

Imperative to Invest

How addressing violence against women and girls today reduces violence over time, fosters peace and stability, and enables people to reach their full potential - all of which advances us towards the SDGs



AUTHORED BY

Dalberg

Foreword



Amanda Nguyen is the Founder of Rise, a 2019 Nobel Peace Prize Nominee, a 2022 TIME Woman of the Year. Amanda's 2021 viral video ignited a wave of collective action in the anti-Asian hate movement. She drafted and unanimously passed the Sexual Assault Survivors' Bill of Rights through the United States Congress. Over 50 laws have been passed inspired by this law. She was listed on Forbes 30 Under 30 twice, served at NASA and the White House. She is also an Astronaut-Scientist Candidate at the Astronautical Science Institute. Amanda graduated from Harvard University. As a survivor of sexual violence, she has been organizing globally for survivor rights for the past 6 years.

Violence against women is all around us. It affects everyone, in all walks of life. It is in our homes, our workplaces, our streets. Power and privilege cannot shield against it. Even spaces we think are safe turn out not to be.

As mothers, daughters, activists, and political leaders, we could give in to despair—we could surrender to the immensity of the violence and lose all hope of ever achieving security. Especially at a time when women's basic rights and bodily autonomy are being rolled back, even as violence against women and girls increases.

But we cannot accept that so many of us must endure physical and psychological harm; that so many of us will never develop our full potential; or that, despite our immense abilities and determination, our dreams and aspirations will be thwarted by the violence around us. We cannot give up. We must act—decisively and with clarity of purpose.

While it can sometimes be hard to see, tangible progress is already being made all around us. Governments, activists, and civil society organizations are finding effective ways to work against the violence. Their efforts are helping to create a better society for everyone.

This report offers hope. It paints a picture of what can be done if we try—the power of thousands of people working together, and the potential of what we can achieve with resources that match the gravity of the problem. Thanks to these efforts it is no longer inconceivable that we could end violence against women and girls in our lifetimes. I urge you to read and to reflect on how you can contribute to these manifold efforts. There are precious lives at stake. The time to act is now.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amanda Nguyen".

Amanda Nguyen
*Founder of Rise and 2019
Nobel Peace Prize Nominee*

Contents

Letter from the Authors	1
I. Introduction: why this issue needs attention	4
II. Approach & Methodology: how we designed and implemented this study	11
III. Highlights: what are the potential future impacts of the Spotlight Initiative	15
An Imperative to Invest in Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls... Reducing Violence and Fostering Peace and Stability	16
1. Preventing violence against women & girls	
2. Amplifying investment impact	
3. Creating conditions for more survivors seeking formal help	
4. Preventing the loss of life	
5. Preventing harm to physical and mental health and wellbeing	
6. Tackling conflict and instability	
An Imperative to Invest in Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls... Enabling People to Realise their Full Potential	25
7. Safeguarding girls' right to education and preventing interruptions to schooling	
8. Reducing poverty for individual households while contributing to economic growth	
9. Shifting attitudes and beliefs in favour of equality	
IV. Conclusion	30
Acknowledgements	32
Annexure A: Abbreviations	33
Annexure B: Bibliography	34

Letter from the authors

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a pervasive and grave violation of women's human rights that is inextricably intertwined with broader issues of stability and prosperity.

Globally, 700-750 million women and girls aged 15 and older (1 in 3) have been subjected to violence.¹ Likely more. It takes the form of – for example – domestic violence in the home, sex trafficking of children, and sexual assault and harassment in the workplace. It occurs in public and private spaces. And it is often a precursor to other forms of violence and conflict.

The costs of violence against women and girls are borne by all of society and impede our collective progress.

VAWG hinders all people from achieving peace and prosperity as laid out in the Sustainable Development Goals. For example, individuals and families experience trauma and physical harm; women's and girls' rights and their social and economic agency are collectively limited; and societies as a whole are more likely to experience and perpetrate violence in other forms when violence against women and girls goes unchecked.

Notwithstanding this—and like many other issues that disproportionately affect women and girls—the work to address violence against women and girls is severely underfunded and overlooked in the global development agenda. Less than 0.5% of official development assistance and philanthropic funding went to the violence against women and girls' agenda in 2018, a figure that has not risen substantially through the pandemic, despite the increased need.

Why this disconnect? In our experience, the gap between the data and the discourse on VAWG often stems from a belief on the part of (often male) decision-makers that violence against women and girls is a niche and intractable problem—and therefore not a priority. For example, development sector agendas are often drawn across specific issue areas—such as health, education, or agriculture—with violence against women and girls perceived as sitting outside these priorities in its own niche. Similarly, VAWG is often considered a sensitive and somewhat intractable social issue, because it has persisted for

centuries and is deeply intertwined with power structures, culture, and tradition.

However, the evidence does not support these beliefs. As this report shows, violence against women and girls is not niche: it affects people of all ages, races, socio-economic status, and regions. It has immediate and well-researched impacts on several global priorities, such as health, education, and economic prosperity. It even has less discussed impacts on some of the great challenges of our time—inequality and injustice, conflict and instability, and climate change.² Violence against women and girls is not intractable: decades of community-based work and rigorous research by academics around the world proves that it is preventable.

We conducted this study to better align the discourse on addressing violence against women and girls with the impact of doing so. It brings the evidence together in one place for the first time, anchoring on the Spotlight Initiative, the world's largest coordinated and comprehensive effort to address violence against women and girls, as well as the largest single investment in this issue.

The Spotlight Initiative takes a comprehensive approach to addressing violence against women and girls by working on multiple, mutually reinforcing pillars – including prevention, survivor support services, laws and policies, and data—in a manner that is locally informed and deeply engages local partners and civil society organisations. It draws on—and scales—many other similar models that have pioneered a comprehensive approach to addressing violence against women and girls.

We extrapolate the impact potential of the Spotlight Initiative's work on direct reductions of VAWG as well as indirect effects on SDGs over the next few years and decade. This is not an impact evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative. Rather, we use mixed-method analysis to arrive at a data-driven perspective on the impact potential of addressing violence against women and girls through models like the Spotlight Initiative, with the goal of bringing the best available data to inform ongoing discourse

1 The above figure includes physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, both at least once in their life. It does not include sexual harassment. World Health Organization, on behalf of the United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Violence Against Women Estimation and Data (2021).

2 This study focuses on the impacts of VAWG on other global priorities. We acknowledge that these impacts are not only in a single direction (i.e., the prevalence of VAWG is also driven by levels of health, education, etc. in a community).

and investment priorities.³ Our estimates are based on—and project forwards—the Initiative’s programming and results between 2018 and 2021, its first years of programming, and impact data from the results achieved by more than 30 other programmes that the Initiative draws on and seeks to scale.

Taken together, our estimates offer a panoramic view of the potential impacts of investing in this agenda. Our work makes a significant contribution to the current discourse on the costs of violence against women and girls by showcasing the potential future impacts of addressing it.

We hope that this effort accelerates and increases action on this issue: by elevating violence against women and girls in global development and policy circles and inspiring greater funding and action. We invite our readers to take away the following:

- Violence against women and girls is a debilitating, life-altering human rights violation that can substantially curtail women and girls’ freedoms and alter their futures
- Violence against women and girls can be effectively prevented and addressed by investing in comprehensive approaches—such as (but not limited to) the Spotlight Initiative—that work on multiple, mutually reinforcing pillars of prevention, quality service provision, laws and policies, and data, in a manner that deeply engages local partners, civil society organisations, and progressive movements
- Preventing and addressing VAWG reduces violence, fosters peace and stability, and enables people to realize their full potential, all of which advances us towards the SDGs
- There is therefore an imperative to invest in comprehensive approaches to address violence against women and girls.

We want to acknowledge the contributions of several people who helped make this work possible. All these inputs were critical in helping shape our own perspectives on the issue. We, however, are ultimately responsible for analytical and editorial decisions, as well as any errors in this document.

- **Colleagues at the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat:** Nahla Valji, Erin Kenny, Alessandra Roccasalvo, Philippe Lust-Bianchi, Dania AlRashed AlHumaid, and members of the Civil Society Global Reference Group, especially Lara Fergus. They inspired, funded, and offered technical assistance in this effort. The Spotlight Initiative—and therefore this work, too—is funded by the European Union.
- **Experts we spoke to:** Dr Amrita Namasivayam, Arsene Basobe, Dr Carol Ajema, Cate Owren, Clara Alemann, Dr Daniela Ligiero, Dillyana Ximenes, Edurne Cardenas, Dr Elizabeth Anderson, Emily Esplen, F. Mutema, Laxman Belbase, Dr Mary Ellsberg, Molly Melching, Nayla Procopio, Priya Dhanani, Reem Alsalem, Ruti Levtov, Hon. Minister Sithembiso Nyoni, and Tina Musuya. Together, they offered feedback and guidance to fine-tune our assumptions and pointed us to valuable resources.
- **The broader community of researchers and experts in the field of violence against women and girls:** whose work—for example, randomised controlled trials, other quasi-experimental work, and meta-studies—we have drawn upon to inform our analysis.

And finally, we want to acknowledge the lived experience of survivors and victims of VAWG – and their families and communities.

This experience informs our work on this issue. It serves as a sobering reminder of what lies behind each data point we cite. And it fuels us, as development sector professionals, parents, and women to continue to work towards a world free of violence.






In the meantime, we invite your questions, feedback, and reflections. We hope to carry this work forward with your partnership. Please feel free to reach out to us at imperativetoinvest@dalberg.com to continue the conversation.

Akanksha Agarwal, Shruthi Jayaram, and Swetha Totapally, Dalberg Advisors

³ Our work—which presents directional, not precise, estimates—is meant to be distinct from but complementary to more precise and academically-oriented impact evaluations of interventions to address violence against women and girls. We hope that readers engage with our work in this spirit, and we have generally erred on the side of being conservative in our estimations. We also recognise that there are important limitations to our methodology (see the Approach & Methodology section).

Why it is imperative to invest in addressing VAWG

The Spotlight Initiative is currently the largest-funded comprehensive model of eradicating violence against women and girls. The United Nations is implementing it with a five-year support of EUR 500 million from the European Union. Launched in 2017, the Initiative has already shown the below results across its 26 focus countries:

-  disbursed over USD 144 million to grassroots civil society organisations and women's movements so far
-  reached more than 200 million people through behaviour change interventions so far
-  saw 198 laws and policies signed or strengthened to address violence against women and girls at a structural level across 39 countries in 2021
-  associated with an 8-fold increase in national budgets allocated to violence against women and girls so far
-  associated with a 155% increase in perpetrator conviction rates in 2021

This study extrapolates the impact potential of the Spotlight Initiative's work. See on the right how it can advance many SDGs

Reduce Violence and Foster Peace & Stability



Prevent **21 million** women & girls from facing violence by 2025



Reduce escalations of conflict and foster national/global **peace and stability**



Improve **perpetrator accountability** and survivors' access to quality support



Save nearly 2 women's and girls' **lives every day**



Save **140,000** child lives



Reduce violence **70-90%** more effectively than single-pillar or siloed interventions



Preempt critical physical injuries for **2,500** women and girls and the onset of serious psychological distress for **320** women and girls every day



Enable People to Realise their Full Potential



Keep **5 million** more girls in school by 2050



Safeguard survivors from losing **30%** of their annual earning potential



Add back **43 million** productive days a year



Enable role modelling of gender-equal values and relationships for **90 million** children





Introduction

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a widespread, persistent, and grave human rights violation that affects one in three women and girls around the world.⁴ Such violence has persisted throughout history and continues to exist all around us—in our homes, our streets, and our places of work, education, and worship. It ranges from injury and exploitation to violent death, and takes many forms, such as domestic violence, honour killings, female infanticide, sexual assault in the workplace, trafficking for sexual exploitation, and rape as a weapon of war.⁵ It affects over 700 million women and girls worldwide, and potentially many more—multiple barriers to identifying and reporting violence, including stigma or fear of retaliation, mean that it is likely far more prevalent.⁶ Those who are elderly, transgender, or belong to a religious, racial, or other minority group, are at a higher risk of more frequent and multiple forms of violence. For example, in Uganda, women with disabilities were between 1.3 to 1.8 times more likely than those without disabilities to have experienced intimate partner violence.⁷

Violence against women and girls has significant consequences for individual lives as well as for the collective progress of society as a whole. VAWG can be fatal.⁸ The reported (and likely significantly undercounted) global figure of 50,000 intentional femicides⁹ (the intentional murder of people because they are women) each year hardly tells the complete story. Survivors face severe health consequences. Violence against women and girls can curtail fundamental human rights and freedoms, access to education, incomes, life choices, and aspirations, even for women who have not experienced violence themselves. Beyond the incalculable human suffering and losses, violence against women and girls costs the world more than 2% of the global annual GDP, totalling USD 1.7 trillion.¹⁰ It is now widely established that violence against women and girls is often a pre-cursor to or aggravator of other forms of violence and conflict.¹¹ Crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and conflict in turn often lead to increased VAWG.¹² The collective trauma of VAWG and the harmful norms that enable it are passed on to children, putting their lives at risk and leading to multigenerational cycles of violence.¹³

As the world aspires to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, violence against women and girls starkly inhibits the achievement of health and well-being, hinders our progress towards education and economic goals, and impedes peace and justice.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) and policymakers across the world have worked tirelessly to build models that prevent violence, support survivors, and uplift their communities. Among many others, organisations such as Equimundo, Raising Voices, and Tostan have built and tested different prevention strategies and models around the world to address harmful norms among communities, including men and boys. Impact evaluations have shown remarkable results: the prevalence of violence can be reduced significantly and within a short time frame. Simultaneously, the work of grassroots women’s movements and CSOs, as well as policymakers, has repeatedly shown evidence of effectively preventing violence, holding governments to account, and supporting survivors in all contexts.

4 WHO analysis, 2018.

5 Increasingly, VAWG is manifesting in online spaces. While not the focus of this report, we encourage readers to peruse the growing body of evidence focused on online violence against women and girls and how it links not just to offline violence but also to broader development priorities and political stability in particular. See, for example, publications by the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Center for Women and Development, *She Persisted*, and the Wilson Center.

6 WHO study finds 1 in 3 women experience physical, sexual violence, 2021.

7 Anne Valentine et al., *Intimate Partner Violence among Women with Disabilities in Uganda*, 2019.

8 Unfortunately, the real extent of deaths due to VAWG is not known. The official reporting rate is low, and it is often easy to ‘cover up’ VAWG-related deaths or misrepresent them as an ‘accident.’

9 UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide*, 2018.

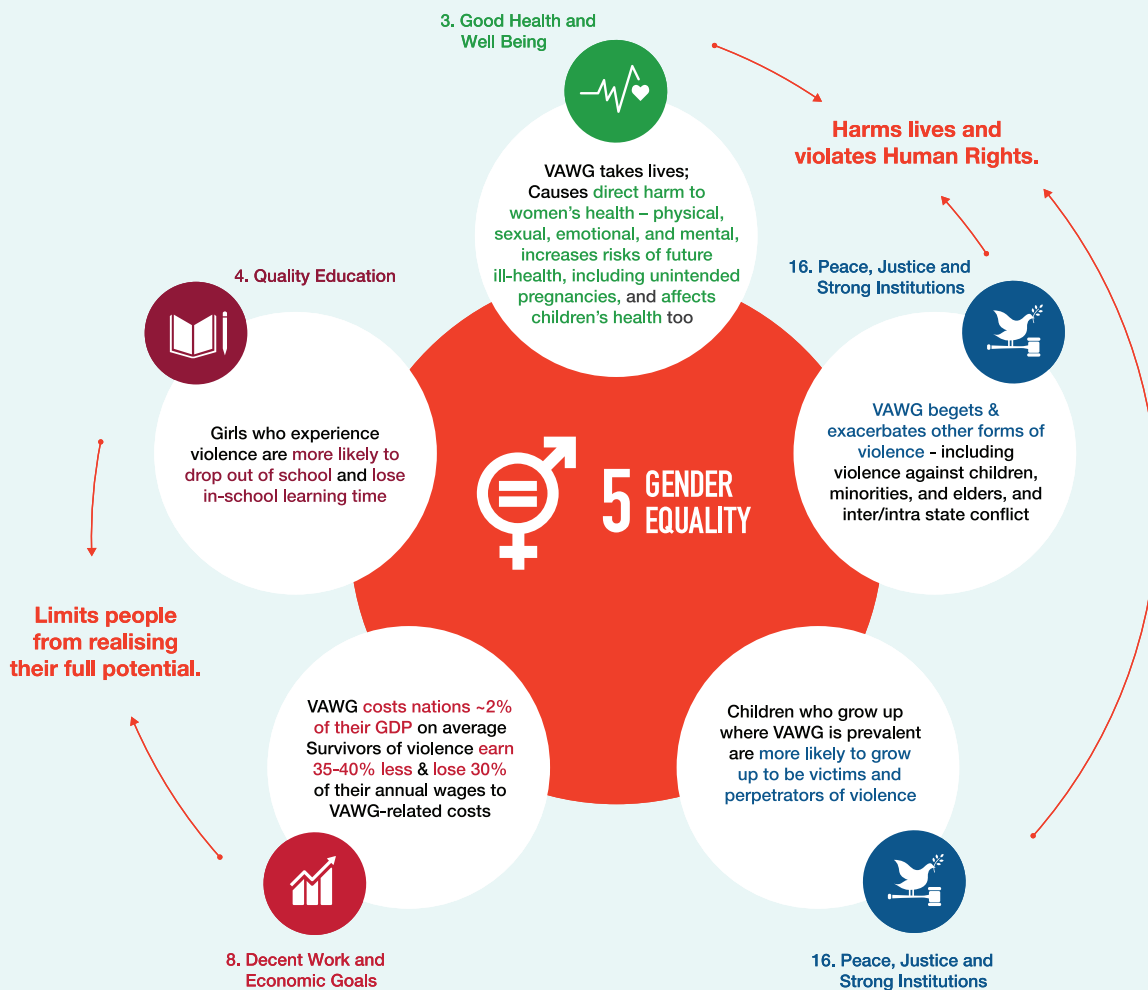
10 CARE, *Counting the Cost: The Price Society Pays for Violence Against Women*, 2018.

11 Arriaga et al, *Linking Security of Women & Security of States*, 2017. Arriaga et al, *Linking Security of Women & Security of States*, 2017.

12 Jo Spangaro et al, *The impact of interventions to reduce risk and incidence of intimate partner violence and sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict states and other humanitarian crises in low and middle income countries: a systematic review*, *Conflict and Health*, 2021.

13 Judicial College of Victoria, *Children’s experiences of family violence*. *Family Violence Bench Book*, 5.3.2, 2014. Wilkins, N., Tsao, B., Hertz, M., Davis, R., Klevens, J., *Connecting the Dots: An Overview of the Links Among Multiple Forms of Violence*. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control and Prevention Institute, 2014.

Figure 1: Overview of links between VAWG and the Sustainable Development Goals (non-exhaustive)



Efforts to end violence against women and girls – driven by women’s rights organisations and activists, including survivors themselves—have taken different forms over the years.

For example, VAWG has been prioritised as a key issue in multiple multi-lateral agendas, including during the UN Decade for Women (1975-1985); in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979); the Beijing Platform for Action (1995); Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security (2000 and beyond), the Sustainable Development Goals (2015); the Generation Equality Action Coalitions; and the UN Common Agenda (2021). Public, private, and philanthropic actors alike have funded these efforts. They are the consequence of tireless advocacy on the part of women’s rights organisations and movement leaders.

And yet—despite the far-reaching consequences of violence and the existence of solutions—violence against women and girls remains overlooked, underfunded, and minimized in discourse and policy.

The WHO estimates that 700-750 million women¹⁴ and girls aged 15 and older (1 in 3) have been subjected to VAWG, with 1 in 4 experiencing it between the ages of 15-19.¹⁵ Although formal statistics are limited, these numbers have almost certainly risen during the pandemic, with increases in cases reported at helplines, women’s refuges/shelters,

14 The above figure includes physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, both at least once in their life. It does not include sexual harassment. World Health Organization, on behalf of the United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group on Violence Against Women Estimation and Data (2021).
 15 WHO analysis, 2018.

and the police, globally.¹⁶ Less than 0.5% of official development assistance and philanthropic funding is estimated to go directly towards the agenda of reducing violence against women and girls.¹⁷ National budgets for VAWG have expanded over time in many countries but still pale in comparison to other priorities for violence prevention, such as military budgets.¹⁸

This study aims to illuminate the paths to what is possible when violence against women and girls is addressed. Every effort towards violence prevention can mitigate its very real costs and open opportunities for progress. Our work paints a picture of what effective efforts to eliminate VAWG can achieve. While the available data are incomplete and clustered around what is measurable, they still demonstrate—together with conservative assumptions, approximations and projections—how impactful working to counter VAWG can be. This study illuminates the extent to which this work can benefit individual women and girls, as well as society as a whole, as we strive to achieve greater well-being, education, prosperity, peace, and justice for all. We hope that this lens inspires readers to see the issue in a new light, see the imperative to invest, and act promptly.

The focus of this study is on comprehensive models that address all forms of violence against women and girls—i.e., models that work on multiple, mutually reinforcing pillars, such as prevention, survivor support services, laws and policies, data, and other ways to strengthen the ecosystem. Comprehensive models have shown themselves to be especially effective at reducing the incidence and prevalence of VAWG. That is because VAWG is not just a women’s rights issue, but is also an issue that affects all spheres of life, including public health, education, and rule of law. Comprehensive models work at a system level, address the issue from different angles, and bring everyone along in that effort; they are self-reinforcing, magnifying the impact of each individual intervention through its interaction with other interventions. These conditions allow for greater and more sustainable impacts.

Specifically, to demonstrate the promising impacts in this study, we use the Spotlight Initiative, the world’s largest comprehensive model to end violence against women and girls.

This study describes a comprehensive model as one that works on multiple, mutually reinforcing pillars—such as prevention, survivor support services, laws and policies, data, and other ways to strengthen society’s response—to address all forms of VAWG for women and girls across all contexts. It fosters system-wide ownership and collaboration beyond traditional siloes, among politicians, policymakers, religious leaders, women’s rights organisations, other civil society organisations, and the media. A comprehensive model centers on grassroots civil society’s engagement, leadership, and partnership, to advance sustainability and local ownership.

16 UN Women, Facts and figures: Ending violence against women.

17 Donor Tracker Insights, Financing to end gender-based violence, 2020.

18 Based on a review of the components of national security / military budgets of Australia, Brazil, India, Sweden, and the US.

A glimpse into the Spotlight Initiative

The Spotlight Initiative is the world's largest – and the first global – initiative at this scale to end violence against women and girls. The United Nations and the European Union launched the Spotlight Initiative as a multi-year investment in 2017 with a seed investment of EUR 500 million from the European Union. The Initiative currently works through 26 country programmes and with over 1,500 partners to reach 122 countries across Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Pacific to address all forms of violence against women and girls—including sexual violence and intimate partner and family violence, as well as harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation, trafficking, and labour exploitation.

With its diverse range of partners, the Spotlight Initiative has already catalysed a powerful movement for collective action against gendered violence. For example, since its launch in 2017, the Initiative has disbursed over USD 144 million to grassroots civil society organisations and women's movements, reached more than 200 million people through behaviour change interventions, and, in 2021 has seen 198 laws and policies across 39 countries signed or strengthened to address violence against women and girls at a structural level. So far, the Initiative's activities have been associated with an eight-fold increase in national budgets allocated to addressing violence against women and girls and with a 155% increase in perpetrator conviction rates in its programming countries¹⁹ in 2021.

The model takes a rights-based, comprehensive, and transformative approach, and draws on proven initiatives from across the world. It builds on the findings of hundreds of large and small interventions and programmes that have proven their effectiveness in addressing and preventing violence against women and girls. Rigorous evaluations by academics and researchers—e.g., DFID's²⁰ What Works Initiative—have established a rich evidence base of what is effective in preventing VAWG; this has inspired the design of the Spotlight Initiative as it aims to scale successful interventions at the global level. Such interventions include FCDO's²¹ Do Kadam Barabri ki Ore (India), IMAGE (South Africa), Sammanit Jeevan (Nepal), SASA! Together (Uganda and globally), Tostan's Community Empowerment Programme (Senegal), Women's Justice Initiative (Guatemala), and Zindagi Shoista (Tanzania). The Initiative owes a significant debt to the advocates, practitioners, and researchers that have provided such a solid base; it seeks to contribute to and reflect these collective efforts.

The Spotlight Initiative's ambition is to take these efforts to a global scale—to accelerate their progress and elevate the need to end violence against women and girls on the global agenda. The Initiative is unique in four ways. First, it mobilises unprecedentedly large-scale resources—both financial and non-financial. Second, it invests a large portion of its funding directly into women's movements. Third, its scale allows it to systematically and simultaneously address mutually reinforcing causes of VAWG—for example, it addresses violence by intimate partners, in schools, in public places, and in its different forms and contexts. Finally, being housed by the UN and supported by the European Union, it is in a position to advocate for and garner widespread political and donor attention.

19 Spotlight Initiative Annual Reports.

20 The UK's Department for International Development.

21 The UK's Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office.

There are six key features of the initiative. Each is designed to apply sector-wide best practices and put the rights-based, comprehensive, and transformative nature of the model into motion.

The Spotlight Initiative -



Takes a **comprehensive, evidence-driven multi-pillar approach** bridging prevention, services, rule of law, health, data, and other ways to strengthen the ecosystem



Embeds the **leave no one behind** principle from the Sustainable Development Goals and a do-no-harm approach in order to improve support for women and girls who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and address the root causes of that discrimination



Engages and invests in **civil society and women's movements** as partners to ensure relevance and sustainability of efforts



Fosters **partnerships and collaboration beyond traditional siloes**, spanning grassroots women's groups, political offices, institutions, religious and community leaders, and more



Anchors on **political buy-in and championship** for lasting momentum



Pools **resources and expertise** across the **UN agencies** to “deliver as one”

Together, these features are also meant to demonstrate unconventional and better ways for large-scale, multilateral, multi-year initiatives to address the pressing issues of our century.

The examples shown ahead illustrate how the Initiative brings these features to life.

The Spotlight Initiative's principles in action: Examples from its work in Argentina, Timor-Leste, and Zimbabwe



Comprehensive, evidence-driven multipillar approach

The Spotlight Initiative takes an evidence-based approach to designing behaviour change campaigns. In **Argentina**, the Initiative had originally funded and launched infomercial-type awareness campaigns that had produced sub-optimal levels of engagement. The country programme team thus reviewed the campaign, consulted media experts, and ultimately decided to root the awareness campaigns in popular culture references. Tailored campaigns led to higher engagement across platforms and informed the approach to multimedia campaigns in other countries. These efforts are coupled with behaviour change work to reinforce campaign messages. Going forward, the Argentina programme plans to further tailor and target its campaigns to the needs and challenges of specific communities.



Political buy-in and championship

The Spotlight Initiative builds political buy-in by working with leaders and public institutions on capacity-building. In **Zimbabwe**, the Initiative has placed violence against women and girls on the national development agenda through sustained lobbying at the highest level. This culminated in a strategic document ("compact") officially launched and signed by the president of Zimbabwe. The compact ensures continued political commitment and engagement of national leaders in eliminating violence against women and girls, and establishes the sustainability of the work even when the Initiative ends.

"It is my conviction that accelerated, adaptive, and innovative implementation of global, regional, and national commitments as outlined in the Action Plan of this high-level political compact will lead to our ultimate aspiration of a Gender-Based Violence free society by 2030"
His Excellence Dr E.D. Mnangagwa, President, Zimbabwe



Leave no one behind

The Spotlight Initiative supports women and girls across all contexts, under the leave no one behind principle, in two ways. First, it funds grassroots CSOs that work with those at risk of violence based on multiple aspects of their identity (gender, race, socio-economic status etc.). Second, it advocates to political leaders and public institutions for inclusive policies and services. These two aspects were combined in **Timor-Leste**, where an advocacy march was jointly planned and carried out with those from the disability and LGBTQI+ communities.



Partnerships and collaboration beyond traditional silos

The Spotlight Initiative works to break traditional silos in two ways – how it invests in ecosystem building by working with all, and how it facilitates partnerships among unlike stakeholder groups. On the first, in **Argentina**, the Initiative brought the media community along through funded workshops on topics such as reporting with a gender perspective. Post the workshops, participants initiated their own journalist network to reinforce gender equality, and two major newspapers created new gender editor positions. On the second, in **Timor-Leste**, the Initiative organised joint meetings between government institutions and grassroots CSOs – the first of their kind – and sowed the seeds for diverse and meaningful partnerships.



Resources and expertise across UN agencies

In the spirit of the UN Reforms Agenda, the Spotlight Initiative invites the cooperation of multiple UN agencies. Within a country, several UN agencies come together to deliver on the mandate of the country programme, leveraging their in-country stakeholder relationships, expertise areas, and human resources to create impact. In **Zimbabwe**, multiple UN agencies joined hands to formulate a strategic document to affirm violence against women and girls as a national development issue. The Government took note of this UN-wide collaborative approach in co-ideating and co-creating the document and verbalised its confidence in this united front.

"Delivering as one helps all the sector stakeholders, especially the government partners. It allows the Initiative to effectively plug the resources into all the components that will make something move."
Pat Made, Spotlight Technical Coordinator, Zimbabwe



Civil society and women's movements

The Spotlight Initiative is committed to supporting civil society organisations (CSOs) and has brought them along as partners, movement builders, and decision makers. In **Timor-Leste**, the Initiative has established connections with over 60 civil CSOs. Beyond supporting programmatic costs, the Initiative has also strengthened CSO capacity—funding non-programmatic needs and offering technical assistance to ensure that new and smaller organisations are well positioned for funding opportunities, which is critical to long-term sustainability.

"The aim of strengthening the CSOs is to help sustain their work. This is something I haven't seen other funders do—they direct their funds only to direct programming."
Dilyana Ximenes, Plan International

A large, light blue number '2' is centered on the page. A horizontal red bar passes through the middle of the number, and the text 'Approach & Methodology' is written in white on this bar.

Approach & Methodology

The objective of this study is to bridge the gap between the prevalent discourse, which treats violence against women and girls as a niche issue, and the available data and evidence that demonstrate the universal severity of the issue and the potentially transformative impact of investing in addressing it.²²

To achieve this objective, we analyse and extrapolate 9 sets of potential future impacts of the Spotlight Initiative’s work. As described above, we focus on the Spotlight Initiative as the world’s largest global comprehensive effort to end violence against women and girls and the largest single investment in this issue. We focus on these nine sets of impacts because, taken together, they demonstrate the imperative to invest in comprehensive models to address VAWG in order to reduce violence and foster peace and stability, enable people to realise their full potential, and advance us towards the SDGs.²³

We calculate these impacts utilising a mixed-methods approach. Key inputs to our analysis include:

- a review of programmatic data²⁴ from the Spotlight Initiative—drawing on annual reports, mid-term evaluations, and direct inputs from civil society partners and other grantees—to distil its reach and impact to date.
- a landscape review and evidence-mapping of the impact of multi-pillar models on violence against women and girls. After filtering for analytical rigour and representation, our evidence base includes 100+ impact evaluations representing over 30 unique interventions. Most of these studies are randomised control trials (RCTs), quasi-experimental and longitudinal studies, and metastudies. The evidence map covers more than 30 countries; 90% of the studies originate in regions and countries where the Initiative works.²⁵
- a landscape review and evidence-mapping of the links between violence against women and girls and other issues. We analysed another 100+ studies that chart and measure the impact of the falling prevalence of violence against women and girls on SDGs. For example, we found 10+ studies that showed violence against women and girls is closely linked to instability and conflict. Similarly, we found more than 10 evaluations and meta-studies that quantified the impact of reduced violence against women and girls on their mental and physical health.
- expert consultations with over 20 experts across the community of researchers, practitioners, and civil society representatives (some of whom are advisors to the Spotlight Initiative; a full list is in the Acknowledgements) to refine our assumptions and approach.

Based on these inputs, we model potential future impacts of the initial investment of the Spotlight Initiative (2017-2023) by:

- directly extrapolating the Spotlight Initiative’s own impact data²⁶ (where available)
- gathering best available impact estimates from other comprehensive initiatives

22 This report often uses a gender binary construct because of available data restrictions; however, we acknowledge the unique and disproportionate impacts on transgender as well as gender non-conforming people.

23 The impacts modelled in this study are not comprehensive. Addressing violence against women and girls has many more benefits to individuals and society than those modelled here. However, we believe that our approach covers a wide-ranging set of impacts that touch upon many global priorities, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the new Common Agenda for the United Nations.

24 We use data from 2018 to 2021.

25 These studies span different durations—some interventions were carried out over a few months, while others covered years of programming. We annualise the findings to aggregate our evidence correctly.

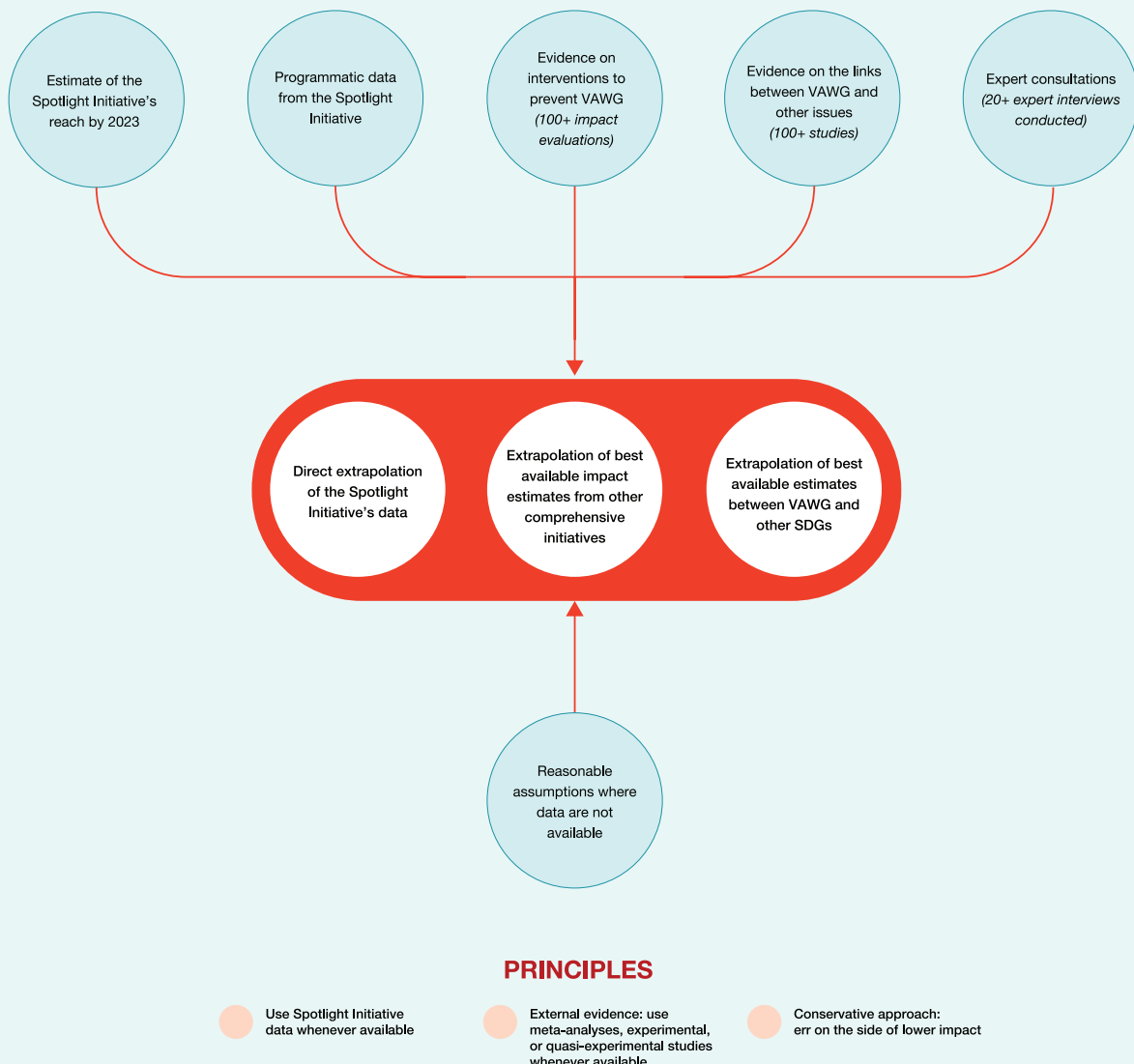
26 Spotlight Initiative Annual Reports and Annexes as well as customized data requests.

and extrapolating from these impacts based on the Initiative’s estimated reach by the end of the initial investment (2023)

- gathering the best available estimates of the links between VAWG and other SDG outcomes and extrapolating these links based on the Initiative’s estimated reach by 2023.

Across the board, we followed three principles in the methodology. First, we relied on the Initiative’s own data, where possible, and only supplemented with external evidence if necessary. Second, when using external evidence, we relied primarily on meta-, experimental, or quasi-experimental studies (as described above) of interventions that the Initiative draws and seeks to scale. Finally, we took a conservative approach to aggregating and extrapolating data, erring on the side of lower impact. Our estimates are likely conservative for two reasons. First, there is no perfect comparison for the Initiative given that it is a globally-implemented, comprehensive model representing the single largest investment in this issue. There are likely breakthrough impacts of such a global model that are not captured in our extrapolation exercise by taking an average of the impacts of relevant but localised interventions. Second, while some of the Initiative’s impacts could endure beyond the initial investment (2018–2023)—due to the capacity-building work that the Initiative does with its partners—no adjustments have been made to account for this in our estimations.

Figure 2: Overview of the methodology



Our methodology also has its limitations. These include:

- **Quantitative data is scarce and unevenly available.** We found substantial gaps in the availability of data linking violence against women and girls and the SDGs. Even when available, the quality of the data was uneven across different forms of violence, demographics, and geographies. Prevailing gaps in data imposed a limit on which impact pathways we were able to explore and required us to make certain reasonable assumptions or approximations.
- **The Spotlight Initiative's implementation, as with many large initiatives, is not (and arguably can never be) complete, consistent, and perfect.** This implies that our estimates, which assume that the Spotlight Initiative will be delivered as planned, have built in ongoing improvements to operational considerations and implementation by the Initiative team and its delivery partners. There are multiple ongoing evaluations and emerging areas for learning and improvement for the Initiative. So far, in our work, members of the Civil Society Global Reference Group (CSRG) and the Spotlight Initiative itself have pointed out the need to invest more time in setting up country programmes, decentralise the decision-making to civil society to a greater extent, and fund a greater proportion of localised grassroots women's movements and CSOs as grantees and partners to drive sustainable change and government action.

The following chapter contains additional detail on the methodology for each of the nine modelled impacts. We would be pleased to share additional data or details on the methodology with interested researchers upon request.

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Highlights

Together with its 1500+ partners, the Spotlight Initiative has already achieved much in terms of funding organizations and behaviour change interventions; contributing to stronger laws and policies, as well as greater perpetrator accountability; and advocating for larger national budgets to address VAWG.

This chapter presents nine illustrations of potential future impacts of the Spotlight Initiative's work. Each of these examples is derived from combining existing data on the Initiative's reach with the best available evidence of impact from relevant interventions that it draws on and seeks to scale. Taken together, these examples demonstrate a compelling proof of concept—and imperative to invest—in models like the Spotlight Initiative that take a comprehensive approach to addressing violence against women and girls.

An Imperative to Invest in Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls... Reducing Violence and Fostering Peace and Stability



1. PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS.

The Spotlight Initiative could result in 21 million fewer women and girls experiencing violence by 2025. This number is equivalent to the complete eradication of violence against women and girls in 18 out of 26 of its programming countries.

The problem and the opportunity

Violence prevention is a critical component of the anti-violence agenda. Successful solutions for preventing and breaking the cycle of violence are well documented²⁷—for example, the school- and community-based work on promoting healthy gender roles and addressing harmful ideas on masculinity, led by pioneers and Spotlight Initiative partners such as SASA! and Indashyikirwa. Available literature suggests that effective prevention strategies (i) address root causes of violence—such as the propagation of harmful attitudes, beliefs, and norms about gendered roles and dynamics—and (ii) combine these root-cause interventions with additional system-wide pillars such as survivor support services, policy strengthening, and data.²⁸

The Spotlight Initiative's approach and work so far

The Spotlight Initiative takes a comprehensive—i.e. multi-pillar²⁹ and CSO-centric—approach to tackling the root causes of violence against women and girls. Through its partners, it implements a broad range of programmes to prevent VAWG and address its consequences:

- community-level engagement with married and living-in couples

²⁷ What Works Resources.

²⁸ As elaborated in the following pages, our comparative analysis of comprehensive models (multi-pillar and CSO-centric) vs. single-pillar / siloed models showed that prevalence reduction achieved by comprehensive models was 70–90% higher than that by non-comprehensive models within the same period.

²⁹ Programmes work comprehensively across six pillars: (i) targeting inequitable laws and policies; (ii) strengthening institutions; (iii) challenging harmful social norms, attitudes, and behaviours; (iv) strengthening services, access to justice, and referral systems; (v) strengthening data and tracking systems to make violence against women and girls visible; and (vi) supporting civil society and movement building.

- in-school and out-of-school programmes with girls and boys, and cooperation with national education ministries
- trauma-informed sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services for women and girls
- advocacy for perpetrator accountability
- training and sensitisation of healthcare, police, and judicial service providers
- behaviour change multimedia campaigns, and
- collection of high-quality, disaggregated data.

Potential future impacts of the Spotlight Initiative

We extrapolate the potential future impacts of the Spotlight Initiative on prevention by combining the expected **reach** of the Initiative with an estimate of the **impact** (reduction in yearly prevalence) due to the work of the Initiative. By 2021, the Initiative had reached 230 million people through a combination of (i) targeted community-based programmes and (ii) mass media campaigns. The initial investment in the Initiative is projected to reach over 550 million people through 2023. We estimate impact separately for the two types of interventions:

- **Targeted community programmes:** These programmes engage a targeted set of community members through various activities (as described above) over several years. We estimate a 16% annual reduction in the prevalence of violence against women and girls (from the baseline of 35% prevalence in the broader population today, per WHO estimates) through the work of the Spotlight Initiative. This estimate is based on a median of results shown by 30+ programmes and interventions that are similar and relevant to the Initiative, such as Raising Voices' SASA! Together (globally), Tostan's Community Empowerment Programme (Senegal), and Indashyikirwa (Rwanda).³⁰
- **Mass media campaigns:** These campaigns are usually multimedia focused, non-targeted in outreach, and brief in duration. Our review of such campaigns suggests that the Spotlight Initiative's media campaigns can bring about a 7%³¹ annual reduction in the baseline prevalence of VAWG.

Based on these reach and impact estimates, we project that the Spotlight Initiative could prevent violence for at least 21 million women and girls in its initial five-year investment.³² This is a more-than-encouraging start. We further extrapolate that if the Initiative continues in the same 26 countries with an additional EUR 300 million for another five years, it could prevent violence for 47 million more women and girls. This rapid change is driven by two main factors. First, the Initiative can leverage existing programming and partnerships to scale rapidly in the 26 countries where it is present. Second, the work creates a movement within communities and propagates positive impacts to whole populations, beyond those reached by the Initiative directly.

30 An average intervention that runs for two years has shown an endpoint impact of a 5–50% reduction in VAWG prevalence. The variation in results across interventions is due to underlying community and programming contexts.

31 Green, Wilke, and Cooper, *Silence Begets Violence: A mass media experiment to prevent violence against women and girls in rural Uganda, 2018*. This study from Uganda is one of only a few that measure the eventual impact of mass campaigns on VAWG prevalence. It does so by a) using multiple control groups (of people exposed to general or SRH campaigns vs those who were exposed to VAWG-specific campaigns), b) measuring a change in attitudes, c) measuring changes to both the prevalence / incidence and the frequency of violence, and d) running robustness checks to control for biases amongst individuals and clusters. The lack of similar evaluations of mass media's impact on changing attitudes towards violence disallows aggregation across contexts and countries. That said, the campaigns run by the Spotlight Initiative are similar in nature to those in Uganda, and the effect size estimated by Green et al. is conservative, reproducible, and significant.

32 (a) To put 21 million in perspective, this is equivalent to eradicating VAWG in 18 out of 26 countries in which the Spotlight Initiative is active: Belize, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Kyrgyz Republic, Liberia, Malawi, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Trinidad and Tobago, Vanuatu, and Zimbabwe. (b) This estimate is conservative since we base it on only two of the Spotlight Initiative's pillars. We do not have data on the prevention impact of the other pillars—survivor support services, laws and policies, data, and other ways to strengthen the ecosystem—and do not consider them in our estimation.



2. AMPLIFYING INVESTMENT IMPACT.

By simultaneously working on multiple pillars - prevention, survivor support services, and ecosystem building—and emphasising civil society partnerships, the Spotlight Initiative is expected to be 70%–90% more effective at reducing the prevalence of violence, compared to a model that focuses on only one pillar or works in silos.

The problem and the opportunity

Addressing violence against women and girls requires recognising that it is a universal, multi-faceted issue the experience of which is nonetheless highly dependent on context. VAWG is not restricted to any single place or social setting and affects all people—particularly women and girls—in different ways. At the same time, gendered power dynamics are often rooted in the history, culture, and traditions of the particular place in which violence and harmful practices against women and girls are occurring.³³ The literature emphasises the need to address such violence comprehensively at multiple levels—through prevention, support for survivors, and justice; in households, communities, schools, and government; by people of all genders; and across women’s movements, social workers, religious leaders, the police, and policymakers.³⁴

The Spotlight Initiative’s approach and work so far

The Spotlight Initiative’s work directly and comprehensively addresses the *universal, multi-faceted, and context-dependent* nature of violence against women and girls at scale by:

- applying a **multi-pillar approach**—from prevention strategy and survivor support services to ecosystem building through policy and data reforms.
- **centring civil society engagement**—partnering with grassroots CSOs and women’s movements, integrating their guidance into programme design and governance, and investing in building on their existing knowledge, skills, and connections to deeply root the work within local systems
- engaging at **multiple levels, in multiple settings, involving everyone**—working at the individual, organisational, and societal level because VAWG is enabled by norms, institutions, and society as a whole; working with all communities and all stakeholders since we all have a role to play in reducing VAWG.

This approach ensures that champions of norms change exist throughout the community and enables consistent messaging and action across different parts of society—reinforcing the new norms with each new iteration.

Potential future impacts of the Spotlight Initiative

We examined the differential impacts on the reduction of violence between initiatives (like the Spotlight Initiative) that take a multifaceted and localised approach (engaging CSOs) and those that follow a single-pillar approach and/or do not engage CSOs.³⁵ We found that a comprehensive model reduces the prevalence of violence by 70–90% more than a single pillar/siloed model. This means that the Spotlight Initiative can prevent violence for almost 10 million more women & girls than it would have if it had taken a single pillar or siloed approach.

³³ Barbelet et al., Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation: a literature study, 2021.

³⁴ WHO, Violence Prevention through Multisectoral Collaboration, 2020.

³⁵ We categorized the interventions in our evidence base as single pillar or multi-pillar and as with or without CSO engagement. We then, compared the annualized impacts of the different categories of interventions. Examples of single-pillar interventions include “No Means No Worldwide” (a self-defence training intervention for adolescent girls) and PREPARE (a school-based HIV prevention and sexual education programme). An example of a multi-pillar intervention is Equipundo’s Program P (a couples curriculum, health provider training, and community campaigns).

3. CREATING CONDITIONS FOR MORE SURVIVORS TO SEEK FORMAL HELP.

On average, only 2 in 5 survivors of violence are able to seek any formal support. Through fundamental improvements, such as holding perpetrators accountable and offering better services to survivors, the Spotlight Initiative's work has already led to 12% more survivors than before seeking help.

The problem and the opportunity

In parallel to efforts to prevent violence, it is critical to support access to culturally competent services and resources for survivors across all contexts. Today, only 2 in 5 women survivors of violence seek out any formal help.³⁶ Barriers to supporting survivors include:

(i) siloed support from different sources - e.g., government agencies or non-profits that provide crisis counselling are often distinct from and inadequately connected to those that provide medical care and/or meet other needs of survivors. (e.g., supplies for sexual and reproductive health, or income supports)

(ii) limited access – due to, among other obstacles, restricted mobility under the coercive control of the perpetrator, cultural stigma, concerns about confidentiality / privacy, and the hidden costs of accessing 'free' services.

(iii) limited availability and cultural competence of services – due in part to under-resourcing of existing government and CSO-provided services; service providers often lack specific training and resources to help, for example, the survivors of violence who live with disabilities or an HIV positive status.

The Spotlight Initiative's approach and work so far

The Spotlight Initiative is expanding survivor support services in three ways. The first is by breaking silos - expanding/ scaling the access to the Essential Services Package³⁷ through its UN-wide partnership and network of 1500+ partners across countries. Different UN agencies, notably the UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, and UN Women, support the rollout of services per their area of expertise. The second is by expanding access by (i) making services available through localised civil society organisations, and (ii) improving the support environment by holding perpetrators accountable and enabling systems to safeguard survivors from re-victimisation. The third is by improving the availability and quality of the services by (i) supplying more resources and training the service providers, and (ii) tailoring the services according to the needs and contexts of women and girls who face multiple forms of discrimination and are often left behind.

Potential future impacts of the Spotlight Initiative

Since its launch, the Initiative has already led to a 12% increase in the proportion of survivors seeking help every year, compared to survivors who have not been reached through the Initiative.³⁸ By extension, of the 70 million survivors that the Initiative is projected to reach by 2023 across its 26 countries, more than 3 million will seek formal help for the first time due to their association with the Initiative.

³⁶ UN Women, Essential services: Ending violence against women, 2015.

³⁷ In 2013, a partnership among UN Women, UNFPA, UNDP, and UNODC announced the Essential Services Package for women and girls subject to violence.

³⁸ The Spotlight Initiative collects data on the percentage of women and girls who access help. In 2021, Spotlight noted a ~12% increase in this indicator. Data for 2019–2020 were not comparable due to a substantial increase in the number of Spotlight programs reporting on this indicator. Assuming the global baseline of 40% for the number of survivors who seek formal help, 12% more, i.e., 45% are reported to exhibit the behaviour after the Initiative's intervention.

This increase in help-seeking behaviour might be due to the trust that survivors place in the services facilitated through the Initiative's grassroots partners, who are deeply aware of their communities' unique needs, challenges, and preferences. It may also be due to a general increase in survivors' sense of safety and assurance when (a) survivors' community members are reached through various programmes and campaigns against VAWG and (b) they observe a reduction in such violence.



4. PREVENTING THE LOSS OF LIFE

The Spotlight Initiative's work on prevention of violence for 21 Million women and girls by 2025 could save – at the very least – 600 women's lives every year or nearly two every day, in the 26 countries it serves. Moreover, preventing violence against some pregnant women and mothers is expected, by 2030, to prevent 500,000 women from experiencing miscarriages and also to reduce the chances of newborn and infant mortality, saving the lives of 140,000 children.

The problem and the opportunity

Violence against women and girls takes hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions of lives each year. Beyond the 80,000 women who die each year from intentional homicide,³⁹ many women and girls die from health complications (e.g., brain injury) resulting from injuries as a consequence of such violence.⁴⁰ In other cases, serious psychological distress resulting from the experience of violence compels some women and girls to die by suicide. Finally, research also shows that violence against women increases the likelihood of miscarriages and child mortality, and that women experiencing violence are ~53% more likely to have an unmet need for family planning.⁴¹

The Spotlight Initiative's approach and work so far

In addition to its efforts to prevent violence (described earlier), the Spotlight Initiative works to mitigate this loss of life by:

Violence against women and girls increases the likelihood of neonatal and under-five mortality by 12.5% and 11.5% respectively.

- **Expanding availability and access to essential support services.** To this end, the Spotlight Initiative (i) funds helplines, service centres, and other last-mile resources, (ii) works to increase community awareness of resources available for survivors, and (iii) facilitates the rollout of the Essential Services Package through UN, governments, and civil society partners.
- **Increasing appropriate and timely healthcare response.** The Initiative advocates for trauma-informed sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and emergency room services. The Initiative also funds training for service providers and provides them with resources and tools (e.g., emergency-room checklists) to help detect instances of violence and

39 UNODC, Killings of women and girls by their intimate partner or other family members: Global estimates 2020, 2021.

40 Physical injuries such as strangulation, trauma from blunt objects, and female genital mutilation lead to health complications, some of which can result in premature death.

41 a) Child mortality is affected by: (i) direct physical injury to young children or (ii) the impact of violence on a mother's own well-being and ability to care for her child (e.g., seek hospital care, provide adequate nutrition); Rawlings and Siddique, Domestic Violence and Child Mortality, 2018. (b) Maxwell et al., Estimating the Effect of Intimate Partner Violence on Women's Use of Contraception: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis, 2015.

- treat injuries, including non-visible injuries which may not be immediately apparent.⁴²
- **Strengthening the survivor support ecosystem by breaking silos.** The Initiative is advocating for greater collaboration, coordination, and integration across judicial, law enforcement, health, and social service agencies.⁴³

Potential future impacts of the Spotlight Initiative

To estimate lives saved, we combine our **prevention estimate** of 21 million fewer women and girls experiencing violence by 2025⁴⁴ with the current **global female homicide rate**. We use current (limited) available statistics on female homicide to derive the percentage of reported cases of violence against women and girls that result in death today. We believe this figure is underreported for two reasons: (i) the female homicide data itself is underreported⁴⁵ and (ii) we have not adjusted the fatality rate for death from health complications resulting from violence against women and girls. We have also not accounted for any protective effect of survivor support services.

This conservative approach suggests the Initiative could save at least 600 women's lives every year, or nearly two every single day.

We combine our **prevention estimate** with the **effect of violence against women and girls on increased miscarriages and increased child mortality** (newborn and under-5) to find that the Spotlight Initiative's work could result in 500,000 fewer women experiencing miscarriages and 140,000 fewer child deaths by 2030.



5. PREVENTING HARM TO PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

The Spotlight Initiative could mitigate harm to health by preventing violence against women and girls, and it could further reduce morbidity for survivors. By preventing violence for 21 Million women and girls by 2025, it could result in 2,500 fewer cases of urgent medical attention and 320 fewer women experiencing depression per day.

The problem and the opportunity

Even when violence against women and girls is not fatal, it frequently results in severe physical injuries and mental harm. Today, 22% of incidents result in seeking urgent / emergency medical care for physical injuries, such as stab wounds, gunshot wounds, and broken bones.⁴⁶ If other (less urgent but still important) medical requirements—such as replacing broken teeth or treating sprains—were to be considered, the actual need would

42 (a) In the US, more than half of the victims of homicides had been to emergency care previously—substantiating the belief that if support services are integrated with VAWG response, the healthcare system can detect danger signs early and help to pre-empt/minimise potential harm. (b) Snyder, No Visible Bruises: What We Don't Know About Domestic Violence Can Kill Us, 2019.

43 Advocacy efforts are also meant to offer sustained support to survivors and thereby minimise and pre-empt further violence in their lives. As a case in point, data shows that violence escalates in events like bail or acquittal of the perpetrator. If the support systems are well-coordinated, the survivor at risk could be provided essential social services in anticipation of a certain judicial outcome for their perpetrator.

44 As calculated in the first impact estimate, 21 million fewer women and girls might experience violence by 2025.

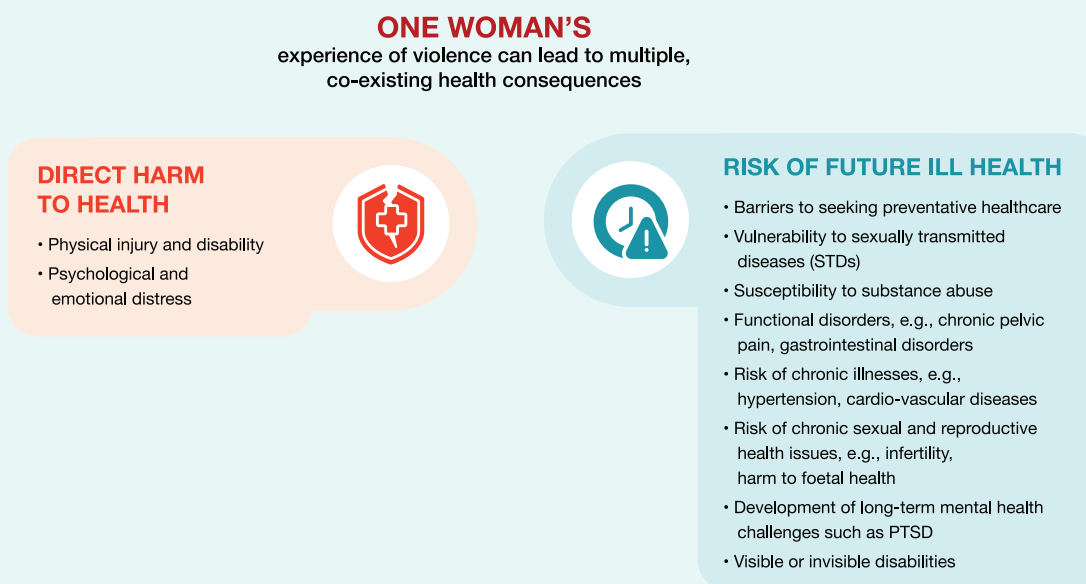
45 Official crime statistics on femicide are available but experts believe massive under-reporting given anecdotal evidence of many deaths being misrepresented as 'accidental deaths.' This is especially true for killings by intimate partners and family members (including 'honour killings' in some parts of the world).

46 (a) Valladares et al., Violence against pregnant women: A population-based study in Nicaragua, 2005. (b) The estimate of 22% of incidents leading to urgent medical attention is based on multi-country research, as elaborated on below. The term 'urgent medical care' includes emergency room visits, inpatient hospital nights, outpatient clinic visits, and ambulance services. This trend sits within the context that more than 90% of cases have resulted in at least one physical injury but only 2 in 5 survivors seek any formal help, as noted earlier. The true extent of cases 'needing' urgent medical attention is likely much higher.

be far higher. Moreover, 7% of women and girl survivors of violence experience depression, almost twice the percentage of women and girls who do not experience violence.⁴⁷

The potential harms to women and girls are many. Beyond direct harm, VAWG can lead to risks of future ill health. Multiple issues can co-exist and become chronic, with long-term—and, in some cases, lifelong—impacts. For example, physical injuries can lead to disability (loss of limb function, vision loss, etc.) or sexual and reproductive health issues (chronic vaginal pain, harm to a foetus, etc.). Serious psychological distress can exist with or without physical injuries and can lead to depression, PTSD, and suicidal thoughts / behaviour.⁴⁸

Figure 3: Health impacts of violence against women and girls



The resulting need—immediate and long-term—for appropriate healthcare is vast but remains largely unmet for several reasons. First, limited awareness on the part of survivors and controlled access on the part of perpetrators and family members often prevent survivors from seeking timely help.⁴⁹ These barriers can be compounding for many people, including those with language or mobility restrictions, those not legally recognized, or those legally condemned in specific contexts due to their employment or sexual orientation status, etc.⁵⁰ Second, prohibitive costs of medical care can further curtail treatment and recovery. Some estimates suggest that, between medical costs and foregone income, VAWG can cost survivors at least 30% of their annual earning potential if they can continue to work at all.⁵¹ Third, even when survivors receive medical treatment, care can be limited and even inadequate. For example, and as discussed earlier, many victims of violence are not identified as such and therefore not tested for non-visible injuries (e.g., internal organ bleeding) that could lead to further complications, especially if left untreated.

47 WHO, Department of Reproductive Health and Research, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, South African Medical Research Council. (2013). Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence.

48 WHO, Intimate partner violence and women's physical and mental health in the WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence: an observational study, 2008.

49 (a) Kalra and Bhugra, Sexual violence against women: Understanding cross-cultural intersections, 2013. (b) In many incidents of intimate partner violence, survivors continue to live under the coercive control of partners, which can severely limit their access to preventative and curative healthcare services. In many cultures and communities around the world, these restrictions may be imposed by family members, too, for reasons ranging from the cost of care to 'saving face.'

50 Healthcare systems and service personnel are not always trained, sensitised, and resourced to care for women and girls across all contexts. There are several news reports around the world of discrimination within healthcare units—on the grounds of HIV-positive status, non-binary gender, income status, disability, occupation, and marital status, among other characteristics.

51 Survivors' baseline income is ~38% lower due to violence. Additionally, of their annual income, they lose ~22% to cope with regular incidents of violence. At the upper end, this means female survivors of regular violence lose over 50% of their annual earnings to the economic costs of VAWG. A more conservative estimation assumes that not all survivors will bear all these costs together. Therefore, taking an average of the income costs and direct costs to survivors, violence may cost about ~30% of the average annual income.

The Spotlight Initiative's approach and work so far

In addition to its efforts to prevent violence, the Spotlight Initiative works to create conditions for better health outcomes. Above, we discussed awareness building through multiple media, increasing access to the essential services package, and improving the timeliness and adequacy of response. Beyond those efforts, the Initiative emphasises access to care for women and girls who face a higher risk of discrimination through (i) funding of civil society organisations that serve specific populations and (ii) funding and facilitation of training and sensitisation of healthcare providers. Additionally, the Initiative advocates for a holistic, trauma-informed healthcare response that addresses the risks of future ill health (e.g., by referring survivors of sexual violence to mental health counsellors). These efforts are intended both to reduce the health risks and impacts for women and girls and bring down the out-of-pocket costs for some survivors.

Potential future impacts of the Spotlight Initiative

Due to data limitations, we were able to quantify the potential impacts of the Initiative based on its work on only violence prevention (which subsequently mitigates direct harm to health). The estimations below are based on our prevention estimate and evidence on elevated risks due to exposure to violence.

- **Urgent medical attention for physical harm:** Multi-country evidence shows that an estimated 22% of VAWG cases result in seeking emergency care. Our prevention estimate suggests that, on average, 3.5 million⁵² fewer women and girls will experience violence every year due to the Initiative's work on VAWG prevention, which would result in 900,000 fewer women and girls requiring emergency care in a year (or 2,500 a day).
- **Serious psychological distress:** Similarly, evidence from multiple countries suggests that VAWG survivors are twice as likely to experience depression compared to people who did not experience such violence. When 3.5 million fewer women and girls experience violence, the risk of depression is mitigated for 120,000 women and girls a year (or more than 300 a day).

The estimations above are likely conservative as they do not account for mitigation of further risks to health (i.e., chronic and long-term issues which result from direct physical and mental harms of violence) and do not include the impacts of the Spotlight Initiative's efforts on awareness-building, access to support services, and systems strengthening.

⁵² Our cumulative prevention estimate of 21 million women and girls based on five years of programming (2018-2023) is equivalent to about 3.5 million girls and women for whom violence is prevented per year.

6. TACKLING CONFLICT AND INSTABILITY BY REDUCING VIOLENCE AGAINST A SIGNIFICANT SHARE OF THE POPULATION & INTERVENING EARLY TO PREVENT ESCALATION OF VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR.

Violence against women and girls directly affects a significant share of the population and is proven to be correlated with, and in some cases a precursor to broader conflict and instability. By preventing VAWG, the Spotlight Initiative and other comprehensive models promote the building of more peaceful societies for all people including women and girls.

The problem and the opportunity

An estimated 35% of women and girls—a significant share of the overall population—experience violence in their lifetime because of their gender. However, violence against women and girls is correlated with broader forms of violence that affect all people in society. There are even some indications that—when unaddressed—VAWG precedes and exacerbates broader forms of violence and human rights violations, such as:

- **violation of women’s rights more broadly** including bodily autonomy, freedom of movement, and privacy⁵³
- **deterioration of the rule of law and increase in violent extremism and radicalization** due to increased impunity for perpetrators to inflict other types of violence –against children, minorities, elders, the state etc. For example, the perpetrators of gun violence in many countries are found to have a history of intimate partner violence in almost all cases⁵⁴
- **increase in conflict**, unrest, and use of force to resolve disputes.⁵⁵ This often leads to a further escalation in violence against women and girls.

“ What we have discovered is that the very best predictor of how insecure and unstable a nation is is not its level of democracy, not its level of wealth... but is, in fact, the level of violence against women in the society. ”

Valerie Hudson, co-author of *Sex and World Peace*

The Spotlight Initiative’s approach and work so far

The Spotlight Initiative recognises that violence against women and girls is inextricably linked with all other forms of violence in society. To that end the Initiative:

- advocates for and informs the measures on **perpetrator accountability** – such as an increase in crime conviction rates
- has a strong focus on men and boys in its efforts to **shift harmful attitudes**
- works with political leaders and policymakers to advocate for and elevate **violence against women and girls in broader national security agendas**, including in conflict-affected states

Potential future impacts of the Spotlight Initiative

In aggregate, the Initiative’s comprehensive model for addressing violence against women and girls seeds conditions for wider peace and stability by, for example:

- directly addressing violence against women and girls, and restoring women’s rights,

53 WHO, Fact sheet: Violence against women.

54 Everytown Research and Policy, *Guns and Violence Against Women*, 2019.

55 Hudson, *Sex and World Peace*, 2012.

freedoms, and choices over their public and private lives, could create positive ripple effects—more girls finishing school, pursuing leadership opportunities, and living healthier lives. Research confirms that these factors strengthen women’s ability to participate as active citizens, activists, decision-makers, and public leaders,⁵⁶ and that this participation is a building block for peace and stability in local communities and in national and international spheres.

- addressing the root causes of violence against women and girls—such as harmful gendered norms and stereotypes about both men and women—which also beget other forms of violence.
- holding perpetrators of violence against women and girls accountable and encouraging positive role-modelling, breaking the cycles of violence and reducing risk of other forms of violence and conflict.

An Imperative to Invest in Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls... Enabling People to Realise their Full Potential



7. SAFEGUARDING GIRLS’ RIGHT TO EDUCATION AND PREVENTING INTERRUPTIONS TO SCHOOLING.

Preventing VAWG leads to fewer school dropouts, higher net school enrolment, and better quality of learning. By 2025, we expect the Spotlight Initiative to help almost 1 million girls stay in school; ripple effects could contribute to an additional 4 million girls completing school in the next generation.

The problem and the opportunity

Violence against girls impedes girls’ right to education.⁵⁷ Today, 22 million girls drop out of school each year due to violence.⁵⁸

Other harmful practices such as child marriage, public harassment, and gender-based bullying by teachers and peers, as well as unsafe infrastructure (toilets, buses, etc.), keep girls from pursuing their education.

For example, girls who experience violence or grow up in households where VAWG is prevalent are 11% to 24% more likely to drop out of school. Meanwhile, the perception that schools and commutes are unsafe can lead many parents to keep older girls at home.⁵⁹ For the girls who are in school, direct or indirect exposure to and experience of violence impact their quality of learning—absences, mental health challenges, and concentration difficulties lead to the loss of an estimated 15% of learning time each academic year.⁶⁰ When VAWG is

Nearly 22 million girls drop out of school every year due to the experience of VAWG in some form. Once out of school, they are at greater risk of underage marriage or trafficking. The cycle of violence continues.

56 Cowper-Coles, Women political leaders: the impact of gender on democracy, 2020; Wood and Ramirez, Exploring the micro-foundations of the gender equality peace hypothesis, 2017.

57 UN-OHCHR, The right to education – violence against women and girls in schools.

58 Dalberg estimate based on i) WHO data on prevalence of violence against women and girls, ii) UNICEF data on dropouts among girls, and iii) evidence that shows an 11% increased risk of dropouts amongst girls due to VAWG.

59 Behounek, The Safety of Women and Girls in Educational Settings: A Global Overview and Suggestions for Policy Change, 2020.

60 The Commonwealth, The Economic Cost of Violence Against Women and Girls: A Study of Lesotho, 2019.

prevented, more girls finish school and are empowered to exercise their agency in public and private lives.⁶¹

The Spotlight Initiative's approach and work so far

Many of the Spotlight Initiative's efforts help create environments that support girls' school enrolment, attendance, and engagement. Its work on changing social norms—especially its direct engagement with young people, through comprehensive sexuality education activities both in and out of school—influences lifelong gender-equitable attitudes and helps make schools safe spaces, which has positive effects on school attendance and participation. The Initiative also works with national education ministries on programmes and policies for young people, including localised policies focused on universal girls' education and programmes supporting identification and reporting of child marriage (which is a key driver of school dropout rates).⁶² Finally, the Initiative elevates girls' leadership and voices by supporting youth-led advocacy for girls' equal education and their participation in its proposed youth governance in multiple programming countries.

Potential future impacts of the Spotlight Initiative

Based on research on the impact of violence on school enrolment and dropouts of girls, we extrapolate that the Initiative's community-based and school-related programming in 26 countries could prevent the disruption of schooling for 1 million girls by 2025. This figure represents both pre-empted dropouts and new enrolments due to prevention of VAWG.

The benefits of schooling for these girls will extend to future generations. An educated girl is more likely to grow up healthy, safe, and empowered to determine the course of her life and future. She is more likely to engage in formal employment, earn a higher income, and have financial agency. Moreover, she is better able to decide if and when she is ready for marriage and children, she is more likely to send her children to school and provide them with better nutrition, and she is even expected to live a longer life.⁶³

We extrapolate that the presence of more girls in school today could lead to a further enrolment of 4 million girls by 2050, based on two factors: i) of the girls who return to school today, those who choose to become mothers in their lifetime are 14% more likely to educate their own daughters—leading to an estimated 0.2 million additional girls in school by 2050⁶⁴ — and ii) when violence is prevented and girls are educated, households earn higher incomes; these higher incomes are expected to lead to an increase in the schooling of 3.7 million girls by 2050.⁶⁵

61 Koissy-Kpein, Gender-based violence and gender bias in schooling decision, 2016.

62 Sekine and Hodgkin, Effect of child marriage on girls' school dropout in Nepal, 2017.

63 Women in the world today, Chapter 2: Women and Education, 2012.

64 We estimate that, by 2050, some of the 1 million girls in this generation who go to schools after the Spotlight Initiative's intervention will have become mothers and have (on average) 4 children in their lifetime. As a result of completing their schooling, they are 14% more likely to enroll their children in school—leading to an additional 0.2 million girls in school in the future.

65 Households in which violence is prevented no longer lose (on average) 30% of their income to VAWG costs. This increase in available income is correlated with an 18% increase in the likelihood of school enrolment in those households - resulting in an additional 3.7 million girls in school.



8. REDUCING POVERTY FOR INDIVIDUAL HOUSEHOLDS WHILE CONTRIBUTING TO ECONOMIC GROWTH.

The Spotlight Initiative's work on prevention could help avoid the burden of violence-related costs which can amount to ~30% of the average annual earning potential of a survivor. Ending violence against women and girls could ensure that women and girls are healthier, thus adding back a total of ~43 million productive days a year.

The problem and the opportunity

The economic burdens of VAWG on people and nations are large and invisible. The existing literature shows that survivors who seek formal help devote, on average, 22% of their annual income to direct, violence-related, out-of-pocket expenditures on legal aid, medical aid, and other necessities. Many are not able to work at all after experiencing violence; those who do continue to work earn, on average, 35–40% less in annual income compared to those who did not experience VAWG.⁶⁶ This difference in incomes is due, in part, to lost productivity owing to preoccupation with health issues, court proceedings, ongoing harassment, etc. Research puts it at 17.5 days of paid work lost annually for employed survivors (and for 1 in 10 survivors, an additional loss of 14.5 days of unpaid care work annually).⁶⁷

These expenses cumulatively become national-level costs. It is estimated that violence against women and girls costs at least 2% of the annual GDP, i.e., a cumulative loss of USD 1.7 trillion globally.⁶⁸

Violence costs a woman over 30% of her earning potential to a combination of direct costs of gendered violence and lost work opportunities.

The Spotlight Initiative's approach and work so far

The most significant way in which the Initiative helps women and girls avoid the financial impacts of violence is, of course, by helping to prevent violence—and the associated costs—altogether. But the Initiative also provides essential services that are largely free of cost to survivors, although such 'hidden access costs' such as transport may persist. Specifically, the comprehensive package of healthcare (including counselling) and contextualised / tailored services for specific populations that the Initiative funds tend to be particularly costly for CSOs and governments and likely would not be available (or financially accessible) without the Initiative's resources. Finally, some of the CSOs that the Initiative funds also provide direct income support and employment opportunities to survivors.

The cumulative minimum cost of violence against women and girls of US\$ 1.7 trillion is equivalent to the combined GDP of 100 countries today.

66 For various reasons – including but not limited to long or incomplete recovery from injuries, chronic health impacts such as depression, and stigma attached with survivors in some contexts – some survivors lose opportunities are not able to go back to work. Even when they do keep a job, for some survivors, their employment may be unstable and a poor match for their skills – leading to lower lifetime earnings compared to women who did not experience violence.

67 Duvvury et al., The impacts of violence against women on choice and agency: Evidence from Ghana and Pakistan, 2021; Raghavendra et al., The Macroeconomic Loss due to Violence Against Women: The Case of Vietnam, 2017.

68 UN Women, The economic costs of violence against women, 2016. The cost to nations comprises (i) the cost of human lives, (ii) the aggregate of individual losses of productivity, (iii) the burden on healthcare, social security, and judicial systems, and (iv) costs of addressing other forms of violence and conflicts that are aggravated by the prevalence of VAWG. The available evidence on the costs of VAWG for nations computes costs only categories (ii) and (iii). Considering what remains in categories (i) and (iv), the true cost is likely substantially higher.

Potential future impacts of the Spotlight Initiative

Our conservative⁶⁹ estimate is that preventing the experience of violence for an individual woman allows her to avoid a 30% (or greater) reduction in potential average earnings. (This estimate combines and averages across the research on the direct cost to survivors and income loss due to missed work.)⁷⁰ We further estimate that the Spotlight Initiative's work on prevention could add (that is, eliminate the loss of) approximately 43 million productive days a year. Of these, 37 million days are paid workdays, which we calculate based on our prevention estimate, the percentage of women who are in the labour force,⁷¹ and the average number of days that are typically lost per survivor (as noted above). The remaining balance of 6 million days accounts for unpaid care work, based on our prevention estimate, the proportion of survivors who report missing care work (as mentioned above), and the average number of days that are typically lost per survivor (as noted above).



9. SHIFTING ATTITUDE AND BELIEFS IN FAVOUR OF EQUITY.

By promoting self-expression and raising awareness of inequitable gendered norms, the Spotlight Initiative could shift attitudes and beliefs in favour of equity and equality for almost 90 million children in the next generation.

The problem and the opportunity

Research shows that children who grow up in homes where violence against women and girls is prevalent go on to emulate and pass on harmful gender attitudes and beliefs as adults.⁷² They are more likely to perpetrate violence (as men) and face violence (as women). To break the cycle of this intergenerational trauma, it is imperative to reset harmful gender norms.

The Spotlight Initiative's approach and work so far

The Initiative uses proven techniques, such as iterative messaging⁷³ in its behaviour change campaigns and its self-expression and introspection-focused activities (such as questioning subconscious biases). These programmes help individuals rethink gender roles and dynamics (e.g., by challenging pre-existing notions of masculinity) and respect women's rights (such as sexual consent). Harmful norms and attitudes are widespread, so the Initiative's outreach efforts are community-wide, engaging men and women, girls and boys, religious and other local leaders, and other community members.

The Initiative's work on harmful norms change with adults can ensure positive role modelling for 1 in 6 children in the next generation. This trend can grow exponentially when such initiatives are scaled.

69 In this estimation, we do not focus on the effects of survivor support services because of the absence of quantitative evidence on the effectiveness of quality services on faster (immediate) recovery, hence reduced loss to productivity.

70 Survivors' baseline income is ~38% lower due to violence. Additionally, of their annual income, they lose over 20% to cope with regular incidents of violence. At the upper end, this means female survivors of regular violence lose over 50% of their annual earnings to the economic costs of VAWG. A more conservative estimation assumes that not all survivors will bear all these costs together. Therefore, taking an average of the income costs and direct costs to survivors, violence may cost about ~30% of the average annual income.

71 World Bank data shows that 50% of the female population (above 15 years) is a part of the labour force in the countries and regions of the Initiative's programming.

72 ICRW, Bridges to Adulthood, 2012; Promundo, State of the World's Fathers, 2021.

73 When community members – women and girls, men and boys, community leaders, and others – are reached through different interventions such as multimedia campaigns, self-expression and introspection exercises, etc., the effort to address harmful gender norms gets iterated and reinforced multiple times.

Potential future impacts of the Spotlight Initiative

The Spotlight Initiative expects its norms change initiatives to reach more than 550 million people by 2023. Based on a review of relevant interventions such as Program Y and Yaari Dosti, we estimate that 8%⁷⁴ of the participants (43 million, representing an estimated 21 million households)⁷⁵ will internalise more gender-equitable attitudes and beliefs and experience a shift in their norms based on a year of programming.

Ninety million children are expected to grow up in these households. The magnitude of this number highlights the possibility of a future generation where gender-equitable attitudes are the *norm*.

74 This is based on the average impact of interventions that the Spotlight Initiative draws on and seeks to scale, such as Equimundo's Program Y (in Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Yaari Dosti (in India). These programmes have shown that 25-52% of all people demonstrated a post-intervention improvement in their attitudes and beliefs related to gender roles after attending the programme(s). We take a conservative estimate of 25%; 8% is the annualised figure.

75 As these interventions are community-based and some are even programmed for couples, they reach two members per household, on average. 43 million people therefore represent 21 million households. Estimates on family sizes and compositions further suggest that 21 million households would include around 90 million children (under 18).



4

Conclusion

The pages above have shown the criticality and promise of ending violence against women and girls – a grave and persistent violation of human rights that stands in the way of our collective progress. We hope this report adds to and advances the existing body of work by showcasing and bringing to life the potential impacts of addressing such violence. Our key messages, as a reminder, are that:

- Violence against women and girls is a life-altering, debilitating human rights violation that can substantially curtail women's and girls' freedoms and alter their futures. It is preventable by investing in comprehensive approaches—those that work on multiple, mutually reinforcing pillars—such as prevention, survivor support services, laws and policies, data, and other ways to strengthen the ecosystem - to address all forms of VAWG for women and girls across all contexts
- Preventing and addressing violence against women and girls reduces violence, fosters peace and stability, and enables people to realise their full potential, all of which moves us closer to the SDGs
- Thus, there is an imperative to invest in comprehensive approaches to addressing violence against women and girls

Extensive efforts and large-scale funding over the past years have created a unique base from which to increase the effectiveness of future investments. Where effective programs and partnerships exist, additional funding can scale up models that work. New comprehensive initiatives can benefit from the insights collected here to reduce VAWG faster and to better leverage their funding. Where broad-based interventions have created fertile soil for norms change, more targeted community interventions can help new norms take root. Where campaigns, prevention interventions, improved services, and policy support have begun to make a difference, continued effort can secure and build upon those gains. We are positioned now to make huge strides with relatively little funding: dedicating just 0.25% of global development spending next year to comprehensive models for eradicating violence against women and girls would be the equivalent of funding a whole additional Spotlight Initiative programme—and scaling the types of impacts outlined in this report.

As funding grows, so must learning and quality. Many gaps remain in the evidence base for what works to address violence against women and girls. For example, we would all benefit if more programmes reported their impact on VAWG prevention. As we collectively invest more in programmes and partners, we must also invest in continuous learning to understand how most effectively and efficiently to address VAWG and how to adapt to different local settings. We must ensure the quality of the design and the implementation of interventions. And we must continue to engage deeply with all relevant partners, from governments to civil society organisations and women's movements.

We know that this report is just a starting point for action. For readers looking to learn more about causes, consequences, and data-driven approaches to addressing violence against women and girls, we recommend getting acquainted with the work of sector leaders such as the Prevention Collaborative, Sexual Violence Research Initiative, What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls Global Programme, Tostan, and others. For those keen to begin or grow their support for this work, we recommend connecting with programmatic experts and sector investors—such as the Spotlight Secretariat and European Union. For researchers interested in building upon these findings, we invite deeper exploration of the differentiated impacts of specific types of violence, as well as additional disaggregation of impacts, particularly with an intersectional lens. And for readers interested in continuing the conversation, we invite you to connect with us at imperativetoinvest@dalberg.com.

Join us in learning more, in acting together, and in creating a world free of violence.

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Dr Daniela Ligiero CEO, Together for Girls
Dillyana Ximenes Plan International, Timor-Leste
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Dr Elizabeth Anderson Global Director, International Centre for Research on Women
Emily Esplen Head of Ending Violence Team, WhatWorks to Prevent VAWG
F. Mutema Victim Friendly System Coordinator, Judicial Service Commission, Zimbabwe
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Annexure A: Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSRG	Civil Society Global Reference Group (at the Spotlight Initiative)
EU	European Union
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RCT	Randomised Controlled Trial
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SRH	Sexual and reproductive health
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WHO	World Health Organisation

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From Dalberg:

- Akanksha Agarwal, Shruthi Jayaram, and Swetha Totapally led the study and authored this report.
- Devaki Banerjee, Devvart Poddar, Priyal Jain, Smriti Natarajan, and Tiara Lui contributed to the research, analysis, and writing of this report.
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- Harshvardhan Gantha developed the design and visual identity for this work.

For more information, comments, or questions, please write to us at:

imperativetoinvest@dalberg.com

We welcome your feedback.

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The Spotlight Initiative is a global, multi-year partnership between the European Union and the United Nations to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. It began in 2017, focusing on 26 countries, with a EUR 500 million seed funding commitment from the EU. Within the UN, it is a joint programme model that includes more than six UN agencies.

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**Spotlight
Initiative**
*To eliminate violence
against women and girls*

