Global Shared Research Agenda

For Research on Violence Against Women in Low and Middle-Income Countries

SVRI
sexual
violence
research
initiative

THE EQUALITY
INSTITUTE

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Throughout this report we use the term 'violence against women'. The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women provides the following definition:

"The term violence against women means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life."

In this report, the term 'woman' refers to all female-identifying people, including trans women.

We acknowledge that there is debate within the field as to the most appropriate terminology to describe gendered patterns of violence. We have chosen to use the term 'violence against women' because it most accurately describes the focus of this particular research agenda.

We also recognise that there are multiple intersections between violence against women and violence against children. This priority-setting exercise includes attention to the intersections between VAW and VAC in a limited way, considering VAC as a risk factor for intimate partner violence, or as an example of dating violence among adolescent girls. However, a more comprehensive priority-setting exercise on intersections is happening elsewhere.

Finally, we acknowledge that there are limitations with the term 'violence against women', not least of which it can be considered cissexist and heterosexist. The purpose of this research agenda is, in part, to bring to light areas of research and the priorities of communities that historically have been under-represented or overlooked. We therefore hope this work forms part of an ongoing conversation to expand research, methods and terminology to meet the diverse needs of our field.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The successful creation of a Global Shared Research Agenda (GSRA) for the field of violence against women has required the intellectual curiosity, generosity, commitment and time of many people.

Suggested Citation

SVRI & EQI (2021). Global shared research agenda for research on violence against women in low and middle-income countries. Sexual Violence Research Initiative, Pretoria.

Together, the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) and the Equality Institute (EQI), with support from funding partners and the field, have drawn on the wisdom of the crowd, to set research priorities for the next five years for fair, effective and relevant research on violence against women (VAW).
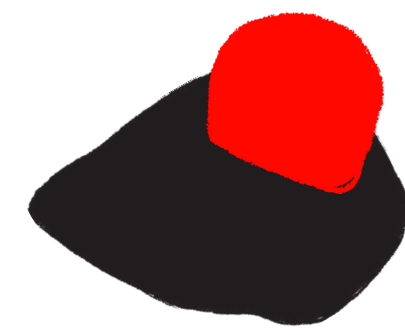
To identify these priorities, and ensure the process was fair and transparent, a method called CHNRI was used, which considers the views of multiple stakeholders, not just technical experts, so all views are treated equally without some voices being more dominant than others. It does this by 'crowd-sourcing' multiple opinions on an issue, surpassing the 'expert' judgement of one person.

"This has been an extremely thorough consultation process. It has not been rushed and given the wisdom of the crowd, it is very unlikely that, even had we had greater numbers from the regions less represented, the scoring would have been very different." - Advisory Group member

Three groups were established to govern and guide the Global Shared Research Agenda (GSRA):

1. **STEWARDSHIP GROUP:** Key staff and consultants working with SVRI and EQI who oversaw the overall process, including co-ordination, design, analysis, reporting and dissemination.

2. **ADVISORY GROUP:** A group of approximately 30 experts in the VAW prevention and response field, across multiple geographical contexts, who provided expert technical input and advice on key steps in the research priority-setting exercise.

3. **GLOBAL EXPERT GROUP:** A group of approximately 400 global experts from both low and middle-income countries (LMICs) and high-income countries (HICs), working on VAW prevention and response, including researchers, practitioners, funders and policymakers.

Guided by these structures, rich with diversity and passion for the field, the GSRA was developed in a six-step highly participatory and iterative process, with many opportunities for feedback from the different governance and advisory group members. The first step involved a scoping review of the literature, to identify key gaps in the field which framed the priority-setting process, and led to the identification of four key research domains:

Domain 1

Research to understand VAW in its multiple forms – including prevalence of different types of VAW, risk and protective factors for VAW experience and perpetration, and the causes and consequences of VAW, including health and psychosocial consequences.

Domain 2

Intervention research – including research on violence prevention and response interventions, and various types of evaluations of interventions, including process, formative and impact evaluations.

Domain 3

Improving existing interventions – including scale-up research, costing research, intervention science, process research and other forms of research that generate innovative solutions to improve existing interventions, making them more deliverable, affordable or sustainable, including research aimed at understanding the impact of policies and laws on VAW.

Domain 4

Methodological and measurement gaps – including new and innovative ways to measure VAW, hierarchies of knowledge, practice-based learning, sticky ethical issues, and monitoring and evaluation of interventions.

The Advisory Group identified priority research questions under each of these four domains via a series of virtual meetings and online surveys. Forty-one questions were identified initially, ten questions under three domains and 11 under one. These questions were then sent to the Global Expert Group through an online survey to rank and score against three criteria – Applicability, Effectiveness and Equity. There was a total of 214 responses.

Who responded?

Three quarters of respondents identified as female, and a larger proportion of practitioners than researchers responded to the survey. Approximately 60% of respondents (n=128) stated that they were currently based in an HIC. Of the 84 respondents based in an LMIC, 73 reported being based in a middle-income country, and 11 in a low-income country.

Overall

The most highly ranked questions fell under Domain 2: Intervention research, suggesting that **intervention research** is viewed by the field as the most needed at this point. The top five questions in order of overall ranking are:

1. What types of interventions can effectively prevent multiple forms of violence, and why?

2. What types of interventions are most effective for preventing intimate partner violence (IPV) (including 'honour'-based violence) against women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination (including age, poverty, disability, ethnicity, race, sexuality)?

3. How are new feminist social movements (eg Me too, Ni una menos) and meninist social movements (Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), incels etc)[1] positively or negatively influencing individual, social and policy perspectives related to the experience and perpetration of violence?

4. What interventions work to prevent sexual harassment in institutional settings (in-person or online), including in the workplace and educational settings, and why?

5. What are the impacts (including disability-related impacts) of under-researched forms of IPV on women and girls, including emotional and economic IPV, revenge porn and 'honour'-based violence?

[1] Meninist social movements advocate for men's rights and are often in opposition to feminism, or support the belief that feminism victimises men. For example, incels (who are predominantly men) comprise members of one type of meninist social movement or subculture. The term refers to being an 'involuntary celibate' or unable to find an intimate partner despite wanting one, with corresponding blame being placed on women.

The top two questions by domain are:

Domain 1

Research to understand VAWG in its multiple forms

1. How are new feminist social movements (eg Me too, Ni una menos) and meninist social movements (Men's Rights Activists (MRAs), incels etc) positively or negatively influencing individual, social and policy perspectives related to the experience and perpetration of violence?

2. What are the impacts (including disability-related impacts) of under-researched forms of IPV on women and girls, including emotional and economic IPV, revenge porn and 'honour'-based violence?

Domain 2

Intervention research

1. What types of interventions can effectively prevent multiple forms of violence, and why?

2. What types of interventions are most effective for preventing IPV (including 'honour'-based violence) against women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination (including age, poverty, disability, ethnicity, race, sexuality)?

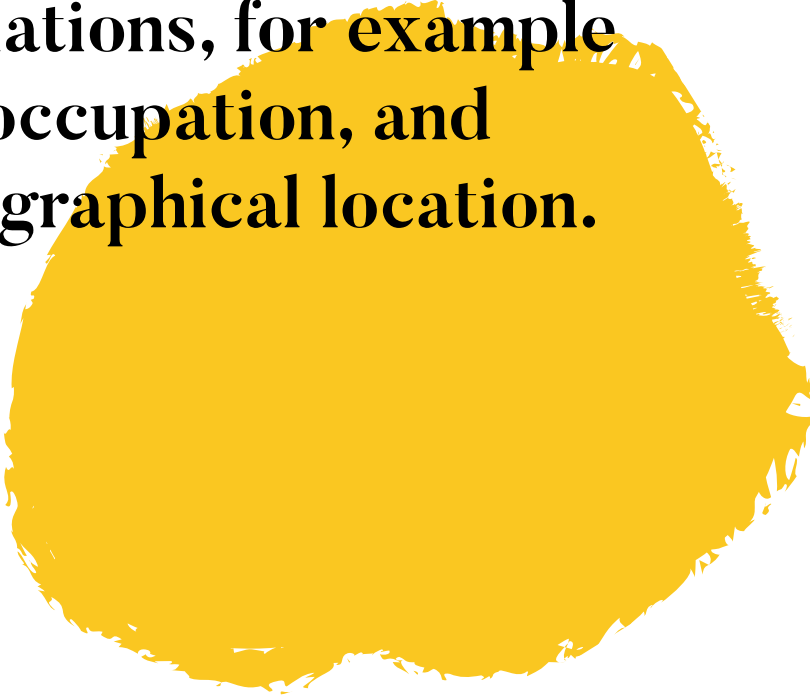## Domain 3

Improving existing interventions

1. What alternative modalities (besides in-person programming) are effective in VAW prevention at scale?

2. How can large-scale sector programmes be adapted to optimise their impact on violence prevention and response, particularly education, health, economic development, infrastructure and social protection programmes?

Domain 4

Methodological and measurement gaps

1. What are the most effective tools to measure harmful traditional practices against women and girls (including Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C), early and forced marriage, crimes committed in the name of honour, dowry-related violence, and son preference)?

2. What methods can be used to measure the intersection and pathways between different types of violence, including polyvictimisation and intersections between violence against women (VAW) and violence against children (VAC)?

While there was surprising consistency across priorities both overall and by domain, there are some notable variations, for example by occupation, and geographical location.

Practitioners gave preference for questions related to Intervention research, while researchers' top five questions included two from the Intervention research domain and two from the Understanding VAW domain, with the addition of a question related to methodology and measurement gaps. Geographical variations were less striking, with the top four questions ranked overall being shared for most groupings of experts across geographical regions, with some exceptions. Experts in East and South-East Asia and the Pacific (ESEAP) for instance, did not rank the Domain 1 question on feminist and meninist social movements in their top five questions. While experts living and working in LMICs, ranked research on interventions that prevent sexual harassment in institutional settings among their top five questions, researchers and experts living in and working in HICs did not.

NOTABLE GAPS

When asked to identify gaps in the priorities, respondents were concerned with the lack of questions on **VAW response/services or a combination of prevention and response,** and several experts noted wider gaps in the field. These included research on: certain **types of violence**, such as VAW in the context of political participation (or 'political violence'), reproductive coercion and other types of violence linked at the intersection of IPV and sexual and reproductive health, caregiver abuse (including against people with disabilities), sex trafficking, genital cutting (for all ages and genders), and severe forms of VAW such as femicide; **missing populations** including adolescent girls/youth, ethnic and religious minorities, sex workers and (sexual violence against) men and boys; and **humanitarian/emergency contexts**.

LESSONS LEARNED

Completing a priority-setting exercise can be complex and time-consuming. But the process for priority setting is as important as the methodology, especially the need to actively ensure diverse voices are included. The GSRA was developed during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, which meant that it was deeply reliant on technology, and to this end it was essential to make access to it straightforward, and so the team worked hard to make it as inclusive, accessible and user-friendly as possible. When undertaking such an exercise, it is also important to be flexible and consider respondents' time and resources. The surveys were also translated into multiple languages. Finally, and very importantly, it is vital to be open, transparent and honest about the process and limitations, to manage expectations.

The GSRA process has revealed that there are still major research gaps in the VAW field.

For example, research on prevention and interventions is an important priority for the field right now, along with research on new and emerging forms of violence, and violence among populations that have been previously overlooked, for example women with disabilities or women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

While these priorities have been developed through a transparent and participatory process with high levels of agreement among experts – no process is perfect. Important gaps were noted; for example, research on responses, research on different forms of violence, and research with different population groups. Humanitarian settings were not a focus of this process and are another notable gap. It is important to take note of these gaps and variations when using the GSRA.

The GSRA must be used, for it to be effective. Funders should increase investment in high-quality and ethical research aligned with the GSRA; researchers should use the GSRA to inform their own research agendas; practitioners should use the agenda as a guide for partnerships with researchers on the evaluation of their interventions; and as a field together, the GSRA should be used as a tool to advocate for more and better research funding that addresses critical research gaps in the field.

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