Message from
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on 25 November 2016, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

Each year on 25 November, the United Nations campaign ‘UNiTE to End Violence against Women’ starts. The 16 days of activism calls for global action to increase awareness and create opportunities for discussion about challenges and solutions on violence against women and girls.

There is a growing body of evidence on the scale and forms of violence that women experience worldwide. Gender-based violence (GBV) against women and girls occurs across all regions around the globe and takes many forms including sexual violence, forced and early marriages, female genital mutilation, honour killings, trafficking and most commonly, intimate partner violence that may involve physical, sexual and emotional abuse.

GBV is a significant public health concern in the South-East Asia Region – with numerous consequences for the health and well-being of women and girls. Responding to GBV has most recently been highlighted in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically under SDG 5. Violence takes a toll on women and children: one in four children has been physically abused; one in five girls has been sexually abused. Violence against women and girls is a matter of grave concern for the South-East Asia Region, with 37.7% of ever-partnered women reported having experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence at some point in their lives.

In line with our commitment to achieving the SDGs, and more specifically SDG 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) and SDG 5, we need to adopt a multisectoral framework and reinforce the interventions for prevention and management of GBV. The health-care system serves as an interface with almost every woman at some point in her life. Interventions by health providers can potentially mitigate both short- and long-term health effects of violence on women and their families. It could also contribute to reaching the objectives of the new Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s and Adolescents’ Health.

At the global level, the 67th World Health Assembly (WHA) adopted resolution WHA67.15 on “Strengthening the role of the health system in addressing violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children”. It called on WHO to develop a global plan of action on strengthening the role of the health system in addressing interpersonal violence, in particular against women and girls and children”. The WHA adopted the Global plan of action on Violence Against Women (VAW) in May 2016 to strengthen the role of the health system within a national multisectoral response to address interpersonal violence, in particular against women, girls and children.
The global plan of action is designed to help countries strengthen action to address interpersonal violence, in particular violence against women, girls and children. The resolution encourages countries to strengthen the role of the health system in responding to violence. It invites partners to take steps to accomplish the plan's four strategic directions: strengthen health system leadership and governance; enhance health service delivery and the capacity of health workers and providers to respond to the needs of people who have experienced violence; boost programming to prevent interpersonal violence; and improve information and evidence.

WHO South-East Asia Region with Member States commits to further strengthen their capacity and encourages them to adapt WHO policy and clinical guidelines on the health sector response to violence against women and girls, specifically at the health managers’ level.

Keeping in mind the importance of the commitment of all Member States on this subject, I would like to encourage you to personally take action in your communities, play your part and stand up against violence against women and girls.