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Violence Against Women and HIV/AIDS: Setting the Research Agenda

Meeting Report
Geneva, 23-25 October 2000

Gender and Women's Health
World Health Organisation
Geneva, Switzerland



World Health Organization

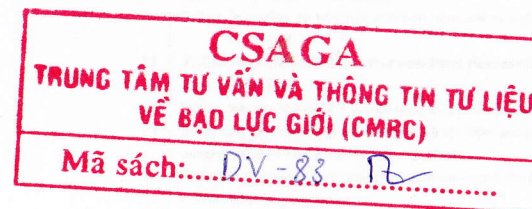
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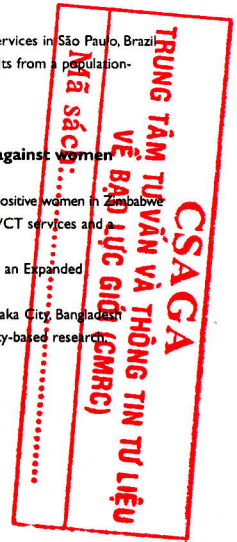
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Introduction

Violence and the fear of violence are emerging as an important risk factor contributing to the vulnerability to HIV infection for women. The extent to which individuals who are HIV infected, particularly women, are vulnerable to violence is also an issue of concern.

A growing number of studies have documented the high prevalence of intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women worldwide. This violence can contribute to women's increased risk of HIV infection both directly through forced sex and indirectly by constraining women's ability to negotiate the circumstances in which sex takes place and the use of condoms. In addition, sexual abuse during childhood seems to be associated with high-risk behaviours in later stages of life that may also increase the risk of HIV. However, many questions remain as to the extent of this increased risk and the precise interactions between different forms of violence against women (VAW) and HIV/AIDS. Further research is needed to understand exactly how these two areas overlap. The extent to which interventions can effectively address both problems also requires further research and collaboration between those working on VAW and those working on HIV/AIDS.

It was with this in mind that WHO convened an expert consultation "Violence Against Women and HIV/AIDS: Setting the Research Agenda" from 23-25 October 2000, to take stock and learn from existing research. The impetus for the meeting came from discussions with UNAIDS on the development of an HIV/AIDS component for inclusion in the WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women. It became clear however, that it was necessary and timely to have a more wide-ranging review of what was known, what research was ongoing and what gaps existed on the intersections between violence against women (VAW) and HIV/AIDS. This in order to come up with a comprehensive research agenda on the same. This concern was further strengthened by debates at the International Conference on HIV/AIDS held in Durban, South Africa, which for the first time included a number of presentations on violence against women. The issue of post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) following rape was one of controversy at Durban, so it was decided to have the third day of the meeting specifically focused on that issue.

This report is divided into three main sections. The first section contains a summary of each presentation. The second section summarizes the discussion and the third details the recommendations and conclusions from the meeting.

The meeting agenda and list of participants are included as Annex 3 and 4.

Objectives

The meeting brought together researchers, activists and policy makers working in the area of violence against women and HIV/AIDS in low and middle-income countries to:

1. Discuss current research activities in the area of violence against women and HIV/AIDS;
2. Identify key research questions (epidemiological, social/behavioural, clinical and intervention related) related to the connections between domestic and sexual violence against women and HIV/AIDS in different regions and among different age and population groups;
3. Identify opportunities to integrate issues of violence into ongoing HIV/AIDS research activity, and vice-versa;
4. Discuss methodological, ethical and safety issues associated with conducting research in relevant areas of violence against women and HIV/AIDS, including provision of post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) to rape survivors;
5. Make recommendations/proposals for a research agenda to address violence against women and HIV/AIDS.

The meeting was divided into two parts. The first two days consisted of presentations by participants on epidemiological, social/behavioural and intervention research related to violence against women and HIV/AIDS. Four working groups were formed to address the four topics below:

- Partner violence and HIV risk
- Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA) and HIV/AIDS risk
- Violence in the context of HIV testing and disclosure
- Violence and HIV/AIDS in the context of sex work, trafficking and migration

Participants sought to identify for each of the topics, key research questions, suggest possible study designs and discuss methodological concerns, as well as intervention issues that needed addressing.

The third day of the meeting focused on post-exposure prophylaxis following rape. This also consisted of presentations and discussion. The aim was to:

- Review the available evidence on the effectiveness of PEP following rape and other relevant issues to do with its delivery, adherence, compliance and costs;
- Explore the possibility of conducting research to formally assess effectiveness; and
- Consider the types of facilities and other resources necessary to provide PEP appropriately.

The Reports

