

Conceptualizing the impact of domestic violence

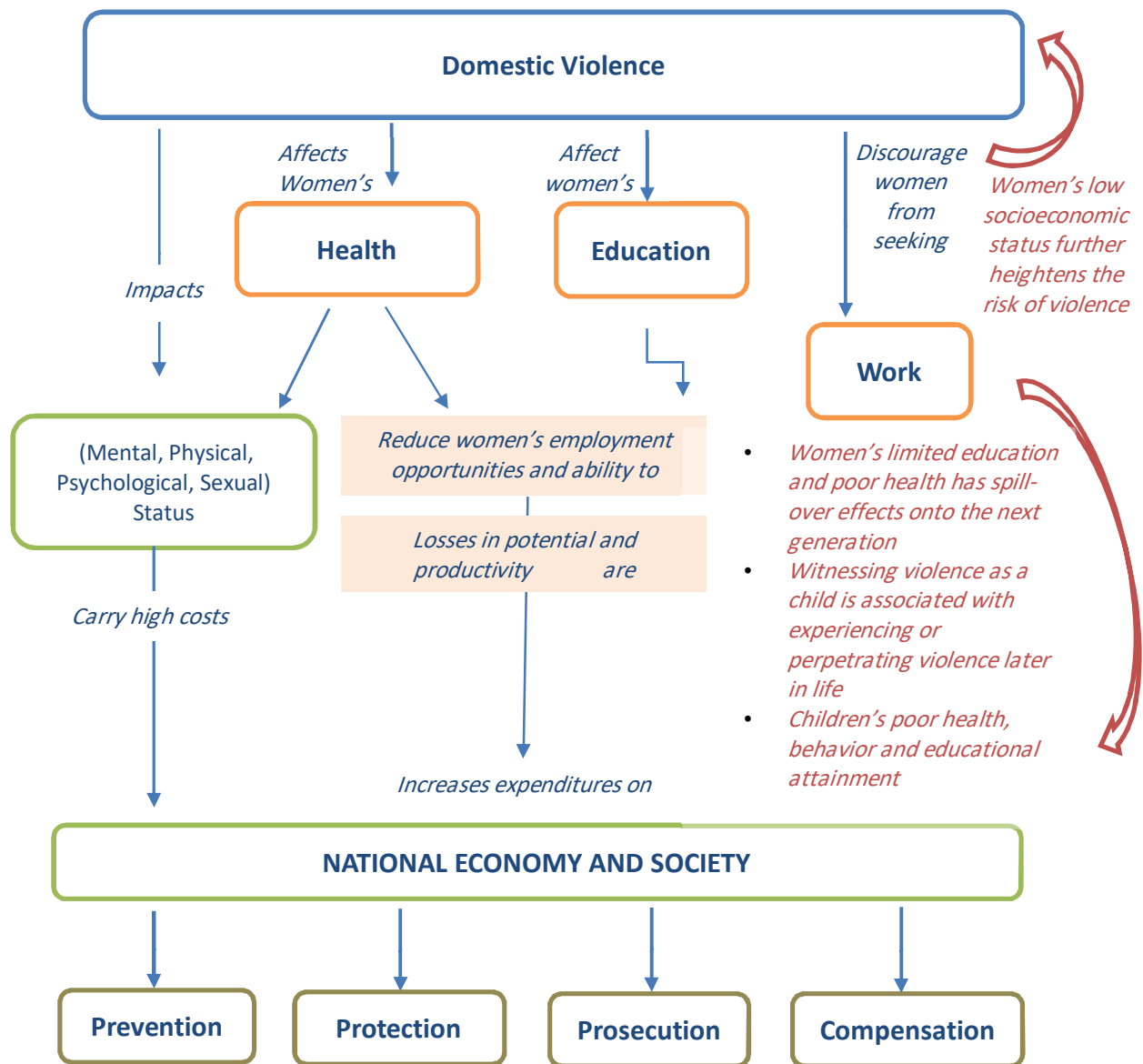
The effects of domestic violence are devastating for women and children, and society. Domestic violence has multiple adverse effects on a woman's physical, mental and sexual health, impacting on their participation in the labour market and on political and civic activities. It influences the demographics of society since it gives rise to mortality and morbidity. Domestic violence increases the risk of miscarriage and is a cause of death among women, especially that associated with honour killing and physical violence.

The World Health Organization has documented many of the health consequences of domestic violence on women and their children, including physical trauma, psychological stress and fear, and how it can increase a woman's risk of disability and death.ⁱ There is a growing body of research exploring the relationship between domestic violence and the economic empowerment of women. Studies relate the extent to which experience of marital violence, in particular, affects women's wellbeing, and their level of productivity and subsequently society's.ⁱⁱ In addition, women are less likely to be attentive and take longer to perform tasks.ⁱⁱⁱ

Domestic violence affects children's welfare and education (especially incidents they witness) and risks a closed circle of violence. It denies them the right to a safe and stable environment – the normal and routine – necessary for development.^{iv} Exposure to domestic violence at home can severely affect behaviour. Children are more likely to have problems with social relations and in empathizing with others, to feel isolated and inadequate, and to sometimes suffer from substance abuse, juvenile pregnancy and aggressive or criminal behaviour. Domestic violence encourages children to learn violent ways of communication as a means of control.^v Studies have shown that children who see violence at home are more likely to engage in similar behaviour when they grow up, or to experience violence themselves.^{vi}

The costs borne by States and society (including survivors of violence, non-governmental organizations, local communities and State institutions) to prevent, protect, prosecute and compensate for violence and reintegrate women and their children in society is extremely high, as evidenced by research in advanced countries. These costs are a burden on the economy and consume a large portion of government budgets that could be dedicated to sectors benefiting women and men, among others. The figure below offers a visual representation of the multifaceted effects of intimate partner violence on survivors and society.

Domestic violence with all its interrelated consequences requires a comprehensive response that fulfils State commitments to international obligations and puts them into operation at the national level.



i For more details about the health consequences of violence against women see WHO, *Global and Regional Estimates of Violence Against Women: Prevalence and Health Effects of Intimate Partner Violence and Non-Partner Sexual Violence* (Geneva, 2013), p. 5. Available from http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/85239/1/9789241564625_eng.pdf.

ii Seema Vyas, "Estimating the association between women's earnings and partner violence: evidence from the 2008-2009 Tanzania National Panel Survey", *Women's Voice, Agency, & Participation Research Series 2013 No.2* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2013), p. 5. Available from <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/505151468313196254/pdf/825350WP0Estim0379862B00PUBLIC0-pdf.pdf>.

iii Nata Duvvury and others, "Intimate partner violence: economic costs and implications for growth and development", *Women's Voice, Agency, & Participation Research Series 2013 no.3* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2013), pp. 9-10. Available from <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/412091468337843649/pdf/825320WP0Intim00Box379862B00PUBLIC0.pdf>.

iv United Nations Children's Emergency Fund, *Behind Closed Doors: The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children* (New York, 2006), p. 9. Available from <http://www.unicef.org/media/files/BehindClosedDoors.pdf>.

v United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (2006). *Behind closed doors: The impact of domestic violence on children*, p. 7. Available from <http://www.unicef.org/media/files/BehindClosedDoors.pdf>.

vi *Ibid.*, p. 3. Available from <http://www.unicef.org/media/files/BehindClosedDoors.pdf>.