

OPENING REMARKS FOR DR. DANIEL  
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE AMERICAS: DATA TO ACTION  
Thursday, 29 November 2018  
9:30 to 12:00  
Room B

- On behalf of the Pan American Health Organization, the home for health in the Americas, I'd like to welcome all of you—both our physical and our virtual guests—to this special event in observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.
- A special welcome to our partners who have made this event possible, including colleagues from Canada's Permanent Mission to the Organization of American States, UN Women, the World Bank, and the Global Women's Institute at the George Washington University. We are honored and grateful for your collaboration with PAHO, not just today but throughout the year.
- There are many kinds of violence that affect women around the world and in the Americas. They include intimate partner violence; sexual violence by non-partners; child, early, and forced marriage; trafficking; sexual harassment; and femicide, to name a few. Saying these horrific words in one sentence gives me pause, and makes us reflect – on the suffering of millions of women; and compels us to work to end it.
- Globally and in our region, intimate partner violence is the most prevalent form of violence against women, affecting 1 in every 3 women in the Americas.

- How do we know this? We know it because we have built up an evidence base that allows us to understand the nature, magnitude, and consequences of violence against women. Having such data is absolutely key because, as we know, that if you don't measure it – it remains hidden, almost as though it doesn't exist and becomes part of the 'silence' around this issue; if you don't measure it you don't know if actions being taken are having an impact; if you don't measure it you won't know where to use limited resources – and we know county resources are limited. If it's important – you will measure it, monitor it, track it until you have eliminated it.
- PAHO and WHO have long supported the development of sound methodologies to measure women's experiences of violence in an ethical way that preserves the safety of women and researchers. Indeed, the methodology that is currently considered the "gold standard" for household surveys on violence against women was developed by WHO and partners, including some, such as Mary Ellsberg, who are in this room.
- PAHO and WHO have also made great strides in analyzing data across countries and regions and in measuring changes. Today, you will be the first to hear the results of PAHO's systematic review and comparative analysis of the prevalence of intimate partner violence in 23 countries of the Americas, as well as changes over time across 7 countries.

- Our findings confirm that intimate partner violence against women remains widespread in the Americas, although with significant variation across countries and within countries.
- Data have also been key to documenting that violence against women can have profound and long-lasting consequences for the mental and physical health of survivors, including their sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- And recently we've been learning more and more about how violence against women also harms children, families and communities. Children of abused women experience anxiety and behavior problems that impact their health and development; families may suffer from loss of home and income; and entire communities suffer when survivors' productivity is affected, and women are not able to fully participate in public life.
- We know that children exposed to violence are more likely to be perpetrators of violence as adults, and/or are more likely to suffer violence themselves. This cycle of violence must be stopped.
- Fortunately, data also show us that violence against women can be prevented.
- So clearly, data and knowledge are key to understanding violence against women. But the full value of the data we collect and analyze cannot be realized unless and until it is translated into meaningful efforts to improve women's lives.

- This means we must use our data to develop evidence-based, culturally relevant plans, policies, programs and laws. It means we must continue collecting data to monitor and evaluate the impact of our efforts, so we can be sure we are making sound investments in effective policies.
- Let me state unequivocally that a problem of this magnitude, with such wide-ranging ramifications, can only be solved through collaboration and multisectoral action. But – on behalf of PAHO and WHO as the UN specialized agencies for health—I need to emphasize that, within this necessary multisectoral approach, health systems are key.
- First of all, it is the responsibility of health systems to provide compassionate, effective and accessible care to survivors. Our health care institutions must be fully prepared to address the multiple implications of violence – including helping survivors access other services, such as legal or social services.
- The health sector, as we shall see today, can also be a powerful ally by collecting and analyzing data that helps mobilize societies to address violence against women, and by framing it as a public health problem. By demonstrating that violence against women is, indeed, a major problem that affects a large number of women, we are better positioned to build sustained commitment from policy makers and from society as a whole.

- Today, we will be hearing more about the characteristics of violence against women in the Americas. And we will also hear about the positive results of sustained evidence-based efforts to prevent such violence, for example, in Canada and Nicaragua.
- PAHO's own analysis confirms that levels of intimate partner violence are decreasing in some countries in our region. This should both reassure us that it is possible to prevent violence against women and compel us to apply the lessons we learn from successful programs to make progress elsewhere, including where it is most needed.
- But, we must remain vigilant about safeguarding gains we have achieved, because we still face strong headwinds as we work to advance and consolidate progress for women's health and rights.
- We have seen some powerful positive trends recently with truly inspiring movements by women such as "Me Too" and "Ni Una Más". And we've seen demonstrations around the world over the last couple of days related to '16 days of activism against Gender-Based Violence'. These trends are exposing the high prevalence of violence - the presence of violence against women everywhere – at home, at work, at play. And they are contributing to a more supportive environment, a more demanding environment, for recognizing the magnitude of the problem and for mobilizing action to prevent violence against women – demanding accountability and an end to impunity.

- I want all of you to know: we at PAHO are deeply committed to continue working with our countries to generate and use data such as what you will see today, to strengthen policies in this area, and to catalyse cross-sector collaboration in partnership with you and your organizations.
- We all know this: if we work *together*, if we bring together all of our various skills and expertise and influence and advocacy - we can have a much greater impact in preventing the terrible scourge; the unacceptable scourge; the preventable scourge that is violence against women.
- Thank you.
- I will now hand over the floor to Diana Arango who is the Senior Gender-Based Violence and Development Specialist at the World Bank.
- Diana has an MSc in Anthropology and Development from the London School of Economics and over ten years of experience in development and gender-based violence research and programs. Thank you, Diana, for moderating our joint event today.