Only 15% of African countries have mental health services, a factor in violence prevention

The Global status report on violence prevention 2014 reveals that 475,000 people were murdered in 2012 and homicide is the third leading cause of death globally for males aged 15-44 years, highlighting the urgent need for more decisive action to prevent violence. It is the first of its kind to assess national efforts to address interpersonal violence, namely child maltreatment, youth violence, intimate partner and sexual violence, and elder abuse.

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Despite indications that homicide rates decreased by 16% globally between 2000 and 2012, violence remains widespread. Non-fatal acts of violence take a particular toll on women and children. One in four children has been physically abused; one in five girls has been sexually abused; and one in three women has been a victim of physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence at some point in her lifetime.

Despite strong evidence linking experiences of violence to mental health problems, under half of countries have mental health services to address victim needs, with only 15% of countries in Africa offering such services. Over two thirds of countries make available child protection services and medico-legal services for victims of sexual violence.

Jointly published today by the World Health Organization the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the report indicates that:

- Only one third of the 133 countries surveyed are implementing large-scale initiatives to prevent violence, such as bullying prevention programmes, visits by nurses to families at risk and support to those who care for older people;
- just over half the countries are fully enforcing a set of 12 laws generally acknowledged to prevent violence, although 80% countries have enacted them;
- only half of all countries have services in place to protect and support victims of violence.

"The consequences of violence on families and communities are profound, and can result in lifelong ill health for those affected," states Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization. "Yet we know what works to prevent violence in our homes, schools and workplaces and on our streets and playgrounds. We should take inspiration from governments that have demonstrated success in reducing violence by taking the steps needed. They have shown us that indeed violence is preventable."

Individual country profiles reflect the extent to which key violence prevention programmes and laws and selected services for victims of violence are being implemented. The report assessed the scale of implementation of 18 "best buy" violence prevention programmes. It shows, for example, that:

- One half of countries are implementing school-based programmes to teach children and adolescents 'life-skills' such as non-violent conflict resolution.
- One half of countries are promoting efforts to change gender norms supportive of violence against women.
- One third of countries are putting in place programmes to improve parenting in families at risk of violence.
- Less than one quarter of countries is developing public information campaigns to prevent elder abuse.

The report also reviewed 12 laws that are relevant for violence prevention. It shows, for example, that:

- 98% of countries have laws against rape;
- 87% of countries have laws against domestic violence;
- 84% of countries have laws against carrying weapons in schools;
- 40% of countries have laws against abuse in institutions for older people.

On average, 80% of countries have enacted each of these 12 laws relevant for violence prevention; however, only just over half of countries report that these laws are fully enforced.

Providing care and support to victims of violence is important for reducing psychological trauma, helping victims heal and preventing further involvement in violence.

The report calls for a scaling up of violence prevention programmes in all countries; stronger legislation and enforcement of laws relevant for violence prevention; strengthened justice and security institutions to uphold the rule of law; and enhanced services for victims of violence. It also advocates for better and more effective use of data to inform violence prevention programming and to measure progress. The report is intended for use by governments to help identify gaps and encourage and guide actions and by nongovernmental organisations and experts to assist governments in their efforts.