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World Health Organization Supports Domestic Violence Prevention

Interpersonal violence devastates lives and families, and it also imposes major economic costs on societies around the world. Some nations spend more than four percent of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on violence-related injuries, and low-income nations may be hardest hit. Those are among the conclusion of *The Economic Dimensions of Interpersonal Violence*, which was released in June by the World Health Organization (WHO). It finds that Colombia and El Salvador spend 4.3 percent of their GDP on violence-related expenditures – the highest of any nations. The United States spends 3.3 percent of GDP on violence-related matters.

The new study examines interpersonal violence from a public health economics perspective. It concludes that interpersonal violence is extremely costly; prevention studies show evidence of cost effectiveness; and, for most of the developing world and many developed countries, too little information is available about the direct costs of treating the consequences of interpersonal violence.

Based on an extensive review of peer-reviewed articles, the study found that 1.6 million people around the world die because of some form of violence each year. Millions more are injured and experience ongoing physical, mental, emotional, sexual or reproductive health problems as a result of violence, which is a leading cause of death for people ages 15 to 44.

While strangers kill most male victims of violence worldwide, almost half of women victims are killed by current or former husbands or partners and in some countries that figure is as high as 70 percent. About 20 percent of women, and five to ten percent of men suffered sexual abuse when they were children.

“Responding to violence diverts billions of dollars away from education, social security, housing and recreation, into the essential but seemingly never-ending tasks of providing

care for victims and criminal justice interventions for perpetrators,” said WHO Assistant Director-General Dr. Catherine Le Gales-Camus. “A major challenge in the years ahead will be to strengthen and support developing country research into the costs of interpersonal violence, and to feed the findings into policy making and advocacy where it can reinforce arguments for prevention.”

The study recommends systemic future research into the direct and indirect costs of interpersonal violence that allows for comparisons across countries and settings.

“These findings suggest that violence prevention is not only good for health and safety, but also sound economics,” said Dr. Alexander Butchart, WHO’s Coordinator for Violence Prevention.

The Economic Dimensions of Interpersonal Violence is available online at www.who.int

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