VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: GLOBAL PICTURE HEALTH RESPONSE

PREVALENCE

1 in 3 women throughout the world will experience physical and/or sexual violence by a partner or sexual violence by a non-partner.

HEALTH IMPACT:

- Mental Health
  - Women exposed to intimate partner violence are twice as likely to experience depression.
  - Women exposed to intimate partner violence are almost twice as likely to have an alcohol use disorder.

- Sexual and reproductive health
  - Women exposed to intimate partner violence are 1.5 times more likely to contract HIV/AIDS, other sexually transmitted infections, or unplanned pregnancy.

- Health and injury
  - Women exposed to intimate partner violence are more likely to experience physical injuries leading to a hospitalization or emergency department visit.

GUIDELINES FOR HEALTH SECTOR RESPONSE

WHO’s new clinical and policy guidelines on the health sector response to intimate partner violence among women emphasize the need to integrate these issues into clinical training for health care providers. WHO has identified the key elements of a health sector response to violence against women, which have informed the following recommendations:

Women-focused care:
- Health care providers should:
  - Collect data on women’s risk behavior, violence and mental health, including depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders.
  - Promptly respond to women’s needs and preferences, including the confidentiality and respect for the provider-patient relationship.

Training of health care providers on intimate partner violence and sexual violence:
- Training of health care providers should be the top priority for women who have experienced intimate partner violence and sexual assault to gain knowledge on healthcare services.

Identification and care for victims of intimate partner violence:
- Health care providers should:
  - Screen for intimate partner violence and sexual violence as part of routine care.
  - Use tools such as the WHO Multi-country Study on Women’s Health and Domestic Violence against Women.

Clinical care for survivors of sexual violence:
- Health care providers should:
  - Ensure a safe, confidential, and compassionate environment.
  - Encourage women to seek medical care at a time they feel most comfortable.

Health care worker intervention:
- Violence against women is a global public health problem of epidemic proportions, requiring urgent action. Health care providers are in a unique position to address the health and psychosocial needs of women who have experienced violence, provided certain minimum requirements are met:

- Health care providers are trained
- Standard operating procedures are in place
- Confidentiality is guaranteed
- A referral system is in place to ensure women can access needed services
- Health care settings are equipped to provide a comprehensive response, addressing both physical and mental consequences
- Health care providers partner to address violence when needed