violence are employed to aggravate the feeling of vulnerability, lack of control over one’s own body and feelings of hopelessness and shame. As a result of this, it destroys the victim’s power and prevents them from being free and safe. The physical and mental health consequences are substantial and contribute, both directly and indirectly, to many negative health outcomes among women and their children who are witnesses of violence in the family.

 Domestic violence needs to be understood in a wider social context which permits the perpetrators to assume the right to use violence as a means of exercising dominance and control. As it is mainly perpetrated against women because they are women, it constitutes a form of gender-based violence.

**FACTS:**

* **Global:**

According to World Health Organization (WHO):

* one **in** every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex or abused in some other way – most often by someone she knows (2013).
* one in five women is sexually abused as a child (2014).
* **Regional:**
* **1 in 2 women killed are murdered by an intimate partner or family member**
* **1 in 4 women experienced physical or sexual violence from current or former partner**
* **1 in 15 women experienced sexual violence from non-partner**
* **Belarus:**
* The national representative (comparative) study on the verification of the status of domestic violence case in the Republic of Belarus, conducted in 2014 by the UNFPA Belarus found out that three out of four Belarusians (both women and men aged 18-60 with experience of family life) have experienced domestic violence in their life.
* 37% of women and 28% of men with experience of family life have gone through economic violence and 18% of women and 12% of men – through sexual violence.
* 31,6% of women and 24,8% of men have experienced the physical violence in their family life;
* 76,2% of women and 75,6% of men have experienced psychological violence in their family life: out of them abusive/swear wording was experienced by 62,4% of women and 57,5% of men;
* Notably, analysis of proportion of women and men experiencing domestic violence and general public opinion shows significant gap between “thinking” and “behaving” – 92% of men and 96% of women consider unacceptable physical violence against their partners.
* In 2014 legitimacy of economic violence among men towards women increased up to 25% comparing to 14% in 2008; sexual violence – from 8% in 2008 to 18% in 2014;
* As per the data from the Ministry of Interior, in the year 2017 (1st quarter) the 1/4th of the aggregated amount of murder-cases and intended bodily-harms were committed to the side of the family members.
* Following the data received from National hotline for the victims of domestic violence within first quarter of the year 2017 the hotline received 458 inquiries in total:

79,7% of calls arrived from the victims; 17,4% of calls - from the relatives of the victims; 1,2% of calls - from the aggressors.

Commenting further on statistics: 92,7% of the victims are women, 7,3% of victims are men. 37% of the victims have 1 child; 31,5% of the victims have 2 children; 9,8% of the victims have 3 children.

**SOLUTIONS FOR THE PROBLEM:**

* **Advocacy and policy**: Develop laws, policies and action plans to combat domestic violence and promote their enforcement, including running of awareness-raising campaigns which target men and women as well as boys and girls;
* **Capacity development**: Strengthen capacities of government and civil society partners in prevention and response to domestic violence, establishment of multi-sectoral referral mechanisms;
* **Knowledge management**: Conduct data collection and analysis, researches of economic costs of domestic violence, violence prevalence and existing stereotypes;
* **Service delivery**: Ensure long-term access to effective services for victims and survivors of domestic violence, taking into account the needs and vulnerabilities of particular groups.

**WHAT UNFPA DOES IN BELARUS TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM:**

1. **Advocating for improvement of legislation on domestic violence at the national level through:**
* Supporting government in the development of the Comprehensive Law on Domestic Violence in accordance with international recommendations and standards.
* Promoting provisions of the Istanbul Convention and calling for Belarus joining the Convention.
* Contributing to data generation through provision of technical support for conducting researches on domestic violence prevalence, economic costs of domestic violence, time-budget surveys.
1. **Building national capacity for institutionalization and strengthen of practical mechanisms of response to domestic violence through:**
* Strengthening capacity of national counterparts (prosecutors, judges, health, social workers, police, civil society and faith-based organizations) to address domestic violence.
1. **Strengthening the capacity and variety of the related services for and survivors of domestic violence and male aggressors in the country through:**
* Supporting of National toll-free hotline for survivors of domestic violence that serves as a counselling and referral entering point for (adult) victims.
* Supporting integration of Social Quality Standards into work of civil society organizations to ensure provision of qualitative assistance to victims and survivors of domestic violence.
* Providing technical expertise for specialized services for male aggressors.
1. **Supporting the country wide awareness-raising campaigns targeting reach of the general public and bringing society tolerance to violence to zero level**

**EXAMPLES OF UNFPA ACHIEVEMENTS (RESULTS OF THE PREVIOUS PROJECTS!):**

* Within the frames of implemented in 2012-2015 projects (with financial support from UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and SIDA) UNFPA supported development and further institutionalization of multi-sectoral referral mechanism in 3 pilot districts of Brest Oblast (Moskovsky district of Brest, Kobryn, Kamieniec) with involvement of key service providers, civil society and faith-based organizations. The mechanism has been welcomed by local authorities, establishment of multi-sectoral councils and adoption of the Intersectoral Cooperation Protocols was recommended by the profile Ministries all over Belarus, serving as effective tool of response to domestic violence.

UNFPA supported capacity building of key service providers – social and health workers, educators, police, civil society and faith-based organizations – through provision of trainings, technical expertise for establishment and operation of shelters and state-run “crisis” rooms for domestic violence survivors, integration of specific topics related to domestic violence issue, role of each provider and multi-sectoral collaboration into the re-training and professional development curriculums for 4 categories of specialists (police officers, social workers, educators, health professionals).

* UNFPA supported networking and collaboration of 19 civil society organizations

 working in the field of combating gender-based/domestic violence throughout the country.

* UNFPA supported the launch of the national hotline for survivors of domestic violence, at present time the hotline is operated by non-governmental organization “Gender Perspectives”. The hotline is operated on the national level as a toll-free telephone line, in 7/12 format and provides anonymous unconditional and immediate social, psychological and legal assistance as well as referring those affected to other specialized state and non-state services all over Belarus. During the period since 13 August, 2012 till 30 April, 2017 ***9 537*** phone calls were received, in total.
* National model of work with male aggressors was developed on the basis of Duluth model, over 40 specialists were trained to use the model and it was further piloted in 3 districts (Moskovsky district of Brest, Kobryn, Hrodna), 3 rooms for group and individual correctional work with target audience equipped, methodological and technical advice provided to the specialists. However, there is a need for further piloting the model and its further adjustment to national context and amending relevant legislation.
* National awareness raising campaign “Home Without Violence” was implemented in 2012-2015 jointly with all national counterparts, with 1st stage "Kitchen Without Violence" aimed at promoting the national hotline for domestic violence survivors (implemented in 2012-2013), 2nd stage "Playroom Without Violence" aimed at promoting hotline for children and informational kit for parents and specialists on non-violent behavior and treatment of children (implemented in 2014) and 3rd stage “Bedroom Without Violence” focused on non-violence relationships between intimate partners and appealing for men abusers to change the behavior.
* **Cooperation with faith based organizations dealing with domestic violence issues**

UNFPA supported Charity Sisterhood Union (structural department of the Belarusian Orthodox Church) in improving its capacities in addressing domestic violence, integration of services provided by the orthodox sisterhood into existing models of national legal and social support to the domestic violence survivors.

Over 155 youth volunteers from orthodox community were trained on issues on domestic violence and family based on training manual developed and piloted for further work with religious communities throughout the country.

The work of the shelter for the survivors of domestic violence, established by Lida Orthodox Sisterhood (Hrodna Oblast), was supported, capacities of the shelter’s workers to run the shelter and provide comprehensive assistance were enhanced. Annually, around 50 abused women and their children receive social and psychological assistance in the shelter. Services provided by Lida Orthodox Sisterhood are integrated into local multi-sectoral mechanism of response to domestic violence.

**KEY MESSAGES FOR AUDIENCE AND MEDIA:**

* Violence against women constitutes a violation of fundamental human rights and regrettably, domestic violence against women continues to exist in the 21st century all around the world.
* Violence not only affects the physical and mental health, but also results in a loss of self-esteem and confidence, quality of life and self-sufficiency.
* Children to be the victims and witnesses of domestic violence might follow aggressive patterns of behavior in their future being adults or may have face same cases of domestic violence in their own families when becoming the adults. Among those women, who were the witnesses of violence in the parent-families, 32,9% faced the physical violence in their current families when became adults
* Mutual efforts of all national counterparts and international organizations on combating domestic violence is the key to success in terms of domestic violence prevention and addressing.
* Provision of professional correction programs to the male-aggressors is an essential need within the frames of domestic violence counteraction and prevention activities. It is evident that 70% of male aggressors who went through the correction programs are not applying the violent pattern of behavior any longer
* Making people non-indifferent and non-tolerant to domestic violence through strong and profound awareness-raising campaigns will make Belarussian society healthier.