Primary Prevention Interventions

The Asia-Pacific region has some of the highest reported levels of gender-based violence (GBV) in the world. The consequences of this violence can last a lifetime and span generations. While many countries in the region have passed laws to criminalize GBV, national prevalence rates of violence remain stubbornly stable.

For decades, GBV has been part of development, government and civil society agendas. It is increasingly recognized that while responding to violence is crucial, it is not sufficient to decrease the prevalence of violence. Rather, integration of prevention – or stopping violence before it starts – into programming is the key to reducing the burden of suffering, and to minimizing the long-term human, economic and public health costs of violence. In the Asia-Pacific region, given the high prevalence of GBV, primary prevention is also likely to be a cheaper and more effective approach in the long-run.

What is Primary Prevention?
“Primary prevention” describes actions and interventions to stop violence before it starts by addressing the different factors associated with violence. These actions may augment factors that promote safety, equality, non-violence and peace, and/or influence factors that contribute to violence such as impunity and inequality. These factors – both “risk” and “protective” – are embedded in policy, social norms, and institutional structures, the dynamics of social relations as well as individual attitudes and behaviors. In short, primary prevention is about enhancement of protective factors and reduction and mitigation of risk factors.

Why is Primary Prevention Important?
Although response and service provision to people who have experienced violence is critical, it is not enough. In order to decrease overall violence and create a future in which girls and boys, women and men are equal, preventing intimate partner and sexual violence before it occurs is crucial. Reducing the prevalence of violence for future generations will reduce the burden of suffering, and to minimize long-
term human, economic and public health costs. Furthermore, given the high prevalence of GBV in the region, primary prevention is likely to be cheaper and more effective in the long run than continuously attempting to provide services and protection to those who suffer violence and to respond to those who use violence.

**What Do Primary Prevention Interventions Look Like?**

Strong policies and institutions are needed as the foundations for primary prevention. In addition, more focused, multi-component and coordinated interventions are needed at the local level. Below is a sampling of localized actions that can be coordinated for greater impact. This spectrum of potential intervention areas demonstrates how the factors associated with violence can be influenced across many sectors at the local level, and includes engagement with multiple actors and stakeholders. (See “Intervention Framework for Violence Prevention” for more details.)

This figure (left) depicts a proposed project cycle for development for effective prevention interventions. Designing prevention interventions should start with evidence and formative research of specific risk and protective factors. Once these factors are identified, theories of change can be referenced and applied. Strong monitoring and impact evaluation components lead to future evidence and scale-up. (For more details, see “Five Steps to Effective Primary Prevention Programming on Gender-based Violence.”)