



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:
The Health Sector Responds

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Moreover, the PAHO focal points and their national counterparts in the respective ministries of health, offices of women's affairs, and women's nongovernmental organi-

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The authors wish to dedicate this book to all the survivors of violence who so courageously have shared their stories with the desire that others might benefit from their experiences and live safer and happier lives. Their situations are both unique and universal, contributing to our knowledge and understanding of gender-based violence and informing our resolve and actions to overcome it. We hope that the lessons learned in Central America will transcend national and cultural boundaries to find resonance everywhere in the world where dedicated and concerned individuals are looking for guidance in making their communities healthier and violence-free.

PREFACE

I am pleased that the publication of this book takes place at the beginning of the Pan American Health Organization's first administration to be headed by a woman, and that in this, my first book preface, I have the opportunity to place on record my commitment to turning the tide against gender-based violence in the Region of the Americas.

The voices of the women you will hear throughout this book's narrative are rooted in the reality of their everyday lives and call for a compassionate response in the form of recognition and an end to their suffering. The first call for action, to be sure, focuses on the health sector. But implicit in the ultimate, all-encompassing response is action by a diverse partnership involving governments and communities of doctors, nurses, and other health professionals working alongside their counterparts: political leaders, the police and court systems, NGOs, schools, and churches.

PAHO's work in Central America to end violence and to utilize health as a bridge to create long-lasting peace began in 1985, and improving the health situation of women was, and continues to be, a cornerstone of the efforts of PAHO and the international community to consolidate democracy and subregional integration. For more than a decade, the Governments of Norway and Sweden have recognized the pivotal role of women in families and communities in the construction of peace at its most basic and elemental level, and the Nordic cooperation's steadfast belief in this principle is largely responsible for the groundwork that has made this book possible.

Finally, I would like this book full of voices to serve as our social conscience as we embark on an international, interagency campaign during 2003 and beyond to lead and support community initiatives to prevent gender-based violence and to empower women and girls everywhere to realize their full potential and offer our societies the rewards of their wisdom and experience.

MIRTA ROSES PERIAGO
Director

INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the most widespread human rights abuses and public health problems in the world today, affecting as many as one out of every three women. It is also an extreme manifestation of gender inequity, targeting women and girls because of their subordinate social status in society. The consequences of GBV are often devastating and long-term, affecting women's and girls' physical health and mental well-being. At the same time, its ripple effects compromise the social development of other children in the household, the family as a unit, the communities where the individuals live, and society as a whole.

Violence against Women: The Health Sector Responds provides a strategy for addressing this complex problem and concrete approaches for carrying it out, not only for those on the front lines attending to the women who live with violence, but also for decision-makers who may incorporate the lessons in the development of policies and resources. For those communities where support for women does not yet exist, the authors hope that this book will motivate health providers and leaders to more directly confront the issue of gender-related violence and ensure support to affected women in resolving their situation.

This book is a collaborative effort between the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH), with technical assistance provided by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). PAHO produced the first three chapters of Section I: Chapter One gives an overview of why gender-based violence is a public health problem. Chapters Two and Three discuss the development, implementation, and achievements of PAHO's integrated strategy for addressing GBV, starting with how the "Critical Path" study helped define the strategy. In the next four chapters of Section II, PATH presents the strategy's application and its "Lessons Learned" at the macro, or political, level (Chapter Four), within the health sector (Chapter Five), in the clinic (Chapter Six), and beyond the clinic to the community at large (Chapter Seven). The World Health Organization contributed the final chapter (Chapter Eight), which offers a more global perspective on how the lessons learned and the integrated strategy may be applied in other communities around the world.



The obstacles to overcoming family violence are 500 years of culture ingrained through socialization in our children.

–Montserrat Sagot, 2001