Women and girls in Afghanistan face an extraordinary level of violence in private and public spaces, compounded by severe limitations on their freedom, mobility, access to information, education, and ability to earn an income or control resources.

Violence against women in Afghanistan is embedded in a traditional system of male domination that puts women and girls at an automatic disadvantage. It is further complicated by nearly 40 years of conflict during which violence against women has been used as a strategy for the subjugation of women’s rights and agency.

Despite such high rates of violence against women, there is a lack of data on its prevalence. A 2008 Global Rights study showed that as many as 87% of women experience at least one form of violence or forced marriage, and 62% experience multiple forms.\(^1\) This vulnerability is exacerbated by various factors including a lack of economic independence, limited access to justice, and a lack of support from family and community.

There are a number of options available for women wanting to escape a violent situation, however, it remains a challenge. A survivor often starts her journey by seeking help at either a Family Guidance Centre or a Women’s Protection Centre through a specific organisation or institution. How her journey evolves from there depends largely on the capabilities of the people and support institutions involved at each stage of the process, as well as working with communities to end the acceptance of violence.

Survivors have a unique and complex set of needs ranging from medical care to safe accommodation, psychosocial counselling, police protection, legal advice, life skills, and economic empowerment. An effective support system, therefore, requires a comprehensive set of services and a shift in the way women are assisted.

A woman taking shelter in a Women’s Protection Centre may need to stay for days, months or years. Most of the time, her journey ends with a return to her family and community, often not by choice but via a decision made in distress. The Survivor’s Empowerment Journey programme looks to change this by equipping women survivors with life skills, working with communities and the government, and supporting economic empowerment, so they can make informed choices about their future.

SURVIVORS EMPOWERMENT JOURNEY PROGRAMME (2016-2021)

**Coverage:** Afghanistan

**Overview:** This programme takes a holistic approach to empowering women survivors of violence through survivor-centric protection services and economic empowerment, while also fostering an enabling environment for community-level prevention and legal reform.

**Components:** Prevention; Protection; Women’s Economic Empowerment; Legislative Policies.

**Target audiences:** Women survivors of violence; local authorities, duty bearers, decision-makers, and norm-setters; educational institutions; women’s groups and networks; men; and youth.

**Donor partners:** The governments of Australia, Belgium, Italy, Finland, Iceland, the Republic of Korea, Norway, and Sweden.

**Key partners:** Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, civil society organisations, media, research institutions.
87% of women in Afghanistan experience some kind of violence during their lifetime. 62% reported experiencing multiple forms of violence.2

57% of brides in Afghanistan are under the age of 16. Often girls are forced into marriages at an early age to settle financial and political debts.3

62% of women report experiencing multiple forms of violence. The most common is psychological violence with 72% followed by physical at 52%.4

PROGRAMME COMPONENTS

Ending violence against women relies on a comprehensive, holistic approach that works to change the structures and norms that perpetuate such violence, while also providing services that help survivors escape the violence, rebuild their lives and access justice. Working in partnership with the Government of Afghanistan, this programme has four interrelated components.

PREVENTION
Changing social norms through community mobilisation

The most effective method of eliminating violence against women is to prevent it from happening in the first place, which involves addressing the root causes of violence against women. This programme focuses on positive messaging and highlighting the benefits of non-violent, equal relationships for everyone, using the existing Community Development Councils to reach out to communities in collaboration with the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and the Ministry of Women’s Affairs. Community mobilisation through the identification of “Change Champions” and the use of interactive communications and learning materials will be implemented in a phased manner across 10 provinces. Locations for community mobilisation are selected based on the availability of services for survivors as well as UN Women’s established relationships with partner organisations in communities.

PROTECTION
Early intervention and protection

The effectiveness of reducing violence against women is closely linked with the availability and quality of services, as well as access to justice for survivors. UN Women currently supports Women’s Protection Centres and Family Guidance Centres in nine provinces across Afghanistan. This programme will build on and extend the survivor-centred approach, providing centres with tools and training to increase the professionalism and quality of services. Various creative strategies are employed to build the confidence of survivors, for example their participation in the management of the centres, empowerment kits upon entry and exit and life skills education.

WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT
Economic opportunities for effective reintegration

The programme will focus on a mix of activities: an assessment of economic services provided at Women’s Protection Centres and Family Guidance Centres; providing services through existing and newly-established Livelihood Resource Centres; business development and skills training; seed capital or microcredit for women to initiate small enterprises; developing market linkages; and strengthening women’s gardens as market hubs for women entrepreneurs. All of these activities will be informed by the principle of “do no harm”, to ensure that participation does not expose women to further violence or risk.

RULE OF LAW & ACCESS TO JUSTICE
Enabling policy and legal environment for women’s access to justice

The Government has a critical role to play in ensuring women have access to the justice system by creating an “enabling environment” through policy, legislative and budgetary reforms that promote gender equality and women’s empowerment. Taking advantage of UN Women’s role in supporting the government, this strategy focuses on interventions spanning policy implementation to community mobilisation. Using existing mechanisms and partners, UN Women will provide technical assistance to improve the frameworks for legal protection and legal aid, support evidence-based studies and advocacy for improving existing legislation, as well as supporting the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and Provincial Ending Violence against Women Commissions to effectively implement and monitor the Ending Violence against Women Law.
**THEORY OF CHANGE**

A substantial decrease in levels of violence against women will be achieved if there is a combination of:

**FAVOURABLE NORMS, BEHAVIOURS AND ATTITUDES**
- Promotion of favourable social norms, attitudes and behaviours at community and individual levels.

**QUALITY EARLY INTERVENTION AND PROTECTION SERVICES**
- Improved quality of early intervention and the package of essential services so that survivors can safely reintegrate into their families and communities.

**INCREASED ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES**
- Survivors and women vulnerable to violence have increased capacity and access to economic opportunities and livelihoods.

**ENABLING POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENT**
- An enabling legislative and policy environment is in place and translated into action.

**OUTPUTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FAVOURABLE NORMS, BEHAVIOURS AND ATTITUDES</th>
<th>QUALITY EARLY INTERVENTION AND PROTECTION SERVICES</th>
<th>INCREASED ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES</th>
<th>ENABLING POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The mobilisation of women, girls, men and boys in favour of respectful relationships and gender equality.</td>
<td>UN Women-assisted Family Guidance Centres and Women’s Protection Centres provide survivor-centred mediation and early intervention services to prevent the escalation of violence.</td>
<td>Survivors and vulnerable women have opportunities to participate in economic empowerment activities.</td>
<td>Laws and policies are regularly reviewed, reformed and resourced to conform with Afghanistan’s international human rights obligations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence is available to inform prevention policies, budgets and programmes, that are then developed and used to influence policies.</td>
<td>Service provision entities are able to effectively manage cases of violence against women according to key principles of the survivor-centred approach</td>
<td>Improved exit processes for survivors, including reintegration services and monitoring/followup to help ensure their safety.</td>
<td>Ending Violence against Women Commissions and the Ministry of Women’s Affairs have the capacity to implement and monitor appropriate legislation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESULT:** Women survivors of violence are empowered so they can lead a dignified life in a community shaped by social norms, attitudes and behaviours that support ending violence against women.
LINKAGES WITH EXISTING INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL STRATEGIES

Sustainable Development Goals
The Sustainable Development Goals recognise the interrelated nature of all 17 goals, however, the Survivors Empowerment Journey programme links in particular to three of the Goals.

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
Goal 3: Good health and wellbeing
Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions

National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA)
This action plan forms the foundation on which the government is building its efforts to advance gender equality in Afghanistan. It is formed around three pillars, and the Survivors Empowerment Journey links with all three.

Pillar 1: Security
Pillar 2: Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights
Pillar 3: Economic and Social Development

Afghanistan’s National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325
Afghanistan is one of only two countries in South Asia that has a National Action Plan in place for UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

Protection – Objectives 1-3: Protecting women from all kinds of violence and discrimination through the implementation of existing and new laws and policies, access to an effective, active and accountable justice system, and providing health and psychosocial support.

Prevention – Objective 1: Using awareness-raising and public outreach to protect women from all types of violence and discrimination.

Relief and Recovery – Objective 1: Objective 1 focuses on increasing the economic security of vulnerable women.

KEY PRINCIPLES
This programme is based on a “survivor-centred approach”, a set of key principles that puts women’s rights, needs and wishes at the centre. All stakeholders should work to create a supportive environment that promotes a survivor’s recovery, and her ability to identify and express needs and wishes, while also reinforcing her capacity to make decisions for herself.

1. Every person is a unique individual, and not just a member of a category or group.
2. Women who have faced violence are not helpless victims but survivors with strengths and equal partners in social change. “Walk with her” rather than “do for her”.
3. Violence is not an inborn quality, and every person has his/her own capacity for change.
4. Violence against women is a social and structural issue, not a personal problem.
5. “Do No Harm”: All support actions must be carefully designed and implemented to pose no threat to women and their children.
6. Intervention approaches require flexibility; even if people have common needs, each person follows a unique path to empowerment.
7. Violence can only be reduced by overcoming stereotypes and the conformity to violence as a norm at all levels.
8. Always take account of the people a survivor is associated with and is dependent upon, as well as all those who depend on her.
9. By seeking help, a woman must have trust in the people and system. Preservation of private information is one of the critical responsibilities of all supporting stakeholders.

FOOTNOTES
1-4 Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, Violence against women and girls in Afghanistan, 2013

CAPTIONS
Page 1: In Cramp by Arefa Nabizada (Hanganyar). CCA.
Page 2: UNAMA/Fraidoon Poya.
Page 3: UNAMA/Fraidoon Poya.
Page 4: Left and right: UN Women/Kiana Hayeri.
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For more information please contact:
UN Women
UNOCA Compound
Jalalabad Road, Kabul
Afghanistan
asiapacific.unwomen.org
www.facebook.com/unwomentasia
www.twitter.com/unwomentasia