**Expert Meeting for developing consensus on measuring emotional/psychological intimate partner violence against women**

Mont-Blanc Hotel, Morges, June 20-22, 2016

**Meeting Report**

***1. Background***

Intimate partner violence includes emotional/psychological abuse and controlling behaviours by a partner, and these often overlap significantly with experiences of physical and sexual violence (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005; Jewkes, R., 2010). However, there is currently a lack of agreement on standard measures of emotional/psychological partner violence and the threshold at which acts that can be considered unkind or insulting cross the line into psychological/emotional abuse (WHO, 2013). Currently, different surveys measure emotional/psychological abuse in different ways and use different cut-offs for defining prevalence, making it difficult to compare rates of violence across settings, or develop a combined prevalence of physical, sexual and/or emotional partner violence.

The new agenda for the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations General Assembly includes a specific target (5.2), under the Gender Equality Goal, to “Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.” Under this target the following indicator has been proposed:

* Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older subjected to physical, sexual or ***psychological violence*** by a current or former intimate partner, in the last 12 months, by form and age group.

To address the gap above and in light of this proposed indicator, from June 20-22nd, 2016, WHO convened a meeting of experts, UN and other partners, to develop consensus on how to measure and analyse emotional/psychological partner violence, including for the global monitoring on violence against women, in the context of the 2030 agenda. Leading work to build consensus around the development of a standard measure of emotional/ psychological partner violence is necessary to help raise the profile and understanding of emotional/psychological partner violence and its health impacts, an often neglected dimension of partner violence, in order for governments and other organizations to be able to respond to the needs of women experiencing violence more effectively. In addition, it is necessary to support Member States to be able to report on SDG Target 5.2. and to ensure that data for monitoring are as comparable as possible.

**Objectives**

The objectives of the meeting were as follows:

1. To identify the key domains of emotional/psychological partner violence
2. To discuss and agree whether controlling behaviour should be integrated into a measure of emotional/psychological abuse or should remain a separate measure / risk factor
3. To identify the specific questions to operationalize emotional/psychological partner violence
4. To agree or build consensus around how to analyse the data to produce a prevalence of emotional/psychological abuse for use by countries, including as part of UN Member State’s obligations to report under Target 5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Participants included approximately 20 experts who have been involved in the development and implementation of the WHO Multi-country Study on Domestic Violence and Women’s Health (WHO MCS), the domestic violence module of the Demographic Health Survey (DHS), the UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence (UN MCS), and other key surveys that measure intimate partner violence globally. Participants also included qualitative and feminist researchers who have an in-depth understanding of the nature of coercive control and emotional abuse as experienced by women in different settings, as well as clinical practitioners working directly with women who experience intimate partner violence.

A background report detailing key domains of psychological abuse, methodological tools to capture prevalence estimates, along with key issues and methodological limitations was prepared to inform the meeting and will be finalized with inputs from the meeting. In addition to drawing on the literature review and evidence summarized in the background report, several experts presented findings from different analyses of the WHO MCS, DHS and other data, which helped meeting participants reach informed conclusions. Evidence from clinical trials, as well as research from high, medium and low-income countries was also reviewed. The topics of the presentations are listed in the agenda included the annex.

***2. Meeting Outcomes***

In line with the meeting objectives, several recommendations emerged, as will be described per objective below:

**a) To identify the key domains of emotional/psychological partner violence**

Based on a review of the literature, findings from existing global surveys (such as the WHO MCS and the DHS) and clinical studies, eight domains of emotional/psychological violence were identified, including, for example: Criticising, ridiculing and insulting; scaring, intimidating or harassing; threatening with harm; dominance; isolating socially; and withdrawing/ manipulating emotionally. Each of these domains was comprised of several items. An additional domain discussed included economic abuse, due to evidence of its association with other forms of intimate partner violence. Meeting participants proposed a reduced number of key domains, since some overlapped and highlighted the most relevant items within each one. These are described in detail in Annex 1. Participants agreed that, while economic abuse is undoubtedly important, it is difficult to find a question that would work across countries and poses complexities regarding the denominator (e.g., not all women are part of the cash economy); therefore, it was not included among the proposed domains. Some participants did not agree that it should be conceptualized as a separate form of abuse, however. Nonetheless, experts recognized that while further research on the definition and measurement of economic abuse is warranted, other items not explicitly intended to measure intimate partner violence can be used as proxies to illustrate and capture dimensions of economic abuse, such as unequal household decision-making, among others.

**b) To discuss and agree whether controlling behaviour should be integrated into a measure of emotional/psychological abuse or should remain a separate measure / risk factor**

Historically, there has been a lack of consensus as to whether controlling behaviour should be understood as a constituent element of intimate partner violence and incorporated into a measure of emotional/psychological abuse or whether it should be measured separately and considered a risk factor for partner violence (Stark 2007, Johnson 2007). After examining both conceptual and empirical aspects of this issue, participants concluded that emotional/psychological abuse cannot be adequately understood or measured without the inclusion of controlling behaviours. To this end, it was proposed that controlling behaviours be incorporated as a subconstruct within measures of emotional/psychological abuse.

**c) To identify the specific questions to operationalize emotional/psychological partner violence**

Building on the discussion of domains of emotional/psychological violence, participants proposed items that best captured each of the domains, outlined in Annex 1. Additionally, a significant portion of the meeting was dedicated to suggesting possible changes to existing measures used in the WHO Multi Country Study survey and the DHS. These modifications are detailed in Annex 2.

1. **Establishment of a threshold for emotional/psychological abuse**

Another point discussed involved the establishment of a threshold for emotional/psychological abuse. As explained in the background paper, currently there is a lack of agreement about the threshold at which acts that can be considered unkind or insulting cross the line into emotional/psychological abuse (WHO 2013). A WHO paper on the analysis of emotional abuse from the WHO MCS data contrasts measurements of psychological abuse based on the type of acts (act-based) and the frequency of acts (intensity-based) and proposes three categories of abuse: low, middle and high, based on a combination of act-based and intensity-based psychological abuse. This is described in the background paper and was presented in more detail at the meeting. Participants concluded that a specific threshold for psychological abuse should not be established, due to the cultural and contextual complexities of intimate partner violence, its varying manifestations, and limited evidence regarding the impact of specific thresholds on health outcomes.

However, it was recommended that all psychological violence items, including controlling behavior items, include a standardized frequency measure, as well as similar sentence stems. Currently, certain items include frequency response options (such as “If yes, did this happen once, a few times, or many times), while others include yes/no response options. Other items ask about current partners, while others ask about any partner. Yet others ask whether an incidence has ever occurred in the respondent’s life, with others asking whether the incidence occurred in the last 12 months. One of the methodological challenges that has limited the comparability of population-based surveys is the use of different sentence stems and response categories for psychological abuse questions. Standardizing sentence stems and response categories and adding a frequency measure intends to address these discrepancies.

Finally, several suggestions regarding the wording of population-based survey items were made. These include paying attention to the order in which questions are asked, such that items denoting greater severity of intimate partner violence are asked later, replacing the word “hurt” with “harm” as the former has a broader meaning, and avoiding items that ascribe perpetrator intent. Rather, participants suggested wording such as “in a way that makes you feel [insert emotion here].” To improve question clarity, it was recommended that surveys limit the use of too many “or” choices within questions, keep “family” and “friends” separate (such as in social isolation questions), and avoid including examples after questions, as this practice often limits responses to the examples themselves. Removing “tries to” from certain items was also suggested.

1. **To agree or build consensus around how to analyse the data to produce a emotional/psychological abuse prevalence for use by countries, including as part of UN Member State’s obligations to report under Target 5.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals.**

One of the primary objectives of the meeting was to agree on a core psychological abuse prevalence measure for use by countries in light of Target 5.2, and on how to analyse the data. Meeting participants acknowledged the importance of simplicity and the need to ensure that the proposed prevalence measures are both feasible and clear to policy makers. However, the discussion highlighted the challenge of balancing ease and simplicity with the need to capture the complexity of psychological abuse, particularly given the lack of evidence and consensus thus far around these measures. To this end, participants recommended maintaining the empirical integrity of the proposed psychological abuse measure, and suggested that countries receive ample guidance and training on collecting and interpreting the measures. Since the manifestation and nature of intimate partner violence differs greatly according to socio-cultural context, a further recommendation included urging countries to develop additional culturally-specific measures of psychological abuse to supplement the core measures.

***3. Other Recommendations***

**a. Technological Abuse**

Meeting participants acknowledged and discussed the need to develop items to measure technological abuse, that is, psychological abuse perpetrated through different forms of media, such as through email, cell phones, and social media. One challenge is the paucity of existing scales to measure technological abuse, and that its perpetration is often not limited to intimate partners or current partners. There is also a lack of research regarding which items should be used to distinguish the type of abuse experienced by women and girls versus men and boys. Further research is needed to develop appropriate technological abuse scales, including items that capture gender differences in psychological abuse. In the meantime, it was suggested that psychological abuse items avoid using the word “verbally” (for example, in the case of threat items), as this precludes abuse delivered through digital channels.

**b. Gender Symmetry**

Given that many of the psychological abuse items were based on formative research specific to women only, there is a lack of a substantial evidence base to understand their applicability to men experiencing controlling behaviour and abuse. It is recommended that further formative research be conducted to understand the dimensions of psychological abuse and controlling behaviour experienced by men and to develop appropriate measures for male survivors.

However, if the proposed psychological abuse measures suggested in this report are employed to collect data on men’s experiences as well, it is recommended that the inclusion of the word “fear” be used to differentiate between the experience of men and women, as feeling fear (rather than, for example, distress) tends to be unique to women in situations of abuse. This is particularly relevant for items on controlling behaviour, such as “Insists on knowing where you are at all times [in a way that makes you feel controlled/afraid].”

**c. Item Denominator**

Participants noted discrepancies between item denominators, which can lead to inaccurate prevalence estimates. Survey respondents may respond negatively to a question because the situation or context does not apply to them, rather than due to an absence of abuse. For example, prior to asking a respondent whether a partner has ever taken her money away or threatened to take her children away from her is applicable only to women who are part of the cash economy and who have children, respectively. It is recommended that researchers pay close attention to this issue.

**d. Other Methodological Recommendations**

Cognitive testing to examine the impact of word choice should be employed more often than is currently the norm. Participants also recommended the use of correlation matrices and latent class analysis. The latter is particularly helpful for understanding subtypes of violence, especially emotional abuse, as this type of violence is more prone to measurement error. Along with the guidance to be provided to countries for data collection, analysis and interpretation, clarifications on each item will be included. For example, **t**hreats with weapons should be considered physical, rather than emotional, violence.

**d. Issues for Further Research**

Given the limited amount of time for the meeting, it was not possible to cover all topics in depth. Some topics were identified as meriting further research. These are included below:

1. How do the different psychological abuse items “hang together” (in the context of a factor analysis)? How do they relate to fear or health? How do insult and belittle relate to one another and others; is there a higher order (regarding the controlling behavior subset of psychological abuse in particular)?
2. It would be interesting to test out what happens when women with low frequency of abuse are removed from the factor analysis.
3. Qualitative research about how people feel when they are monitored is needed, in addition to research as to whether there are gendered effects of monitoring/controlling behavior, and which terms men and women use.
4. Cognitive testing of new items needs to be undertaken.
5. Does removing or including examples within the scare/intimidate items yield different results?
6. It would be interesting to assess how existing typologies check against Johnson categories (patriarchal terrorism vs common couple violence). See next point below.
7. What is the impact of thresholds by country? Are there potential differences in women who are excluded?
8. A composite measure might be more accurate e.g. physical, sexual and emotional; physical and emotional; it would be important to compare these measures across countries (as conducted by Heise, 2012), and against typology work in the literature (e.g. Kelly and Johnson, 2008).
9. What is the importance of structural issues, such as women’s right and ease to divorce?

**References**

1. Heise, Lori L (2012) Determinants of partner violence in low and middle-income countries : exploring variation in individual and populationlevel risk. Doctoral thesis, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. Downloaded from: http://researchonline.lshtm.ac.uk/682451/
2. Garcia-Moreno, C., et al., *WHO Multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women: Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses*. 2005, WHO: Geneva.
3. Jewkes, R., *Emotional abuse: a neglected dimension of partner violence.* The Lancet, 2010. **376**(9744): p. 851-852.
4. Kelly, J. B., & Johnson, M. P. (2008). Differentiation Among Types Of Intimate Partner Violence: Research Update And Implications For Interventions. *Family Court Review,* *46*(3), 476-499.
5. Johnson, Michael P. (2007). Domestic violence: The intersection of gender and control. In Laura L. O’Toole, Jessica R. Schiffman, & Margie Kiter Edwards (Eds.), *Gender Violence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 2nd edition (pp. 257-268). New York: New York University Press.
6. Stark, E. (2007). *Coercive control: How men entrap women in personal life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
7. WHO, *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence*. 2013, World Health Organization: Geneva.

# Annex I – Suggested domains

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| **Domain** | **Questions** |
| Insults and humiliation | * Insulted you or made you feel bad about yourself? * Said or did something that made you feel humiliated in front of other people? |
| Threats and intimidation | * Did things that made you feel scared or intimidated? * Threatened to harm you or someone you care about? |
| Control and social isolation | * Stops you from seeing female friends? * Restricts contact with your family? * Insists on knowing where you are in a way that made you feel controlled/afraid? * Stops you from getting health care if you need it? |

# Annex II – Modification to existing items

Original items

| **Study** | **Questions on psychological abuse/ Domains of psychological abuse** | **Response options** | **Timeframe** | **Questions on controlling behaviours** | **Response options** | **Timeframe** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **WHO Multi-country Study on Domestic Violence against Women** | If your current husband/partner or any other partner has ever done any of the following things:   * Insulted you or made you feel bad about yourself? * Belittled or humiliated you in front of other people? * Did things to scare or intimidate you on purpose (e.g. by the way he looked at her, by yelling or smashing things)? * Threatened to hurt you or someone you care about? | If yes, did this happen once, a few times or many times | Past 12 months & lifetime | Thinking about your (current or more recent) husband/partner, would you say it is generally true that he:   * Tries to keep you from seeing friends ? * Tries to restrict contact with your family of birth? * Insist on knowing where you are at all times? * Ignores you and treats you indifferently? * Gets angry if you speak with another man? * Is often suspicious that you are unfaithful? * Expects you to ask permission before seeking health care for yourself? | Yes/No | Currently |
| **Demographic Health Surveys Domestic Violence Module** | Does your (last) husband/partner ever:   * Say or something to humiliate you in front of others? * Threaten you or someone close to you with harm? * Insult you or make you feel bad about yourself? | If yes, often, sometimes, not in the last 12 months | Lifetime or current partner | Please tell me if these apply to your relationship with your (last) (husband/partner)?   * He (is/was) jealous or angry if you (talk/talked) to other men? * He frequently (accuses/accused) you of being unfaithful? * He (does/did) not permit you to meet your female friends? * He(tries/tried) to limit your contact with your family? * He(insists/insisted) on knowing where you(are/were)at all times? | Yes/No/  Don't Know | Current |

Modified items

| **Study** | **Questions on psychological abuse/ Domains of psychological abuse** | **Response options** | **Timeframe** | **Questions on controlling behaviours** | **Response options** | **Timeframe** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **WHO Multi-country Study on Domestic Violence against Women** | If your current husband/partner or any other partner has ever done any of the following things:   * Insulted you or made you feel bad about yourself? * Say or do something that made you feel humiliated in front of other people * Destroyed things that are important to you? * Threatened to harm you or someone you care about? * Did things that made you feel scared or intimidated?   [REMOVED: Belittled or humiliated you in front of other people?] | If yes, often, sometimes, not in the last 12 months (DID WE REMOVE THIS?) | Past 12 months & lifetime | Thinking about your (current or more recent) husband/partner, would you say it is generally true that he:   * Stops you from seeing female friends? * Restricts contact with your family? * Insist on knowing where you are in a way that made you feel controlled/afraid? * Stops you from getting health care if you need it?   [REMOVED:   * Ignores you and treats you indifferently? * Gets angry if you speak with another man? * Is often suspicious that you are unfaithful? * Expects you to ask permission before seeking health care for yourself?] | Yes/No | Currently |
| **Demographic Health Surveys Domestic Violence Module** | Does your (last) husband/partner ever:   * Insult you or make you feel bad about yourself? (this item moved from 3rd to 1st question) * Say or something to humiliate you in front of others? * Threaten you or someone you care about with harm? | If yes, often, sometimes, not in the last 12 months | Lifetime or current partner | Please tell me if these apply to your relationship with your (last) (husband/partner)?   * He (is/was) jealous or angry if you (talk/talked) to other men? * He frequently (accuses/accused) you of being unfaithful? * He (does/did) not permit you to meet your female friends? * He (tries/tried) to limit your contact with your family? * He (insists/insisted) on knowing where you (are/were) at all times? | Yes/No/  Don't Know | Current |

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**Expert meeting for developing consensus on measuring emotional/psychological intimate partner violence against women**

**June 20-22, 2016**

**Hotel Mont-Blanc, Morges, Switzerland**

**AGENDA**

**Day 1 ­– June 20th, Monday: Overall discussion, definitions and domains**

Chair: Jacquelyn Campbell (TBC)

|  |  |  |
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| 9:00 – 9:30 | 1. Welcome  2. Introductions  3. Meeting objectives and expected outputs  4. Brief background on context and justification for developing measures for emotional/psychological violence | *Ian Askew/Lale Say*  *Claudia García Moreno* |
| 9:30 - 10:00 | 5. An overview of the literature on emotional/psychological partner violence | *Emma Fulu* |
| *Emotional/psychological violence in the context of population-based surveys* | | |
| 10:00 – 11:00 | 6. Emotional/psychological violence in the WHO Multi-Country Study on Women’s Health and Violence: how to define prevalence | *Christina Pallitto* |
| 7. Empirical Examination of Emotional Aggression Using Latent Variable Approaches | *Cari Clark* |
| 11:00 – 11:30 | Coffee/tea break |  |
| 11:30 – 12:30 | 8. Economic violence: Analysis from the Multi-country study (TBC) | *Henriette Jansen* |
| 9. Emotional abuse measures/questions used by surveys and how data is reported in Latin America and the Caribbean | *Sarah Bott* |
| 12:30 – 14:00 | Lunch break |  |
| 14:00 – 14:30 | 10. Evaluation of emotional violence scale on southern African data | *Mercy Machisa* |
| 14:30 – 15:30 | 11. Discussion about controlling behaviours and economic violence   * Controlling behaviours: Part of emotional/psychological abuse or risk factor for IPV? * Economic violence: Part of psychological abuse or of controlling behaviours? | *Claudia García Moreno* |
| 15:30 – 16:00 | Coffee/tea break |  |
| 16:00 – 17:00 | 12. What is the threshold for defining prevalence? | *Claudia García Moreno* |

**Day 2 ­– June 21st, Tuesday: Operationalizing measures of psychological violence and data analysis**

**Chair: TBD**

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| 9:00 – 9:15 | Introduction: review of day 1 |  |
| *Emotional/psychological violence in the context of clinical studies/trials* | | |
| 9:15 - 10:15 | 13. The composite abuse scale (CAS) and app | *Kelsey Hegarty* |
| 14. New composite abuse scale (CAS) | *Marilyn Ford-Gilboe* |
| 10:15 – 11:00 | 15. Discussion of tabled/parking lot items from day 1  16. Domains and measurement of psychological intimate partner violence in population-based surveys :   * Gaps in existing instruments like WHO and DHS * Core vs. context-specific measures |  |
| 11:00 – 11:30 | Coffee/tea break |  |
| 11:30 – 12:30 | 17. Small groups discuss:   * WHO Multi-country study questions and consider potential refinements to capture the relevant domains of emotional/psychological abuse * How to analyse psychological abuse data? * How to report prevalence of psychological IPV for SDG monitoring? |  |
| 12:30 – 14:00 | Lunch break |  |
| 14:00 – 15:00 | 18. Wrap up of measuring emotional psychological intimate partner violence:   * Small groups report back |  |
| 15:00 – 15:20 | Coffee/tea break |  |
| 15:20 – 16:00 | 19. Concluding thoughts on measurement |  |

**Day 3 ­– June 22nd, Wednesday: Wrapping up**

**Chair:** Claudia García Moreno

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| 10:00 – 11:00 | Review of days 1 and 2, meeting objectives and outputs  20. Concluding thoughts  21. Next steps and final remarks |  |
| 11:00 – 11:30 | Coffee/tea break and adjourn |  |