

Conducting a national study on the
prevalence of violence against women

LESSONS LEARNED IN MONGOLIA

“

A woman cried her heart out during the interview.
When we finished, she kissed me on the cheek
and thanked me, as if I did something precious for her.

”

Interviewer in the field



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December 2021



About the kNOwVAWdata Initiative

The kNOwVAWdata Initiative works to sustainably strengthen regional and national capacities to measure the prevalence of violence against women in Asia and the Pacific. It is a partnership between the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Asia and the Pacific Regional Office (APRO), the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the University of Melbourne and ANROWS.

kNOwVAWdata improves data availability, quality and interpretation to inform more effective policy and programme responses to prevent and end violence against women.

Reliable, comparable, representative and properly explained data on violence against women are essential to prevention and response efforts, but the technical capacity to collect such data safely and accurately is limited. kNOwVAWdata addresses this gap by supporting and training researchers and national institutions across Asia and the Pacific to collect and analyze data on the prevalence of violence against women.

More information

Website: asiapacific.unfpa.org/knowvawdata

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Attributions

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UNFPA Mongolia and the National Statistical Office (NSO), with financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, conducted the 2017 study on the prevalence of violence against women in Mongolia. The kNOwVAWdata Initiative (funded by Australian DFAT) provided technical support to the planning and implementation of the study and developed these lessons learned to reflect the study's experiences. This publication provides insights into overcoming the challenges that arise when implementing a national prevalence study. It intends to inform and inspire donors, planners, organizers and coordinators of violence against women prevalence studies worldwide.

The contributions of several people made this document possible. Many thanks go to the former Mongolia Statistics Office Chair, Ms A. Ariunzaya and her dedicated staff, including lead statistician Ms N. Doljinsuren and her team. Also to Ms Z. Khandarmaa, coordinator of the Women's Health and Life Experiences study, and UNFPA colleagues in the Mongolia Country Office, former Country Representative, Ms Naomi Kitihara and Gender Advisor, Ms B. Oyun. Most importantly, we also thank the field interviewers and qualitative researchers who worked on the Mongolia study. We can learn a great deal from their experiences.

Dr Henrica A.F.M. (Henriette) Jansen, former Technical Advisor to kNOwVAWdata Initiative at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, provided technical support to the Mongolia study implementation, together with Ms Jessica Gardner, VAW data consultant. This report includes reflections from their involvement.

Based on a range of contributions, Ms Gardner drafted this publication and provided editorial support.

INTRODUCING CONTRIBUTORS FROM THE STUDY TEAM



Ms A. Ariunzaya, former Chair of National Statistics Office, Mongolia

As head of the NSO, Ms Ariunzaya was responsible for implementing the 2017 VAW Study. She provided leadership and oversight throughout the entire process, working closely with UNFPA and as part of the GBV project Steering Committee. Ms Ariunzaya was the leading spokesperson during the launch and dissemination of the results, working to communicate the study methodology and findings and encouraging correct interpretation and use of the results.



Ms N. Doljinsuren, Senior Statistician, Population and Social Statistics Department, National Statistics Office, Mongolia

Ms Doljinsuren managed the team at the NSO who conducted the study. She led the technical work involved in planning, designing and testing the study methodology. She and her team of statisticians recruited and trained the enumerators (interviewers), managed the fieldwork, data processing, analysis, and writing.



Ms Z. Khandarmaa, National Coordinator of the 2017 VAW Study

Ms Khandarmaa coordinated the 2017 VAW Study, working full-time on this as part of the NSO team and managing the study's day-to-day planning and implementation. She was involved in every aspect of the work and played a critical role in ensuring that the study ran as planned.



Enumerators who collected data in the field and NSO staff supporting the fieldwork

Reflections and lessons learned from some of the women who worked as enumerators are included in this document. They traversed the country, approaching households and conducting private interviews with randomly selected women who bravely shared their stories.



Ms Naomi Kitahara, former Country Representative, UNFPA Mongolia

As head of UNFPA in Mongolia, Ms Kitahara secured funding for the 2017 VAW Study and provided leadership and oversight throughout. Together with the Vice-Minister for Justice, she co-chaired the Steering Committee for the study and the overall gender-based violence project of which it was a part.



Ms Oyun Banzragch, Gender Advisor, UNFPA Mongolia

As a National Programme Officer on Gender at UNFPA Mongolia, Ms Banzragch coordinated the 2017 VAW study on behalf of UNFPA, liaising with UNFPA Regional Office Technical Advisors and the National Statistics Office of Mongolia.



Dr Henrica A.F.M. (Henriette) Jansen, former Technical Advisor and lead of the kNOWVAWdata Initiative, UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office

Dr Jansen led the provision of technical support to the NSO team throughout the planning, implementation and dissemination phases. Drawing on her extensive knowledge and experience in measuring violence against women, Dr Jansen provided critical guidance and tools to the NSO team who were attempting to conduct this study for the first time.



Ms Jessica Gardner, former VAW data consultant, kNOWVAWdata Initiative, UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office

Ms Gardner provided technical assistance to the NSO team. She gave support during the early planning phase, interviewer training, for the analysis and write up of the results, and the launch.



CONTEXT

Collecting reliable, comparable and comprehensive data to measure the prevalence, nature of, and factors associated with violence against women, and the proper interpretation of such data, is essential to ending this violence. Violence against women is a sensitive topic that requires specialized research methods to ensure the interviewees' and researchers' safety and the quality of the data collected.

This document aims to help other program and project coordinators and researchers undertaking violence against women prevalence surveys to anticipate and address some of the challenges they may face. It contains lessons learned gathered after completing the Mongolia study and launching the results. Key people involved have shared their experiences establishing partnerships with stakeholders, recruiting and managing an effective team of interviewers, preparing for and conducting the fieldwork, and translating the results into action. All quotes and testimonials reflect the own words of the people they are attributed to.

ABOUT MONGOLIA

Mongolia is one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world. Around three million people live in this vast land with a population density of two people per square kilometre, second only to Greenland.¹ Roughly half the population live in the capital city, Ulaanbaatar, where rapid peri-urban growth and air pollution from coal-burning stoves are a significant problem. Landlocked between Russia and China, the terrain ranges from the desert in the south to vast steppes and mountains in the west. Around 30% of the population follow a nomadic farming lifestyle.

Mongolia has experienced strong economic growth in recent decades and is ranked as a lower-middle-income economy by the World Bank in 2021.² Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the economy is expected to contract for the first time since the global financial crisis in 2009.³ Mongolia has high human development and was ranked 97th of 189 countries based in its 2019 Human Development Index (HDI). Mongolia's Gender Development Index (GDI) puts it among countries with high equality of human development achievements between women and men.⁴

The Law on Combating Domestic Violence (LCDV), initially passed in 2004, was revised in December 2016 and entered into force on 1 February 2017. Together with the Criminal Code, Law on Witness Protection, Criminal Proceedings Code, Family Law and the Law on Child Rights, there is cohesive legislation to address violence against women.⁵

¹ World Bank Data: Population density (people per square kilometre of land area). https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.DNST?year_high_desc=false

² World Bank. Data for Mongolia, Lower middle income. <https://data.worldbank.org/?locations=MN-XN>

³ World Bank. The World Bank in Mongolia: Overview. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/mongolia/overview>

⁴ United Nations Development Programme. 2020. Human Development Report 2020: The next frontier. <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2020.pdf>

⁵ National Statistics Office and the United Nations Population Fund. 2018. Breaking the Silence for Equality: 2017 National Study on Gender-based Violence in Mongolia. https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2017%20National%20Study%20on%20Gender-based%20Violence%20in%20Mongolia_0.pdf

THE 2017 NATIONAL STUDY ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

By 2016, despite legislation being in place, the government and people had little evidence about the prevalence and patterns of gender-based violence⁶ in Mongolia. Service records gave the impression that gender-based violence was rare. There was a need for reliable data to learn about prevalence and patterns of gender-based violence and to inform policy and advocate for budget allocations. To address this lack of data, UNFPA Mongolia and the National Statistical Office (NSO), with financial support from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, conducted a nationwide study on the prevalence of violence against women in 2017.

This was the first large-scale quantitative and qualitative study on this topic ever conducted in Mongolia. It involved visiting almost 8,000 households and interviewing a random sample of around 7,900 women aged 15-64 years. The methodology developed for the *World Health Organization (WHO) multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women* was used, which combines a quantitative household survey with qualitative research, and puts safety and ethics at the centre of all activities.

The study mainly focuses on measuring different types of violence perpetrated against women by their current or former husbands or intimate partners (e.g. boyfriend, fiancé). It collects data on

the prevalence, frequency and severity of violence and its associations with women's health, wellbeing and productivity. It also measures physical or sexual violence committed by anyone else, male or female, that women have experienced since age 15.

The study results are published in the report *Breaking the Silence for Equality: 2017 National Study on Gender-based Violence in Mongolia*.⁷ Among the key findings the study found that the prevalence of intimate partner violence was considerable, with 31.2% of ever-partnered women disclosing they had experienced physical or sexual violence by a partner at some point in their lives and 12.7% of women who had experienced such violence in the last 12 months before the survey. That equates to approximately 290,000 women who had experienced partner violence in their lifetime and 118,000 women in the previous 12 months. The prevalence of physical and/or sexual partner violence in Mongolia is above the global average of 26% of ever-partnered women (based on data from 2000-2018).⁸

The study also found that the prevalence of non-partner violence was relatively high, with 17.3% of women have experienced physical violence by someone other than an intimate partner since they were 15 years old. One in seven women (14.0%) experienced sexual violence by a non-partner since age 15 and 2.6% in the last 12 months. The lifetime rate of 14% is more than double the global average of 6% of women aged 15-49 years who have been subjected to sexual violence by a non-partner at least once since age 15.⁹

While the term 'gender-based violence' refers to different concepts in different contexts, it is sometimes used to hide/avoid acknowledging that the victims are mainly women. In measuring violence prevalence through surveys, the term 'violence against women' is preferred as it is clear and unambiguous about what and who is the focus of the measurement. It also acknowledges that with survey methods we are often not able to establish the gender-based motive for the violence.

Source: UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office. 2016. Measuring Prevalence of Violence against Women: Key terminology. kNOWVAWdata Initiative: Bangkok.

- ⁶ Gender-based violence (GBV), in its original meaning, is 'violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman, or violence that affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty'. While the terms 'gender-based violence' and 'violence against women' are frequently used interchangeably in literature and by advocates, the term 'gender-based violence' highlights the gender dimension, in other words, the relationship between (1) women's subordinate status in society and (2) their increased vulnerability to violence because of unequal power relations and gender roles.
- ⁷ Mongolia National Statistics Office and UNFPA. 2018. *Breaking the Silence for Equality: 2017 National Study on Gender-based Violence in Mongolia*. <https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/publications/2017-national-study-gender-based-violence-mongolia>
- ⁸ WHO. 2021. *Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018*. Global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women. WHO: Geneva. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/violence-against-women-prevalence-estimates>
- ⁹ WHO. 2021. *Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018*. Global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women. WHO: Geneva. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/violence-against-women-prevalence-estimates>

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The Mongolian 2017 violence against women study was a considerable undertaking for several reasons. The Mongolian NSO is a strong statistical office and a trusted agency for conducting household surveys that result in data that are considered credible and nationally owned. However, a survey on violence against women was new and unknown territory for NSO, for which different skills were needed compared to for other household surveys.

The sensitive nature of the topic of this study and risk for respondents and interviewers, makes it different than most other surveys and call for safety and ethical protocols at the centre of every decision about survey design and management.

Conducting a study on violence against women ideally should involve a multi-disciplinary team and a participatory approach. The aim is to ensure stakeholders who will use the findings understand how the study is conducted and feel ownership of the results. This calls for strong leadership, partnership building, coordination skills and project management.

The women interviewers who go out into the field to collect the data are the study's face. They are carefully recruited, selected, trained and supervised to get high-quality data. Their safety and that of the women they interview is of primary importance. Interviewers should conduct a limited number of interviews each day (recommendation is three or four) and, overall, a maximum of around 100 interviews. Protocols should be in place to ensure they are supported and have access to counselling to cope and protect their wellbeing.

Violence against women prevalence study results are often confronting, particularly when data brings the issue to light in a country for the first time. The findings need to be communicated clearly and well. How the study results are launched and disseminated requires careful planning and preparation.

The NSO team and UNFPA learned important lessons at each stage of the study: getting buy-in from stakeholders, planning and design, recruiting and training the interviewers, conducting the field work, writing up the findings, and launching the results. These are explained in chapters that follow.



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Chapter 1

GETTING AND MAINTAINING BUY-IN AND SUPPORT

Embarking on a national study on violence against women prevalence needs the backing of a wide range of policy and decision-makers. In Mongolia, political support was secured after many months of advocacy. The study was part of a multi-year project proposal on eliminating gender-based violence. [Note: The 'Combatting Gender-based Violence in Mongolia 2016-2019' project, funded by the Swiss Development Cooperation SDC and UNFPA, Mongolia, has three components. The Study is the first component of this project and has as overall objective to establish national data on GBV and build capacities within NSO.]

CONVINCING DONORS TO LEND THEIR SUPPORT

The study needed donor support, both financial aid and political backing. Gender was a priority identified by most significant donors and development partners active in Mongolia. The lack of reliable data on a critical issue such as intimate partner violence against women revealed a glaring opportunity for collective action.

Knowing that gender was a strategic issue for the development of Mongolia and that partners were positioned to act in some way, Ms Naomi Kitahara, former UNFPA Country Representative in Mongolia, provoked discussion among her peers on this topic.

This prompted donors and partners to discuss what was needed, what were the highest priorities, and where the opportunities were. With a strong and capable statistics office which would ensure credibility and ownership, and technical support readily available from UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office through the kNOwVAWdata project, a study on violence against women emerged as a high priority and feasible option.

Research on violence against women is complex and technical work. It was essential to use language and arguments donors and partners could relate to. Understanding their focus areas helped show how the research would help the country move forward in those areas.

Often we speak to donors with technical language and we present things we are passionate about in technical terms. Work on violence against women needs to be spoken about in such a way that it penetrates to the minds of the donors and work with their emotions.

Ms Kitahara, former Country Representative, UNFPA Mongolia

In the project formulation phase, instead of only inviting the usual partners on the gender front, Ms Kitahara focused on involving stakeholders connected to the issue, like the Police and the Ministry of Justice. UNFPA Mongolia had not worked with them previously, but it was essential for them to be part of the process from the beginning in efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls.

PREVALENCE DIFFERS FROM DATA ON REPORTED CASES OF VIOLENCE

At first, the Police and the Ministry of Justice did not appreciate the data gaps on violence against women. They had been investing in a database on cases of violence as reported to police and justice services – which recorded some 1000 cases per year – and did not understand why a survey was needed. The NSO and UNFPA had to explain using evidence from national surveys conducted elsewhere, that few women report violence to the authorities and the only way to get an estimate of prevalence was a random sample survey. After the Mongolia survey was conducted, the results showed that only 8% of women who experienced violence had ever reported it to the police.

STATISTICIANS AND STAKEHOLDERS NEED A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Stakeholders, represented in Steering Committee and technical Advisory Group are important, and this is one of the backbones of the success of the study.

No matter how perfect the administrative data is, we can never capture what is going on behind closed doors unless we do a survey.

Ms Kitahara, former Country Representative, UNFPA Mongolia

A high-level Steering Committee oversaw the entire project, including the study, and their support was crucial to the success of the project. Further, an Advisory Panel provided a forum to discuss and influence the study's more technical and operational issues.

Governance of the project was important. We had a high-level steering committee; much higher than for other projects (Vice-Minister of Justice (Chair), but also Vice-Minister Health, Vice-Minister Social protection, NSO Chair, Deputy Police Commissioner).

The strength and engagement of this group was the reason we got the project implemented.

Ms Kitahara, former Country Representative, UNFPA Mongolia

At the start, the Steering Committee and the Advisory Panel members had varying levels of understanding of gender and the causes and consequences of gender-based violence against women.

With support from Technical Advisors, sessions were held to sensitize the NSO Survey staff and stakeholders (Steering Committee for the overall GBV project and the GBV Survey Advisory Panel) about the special nature, the sensitivities and the special ethical and safety measures that will need to be in place for quality data and safety of the

participants. At meetings with different audiences, agenda items were included to address, discuss and clarify gender and violence concepts and terminology as well as technical topics, to get everybody on the same page.

The 34-member Advisory panel¹⁰ had a diverse participation including representatives of NGOs working with men, LGBT and disabled people. At the first advisory panel meeting feedback was invited on the survey plan and tools. Work mechanisms for the panel to support the survey implementation were discussed and six sub-committees were established around specific topics (questionnaire development, training and sampling, ethics, qualitative survey, advocacy, support plan). At the first meeting, the survey plan was cleared and endorsed and participants signed a symbolic pledge to support the study and the use of the data.

Sensitization sessions for the advisory panel on methodology, key findings from other countries, and ethical and safety recommendations, were good opportunities to clarify and answer many questions. While discussing measurement concepts it appeared that, among the members of the advisory panel, the concept of gender (and thus of gender-based violence) was understood by some as referring to 'social hierarchy' or 'social inequality' and not

necessarily as a concept related to the roles in society of men and women and their relationships. It was useful to have these different perspectives as it made the survey team realize certain attitudes and beliefs that are also likely to exist among the general public.

Stakeholder engagement at all levels is essential in a study on violence against women, from the most strategic to more operational issues. Ms Khandarmaa, the national coordinator of the study, noted that engagement was sometimes low and it was challenging to get timely inputs from the Advisory Panel. Spending more time on developing relationships with technical partners could have helped strengthen their commitment.



It would have been valuable to have allowed time for the team to get to know and engage stakeholders. Organize informal meetings, perhaps, to get to know people and learn what they are doing.



Ms Khandarmaa, National VAW Study Coordinator

¹⁰ Membership (34 members): Chaired by Chair of National Statistics Office. Members: National Coordinator, Survey On Gender Based Violence; representatives of National Statistics Office; United Nations Population Fund; Ministry Of Justice And Internal Affairs; National Center Against Violence; World Health Organization, Gender Programme Officer; Mongolian Men's' Association; The Social Policy and Development Research Center; LGBT Centre; National Association of Citizens with Disabilities; Mongolian Women's Fund; SDC; Ministry Of Labor And Social Protection; Ministry Of Health; Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sports; National Human Rights Commission; Family, Children and Youth Development Centre; "Gal Golomt" The National Movement NGO.

Chapter 2

PREPARING TO CONDUCT THE STUDY

TAKE TIME TO PLAN THE STUDY WELL AND TO REVISIT AND REVISE THOSE PLANS

While the NSO was highly experienced in conducting national surveys, they recognized that with this survey they were entering unknown territory. It would not be 'business as usual' and the NSO needed ongoing expert technical support and capacity building for best possible results throughout the implementation of the survey.

It was clear early on that for consistency, quality and maintaining momentum, it was essential the NSO core survey team was sufficient in numbers, that key members remained the same throughout the survey and that they will be released from other duties to prioritize work on the GBV survey. The NSO formed a team of 10 statisticians to support the survey implementation. They worked on the project in a part-time capacity in addition to their usual duties.

The team used a Gantt-style project plan that they regularly revisited and adjusted as needed. One of the first tasks they undertook was to review the generic planning template provided by kNowVAWdata and draft an initial study plan (Figure 1).

The project was divided into ten stages:¹¹

1. Preparation
2. Developing survey design
3. Pilot survey
4. Finalize and approve survey protocol, questionnaires and manuals
5. Organize main survey
6. Data processing and data analysis
7. Developing report based on the survey result
8. Data dissemination activities
9. Documentation
10. Evaluation

¹¹ The initial focus of the plan was on the quantitative survey. The team designed and outsourced the qualitative component once the household survey was underway.

FIGURE 1: Planning template in Excel adapted for 2017 Mongolia VAW Study

The team maintained the plan in both English and Mongolian languages. Each stage had a list of activities and an approximate timeline showing concurrent and dependent tasks. The initial plan estimated the study would take around 18 months, from October 2016 until March 2018. This was a good initial estimate. There were a few delays along the way, and the results were launched in June 2018.

Ms Oyun at UNFPA Mongolia emphasized how important the planning phase was, especially when conducting fieldwork in a challenging setting.

“.....
Planning needs to be well thought out, considering possible challenges. This was especially so in a country like Mongolia where the climate is extreme, and the territory is vast, which requires long distance travels and a good vehicle.

Ms Oyun, Gender Advisor, UNFPA Mongolia

Part of the planning process was to draft the study protocol. This is a 30–50-page document that outlines why, how and who is conducting the study. It provides background information on international frameworks for measuring prevalence and details of what is already known about violence against women in the country. The document describes the objectives of the study, how it will be organized and managed, specifics about the quantitative survey and the qualitative component, explanation of the ethical and safety considerations, and plans for report writing and dissemination. The protocol should be viewed as a living document that is drafted early and refined as decisions are made. Much of what was written in the study protocol was re-used as narrative in the main report.

All ‘generic’ documents and materials developed for the WHO methodology (project concept, questionnaire, QxQ manual, ethical guidelines, etc.) were adapted and translated in the first quarter of 2017. The NSO IT department also needed to consider hardware and software requirements, as well as specific training needs of field staff for implementing the survey interviews with tablets (electronic data capture) and the production of field manuals to guide the field staff on this aspect. The interviewer training plan needed further adaptation to include the electronic data capture component.

A NATIONAL COORDINATOR WITH GOOD COMMUNICATION SKILLS IS A MAJOR BENEFIT

The Mongolia NSO is a highly professional and capable organization, but conducting this study for the first time meant they had to rely on unfamiliar international methods and external expertise to guide them. Translating the methodology into the national language and context needed someone with good English language skills who understood the subject matter and being involved at every step of the process, could liaise between all parties involved.

We found having a survey coordinator who has fluent English and had high-level communication skills helped connect international experts with the national team and advisory panel members. Also, it was important to have one person throughout the whole process who would support the team and experts to communicate with each other, as well as translating the documents.

Ms Oyun, Gender Advisor, UNFPA Mongolia

Ms Khandarmaa – after an initial period where trust needed to be built – oversaw the study’s day-to-day activities, liaising with NSO management to ensure tasks were completed and the NSO team had the support they needed. She helped the technical advisors from UNFPA to communicate and work with the team. Not only were her communication skills valued, she had a background in work on gender equality and understood the issues relating to gender-based violence.

It was wonderful to work with the NSO on this study and to provide support as they undertook this survey for the first time. It would not have been easy without Khandarmaa, the national coordinator. Her skills and her passion for the work were a huge help to overcome any communication barriers.

Ms Jessica Gardner, VAW data consultant, kNOwVAWdata Initiative, UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office

BALANCE DATA NEEDS WITH PROTECTING THE SAFETY OF WOMEN IN THE FIELD

Sample sizes for violence prevalence surveys need to be determined with ethical and safety considerations in mind. Generally, with larger samples it becomes harder to ensure wellbeing of the enumerators, safety of the respondents and the quality of data. As a result, most national surveys of violence against women limit sample sizes to enable reliable statistics at national level, for urban and rural areas and for a relatively small number of regions.

The original sample for Mongolia was designed to have full results for each of the five regions. Following intensive discussion with relevant stakeholders, it became clear that political representation in Mongolia and consequently decisions by policymakers and planners were focused at aimag level (21 rural provinces and 9 urban districts in the capital) rather than regional level. In order to achieve maximum buy-in and generate data that was better suited for service planning and action, it was desirable to increase the sample size be able to estimate high-level prevalence data for the most critical indicators at the aimag level. A number of different sampling strategies were explored to achieve reliable aimag level data, and a strategy was opted for with equal size subsamples of households per aimag.

While the aimag level data were considered crucial for policy and planning, it was also important to make sure that policymakers and planners understand that resulting prevalence rates will have a relatively large margin of error (confidence interval).

It should be noted that the larger sample could bring challenges to data quality, participant safety, training, logistics and timeline. The survey project plan needed to be updated to include recruiting and training more female enumerators with the appropriate skills and attitudes, adjustments to the training plan and duration of fieldwork. The budget was increased to cover the cost of more enumerators, extra fieldwork and interviews.

The ethical and safety considerations involved in collecting data on a sensitive topic like this, mean there are requirements that directly impact the sample design and sample size. Further, for Mongolia, having a sample size that enabled prevalence rates for aimag level, while important for policy and action, also needed additional measures to ensure proper interpretation and to caution against 'ranking' aimags for their rates of violence.

Dr H. Jansen, Technical Advisor and lead of the kNOwVAWdata Initiative, UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office

The discussions on sample design in Mongolia were a valuable lesson. The NSO team balanced data needs and prioritized safety by designing an optimal sample for results at aimag level and recruiting more interviewers to complete the work safely.¹²

TAKE TIME TO ADAPT, TRANSLATE AND TEST THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Getting the questions right in the local language or languages is vital in tailoring any methodology to the national context. Allow plenty of time, ensure many people review the translated questionnaire and test it thoroughly in the field. Testing in Mongolia revealed some translation issues, and the questionnaire was revised to address them.

Translating the questionnaire and manuals took longer than expected as we needed to keep the nuances and, most importantly, the meaning of the questions intact. It is always tricky to translate from English to Mongolian.

Ms Khandarmaa, National VAW Study Coordinator

The Advisory Panel did a full read-through of the translated questionnaire to ensure it was consistent and correct in Mongolian. Aside from validating the translation, this was an essential step in the preparations. Advisory Panel members were worried the questionnaire, when read through without skips, was too long. It was important for technical advisors to clarify that most interviews would be much shorter. Skip patterns dependant on women's varying experiences mean that few women have to answer all the questions. Interviews take around 40 minutes, on average. In Mongolia, the time taken for interviews in the field ranged from 30 to 90 minutes in total.

The NSO conducted a pretest and a field pilot to verify and adjust the WHO questionnaire and methodology to suit the Mongolian context.

¹² The experience in Mongolia prompted the kNOwVAWdata team to develop a factsheet on sampling issues specific to measuring the prevalence of violence against women. It explains the wide range of considerations in designing a representative sample while protecting safety and confidentiality and will be published in 2021.

A pre-test of 36 households of four khoros in two districts (Ulaanbaater) was conducted by six people from the NSO team during February 2017. Each person completed six interviews using paper questionnaires. The khoros Administrator helped with indicating households where women aged 15 to 64 are home and available now to be interviewed ("convenience sample"). Main outcomes from the test were to refine the translations and identifying some missing skips that were corrected.

A pilot was conducted in two provinces (60 households) in March using paper questionnaires. The interviews were conducted by the NSO team, joined by the LGBTI advisor from the Advisory Panel (note that all members were invited). Households were randomly selected from registers provided by local government leaders. Paper questionnaires were used. The main challenges and findings from this test were:

- Large distances increased travel time between households.
- Eligible women were absent from the household. When interviews could not be conducted, the households were replaced so the full 60 interviews were reached.
- In one household where the woman was in a violent relationship, it was difficult to conduct the interview as the husband was suspicious and kept interrupting.

Final changes were made to the questionnaire. The test raised the need to organize a safe room to conduct interviews in cases where it is not possible to establish a private setting in the home. Following this experience, it was decided to recruit a few men as team supervisors to help provide physical safety to the interviewers and respondents.



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Chapter 3

RECRUITMENT, SELECTION AND TRAINING OF INTERVIEWERS

Selection of enumerators/interviewers occurred during March 2017. There were 160 applicants who had responded to announcements on websites and in newspapers. This was reduced to 140 by rejecting those who did not meet the criteria of being aged 28 or older and having a tertiary education. Following an exam to test computer literacy, 113 interviewers (on average between 35-45 years old) were selected to participate in four weeks (20 days) of training of which 110 finished the training. At the end of the training, the potential interviewers completed a tablet-based test, and 90 interviewers were selected. In the field, the interviewers worked in 15 teams of six members, including one supervisor.

PAY ATTENTION TO SOFT SKILLS DURING THE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF INTERVIEWERS

Interviewers were recruited based on written applications and a computer skills test, which was the usual way of recruiting interviewers. For a study like this, soft skills such as empathy, sensitivity to gender concerns and the ability to build rapport with respondents are just as critical but this was not included in the test. This type of study requires interviewers to be gentle, compassionate, understanding and non-judgmental. If communication skills and attitudes were included in the selection criteria, some of the interviewers selected for the training may have been better suited and more of them retained at the end of the training. It should be noted that candidate interviewers were not informed about the topic of the survey until the training started.

.....
Due to the importance of attitude and communication skills, we had to let go of some interviewers who were unable to work as part of this team.
.....

Ms Khandarmaa, National VAW Study Coordinator

TRAINING INTERVIEWERS HOLDS THE KEY TO GETTING QUALITY RESULTS

In a study on a topic as sensitive as violence against women, the NSO needed to invest significant time in training interviewers. The training took almost four weeks. The women interviewers who had been selected to be trained participated without pay but received financial support to cover transport and meal expenses.

Training was conducted full-time, six days per week. The first three days of the training was designed to sensitize the interviewers to gender and violence concepts and to understand the causes, consequences and support services for preventing and responding to intimate partner violence, and to begin developing interviewer skills. Participatory training exercises and group work were adapted to the large size of the group. Subsequent training on the paper questionnaire and the tablets (about 3 weeks) was conducted by the NSO team.

On day one, after the introductions and the training could start, Dr Jansen explained that the survey's topic would be on violence against women. The recruits had not been informed about the topic of the survey before arriving at the training, only that they were being trained to conduct household survey interviews. Learning this, anyone who might have felt uncomfortable with the topic or did not want to be involved was encouraged to withdraw themselves without prejudice. Two women of the 113 recruited did not return on the second day of the training.

The first topic of the training was gender sensitization and understanding the underlying causes and consequences of violence against women. The kNOwVAWdata technical advisors worked with the NSO team to facilitate discussions on harmful gender stereotypes like victim-blaming using engaging activities and group work. This helped the group move towards a shared understanding of gender and gender-based violence.

The training then moved to understand the survey objectives, questionnaire structure and plenty of practising interviewing techniques. Interviewing skills included ways to deal with difficult situations, such as being interrupted by the husband/partner, and how to answer questions a respondent might have about the survey. A pilot test in the field enabled the trainee interviewers to hone their skills and for the NSO to further test the questionnaire, the data entry software being used for the survey, and fieldwork arrangements before the survey started.

Technical advisors from the kNOwVAWdata Initiative attended most of the first week of the interviewer training in Ulaanbaatar. The NSO team found their support extremely valuable in facilitating the training and leading the sessions on gender sensitization, ethics and safety. Training the interviewers was such a crucial step in the survey preparations. It was important to involve experienced researchers who help build up their skills and give everyone a clear idea of what they should expect during the data collection.



It is essential that interviewers are well prepared psychologically. It was extremely useful that the advisors were there to explain all the details about ethics, security issues, sex, gender and so on.

Ms Doljinsuren, Senior Statistician,
Mongolia National Statistics Office

You could feel the commitment and engagement of the interviewers during the training. They were attending the training from Monday to Saturday, without pay, hoping to get the job at the end. They were professional and passionate about the work ahead.

Ms Jessica Gardner, VAW data consultant,
kNOwVAWdata Initiative, UNFPA Asia
and the Pacific Regional Office

INTERVIEWERS WILL HAVE HAD THEIR OWN PAST EXPERIENCES WITH VIOLENCE

Many women were recruited as interviewers. The NSO team expected some would have their own experiences with intimate partner violence or non-partner violence. A safe space is created during the interviewer training and while the trainees are never obligated or encouraged to reveal their own stories, some choose to do so. Sharing stories can

contribute to a better understanding of different lived experiences.

The NSO team needed to be prepared and be able to facilitate discussions when people get upset or emotional. One trainee interviewer, Badmaa, was herself a survivor of partner violence. She shared her personal experiences and this had a powerful impact during the training. Her story, captured in a short video, shows how some interviewers confront their own trauma to do the vital work of gathering data on violence and bring them to light.

FIGURE 2: Screenshot of video on Badmaa's Story – the personal experiences of one of the survey enumerators



Source: https://youtu.be/F7tdnNA4B_Y

PILOT TESTING SHOULD BE PART OF INTERVIEWER TRAINING

Pilot testing was an essential part of the four-week training. They targeted households in areas of Ulaanbaatar that were not included in the actual study sample (an important safety measure). The pilot gave an invaluable opportunity for the interviewers to have more practice under closer supervision. By conducting real interviews as part of the interviewer training during the pilot test, the trainees got a better picture of what to expect once they went into the field. At the end of the testing, they shared and discussed their experiences and agreed on how best to handle difficult situations.

One such challenge was establishing a private space to conduct the interview. Some Mongolians live in one-roomed gers¹³ or small apartments that make it impossible to safely interview inside the home unless she is the only one there. One solution was to hold interviews outside in the open and away from the house or to do the interview in the survey team's vehicle with the driver sitting somewhere away, so the two women (interviewer and respondent) are alone.

The pilot test also allowed the NSO team to identify any remaining issues with the questionnaire, tablets or fieldwork processes. Some interviewers had concerns about the length of the questionnaire (similar to how the Advisory Panel members had earlier). These were put to rest when the interviewers could see how the questions flowed and were needed to establish rapport.



When training and testing in Ulaanbaatar, many of us were concerned about our questions and the interview being too long. Once in the field, I realized that we actually do need a lot of time to get to know people and get to the truth.



Interviewer

TRAINING FOR DRIVERS AND OTHER PERSONNEL IS ALSO ESSENTIAL

Male drivers were employed, but, as part of safety and ethical procedures, they were not aware of the survey's true nature. Drivers were responsible for managing the transport and supporting the safety needs of the survey teams. They were briefed about their role but did not receive specific training.

In the main, the drivers supported their team and assisted them by allowing interviewers to use the car so they could establish the private setting needed to conduct the interview. The NSO team felt that training them would have helped avoid the few problems that did occur.



We had a couple of incidents where drivers refused to drive far or even drank vodka on the job, putting the team in danger by driving under the influence.

These were few, but it needs to be addressed in the future with rigorous background checks of drivers and, of course, training.



Ms Khandarmaa, National VAW Study Coordinator

¹³ Traditional round tent used by nomadic farmers.

Chapter 4

EXPERIENCES DURING THE FIELDWORK

*I have learned how courageous, tolerant and strong women are!
We cried together, and at some points we laughed.
I look at my life from a different perspective now.*

Interviewer after taking part in the data collection

ONGOING MONITORING AND SUPPORT ARE NEEDED

Monitoring and support played a crucial role in ensuring the quality of data collected in the field. Interviewers worked in teams of three with a supervisor monitoring their work and providing support daily. Supervisors would ensure the interviewers could get to their allocated households and felt safe and supported to conduct the interviews. They checked completed questionnaires (submitted electronically) for any quality concerns, answered queries, and addressed issues that came up.

The teams had to travel far from their homes and stay away overnight for days at a time while the fieldwork was going on. Listening to the stories of women who have experienced violence can take a psychological toll on the interviewers and support must be a strong feature of the way the teams work in the field.

Interviewers were also provided continuous technical and psychological support throughout the data collection process by their team leaders and NSO staff.

Ms Oyun, Gender Advisor, UNFPA Mongolia

AVOID CLASHING WITH OTHER MAJOR EVENTS LIKE GENERAL ELECTIONS

Unfortunately, the fieldwork coincided with the end of the campaign period for the general elections. This caused issues for some of the survey teams. They were confused with political campaigners and were sometimes met with strong objection, particularly when in the field after campaigning should have officially ended.



It is best not to organize national scale surveys in the year of elections. Interviewers are not welcome, as the public is tired of harassment from campaigners.



Ms Khandarmaa, National VAW Study Coordinator

FINDING THE SELECTED HOUSEHOLDS AND RESPONDENTS IS NOT ALWAYS EASY

There were some barriers when collecting the data. It was difficult to pass through the mountains and the rivers in the vast countryside of Mongolia. To get to the household selected in the survey, interview teams had to go through rivers without bridges, mountains without tunnels, and sand dunes without a road. Sometimes they were helped by the locals to pass those barriers. There were times that they even spent a whole day to reach a family that was only 50 kilometres away.

FIGURE 3: Interviewer gets help from a local to find an address



STORIES FROM THE FIELD

"One time I interviewed a woman who had been beaten until she could not stand. She was in bed. I was afraid and in shock but trying hard not to show that to her. I needed to understand her as much as possible.

After the interview, I left the house, called my supervisor and cried. For some time, we had been trying to reach this woman to do the interview. Excuses regarding her absence were numerous - she's gone to pick pine nuts and will not be back soon; she is sick; or something else. After our persistent attempts to find her, she was located with the help of the local administration officer and we went to meet her. Her partner opened the door.

She was wearing sunglasses and was lying on the bed, moaning. My supervisor made the introductions and left me alone there. Perhaps, she did not know that the woman was beaten, but I was upset she left me without assessing the situation and the potential for danger.

I approached the woman and asked if there is a chance to talk for about 20 minutes? I asked her how she was feeling, or if it is better to do it tomorrow but she insisted on talking, since am already here. Her partner was sitting across and watching us. I took out the dummy questionnaire and started asking questions.

After twenty minutes or so I was preparing to leave, since her partner would not leave us alone to conduct the interview in private. Luckily, his phone rang and he left to meet his friends. Then we could do the proper interview and she told me everything!

I was listening to her and thinking that life can be terrible sometimes. I was deeply shocked. My hands wouldn't stop shaking but I did all I could to pull myself together."

Interviewer

RESPONDENTS NEED TO UNDERSTAND THAT THEY HAVE BEEN RANDOMLY SELECTED

Many women agreed to be interviewed when presented with the consent form. However, as the nature of the questions were revealed, they become surprised and asked why they were chosen. They needed to understand the random sampling process to be sure their anonymity and safety are assured.

The random nature of the sample must be ensured throughout the data collection process. This is fundamental to producing accurate results. One interviewer experienced a respondent begging her to interview someone she knew who was experiencing violence. That would have compromised the random selection of respondents and was not an option.

After we get past the consent part and have clarified how they were selected for the interview, they truly open up! Many of them expressed their hopes for other women to answer honestly and results to be truthful and accurate.

Interviewer

"One woman begged me to interview her sister who was living with violence. I had to explain that I couldn't do that. I had to stick to the list assigned by the Statistics Office."

- Lkhagvajav, violence against women survey interviewer, Mongolia



QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON THE STORIES BEHIND THE NUMBERS

The Mongolia study involved both the household survey and qualitative research.

While it was originally considered to implement the qualitative component in parallel to the quantitative component, time pressure to produce preliminary results by August 2017 meant the survey was prioritized and the qualitative component was deferred to later in the study. This appeared to be beneficial for the design of research questions in the qualitative study. They could focus on validating the quantitative results and exploring findings that were unexpected or surprising.

The qualitative component was outsourced to a national research institute and included focus group discussions and key informant interviews held

across the country, including with groups like LGBQ and disabled people who can be expected to be underrepresented in a population-based study. This generated a lot of qualitative evidence that could be used to validate and triangulate the survey results. Both quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated into the one report.



Quotes from survivors is one reason why the report on the study findings is so comprehensive and has had a big impact. The stories have brought tears to our eyes and touched people's hearts.



Ms Kitahara, former Country Representative, UNFPA Mongolia

Chapter 5

ANALYSIS AND REPORT WRITING

ANALYSIS AND WRITING UP THE RESULTS TAKES TIME

Writing up the findings took longer than anticipated and there was pressure to avoid delays so the results could be released on time. The main report is a major document. Depending on the number of authors, and their previous experience with such reports, the process can take weeks to prepare. It also takes time for the necessary reviews and approvals before anything can be published.

Before the analysis, the data were checked, cleaned and sampling weights applied. Analysis involved recoding the raw microdata into standard variables used to calculate the various prevalence rates and compare the characteristics of women who have experienced violence with those who have not. These steps involved around four weeks of work before the write up could even begin.

The main report had ten chapters plus annexes. Reports for violence against women studies are usually technical reports with many charts and data tables and narrative about the national context, study methodology, and explanation of the results. For the 2017 Mongolia study, the final main report was 225 pages long.

While using analysts with previous experience may have sped up the process, having the NSO team lead the work from the outset had significant benefits. It allowed them to get to know the data intimately, learning by doing the analysis. It facilitated strong national ownership of the results and developed national capacity for future studies on violence against women. It put pressure on the team as they were juggling this work with their usual responsibilities to produce other national social and demographic statistics.

For a country doing the survey for the first time, it may be better if the first draft of the main report is prepared by an experienced expert, in consultation with the national staff. Then national staff could review and finalize the report in consultation with international experts.

Ms Oyun, Gender Advisor, UNFPA Mongolia

ALLOCATE DEDICATED BLOCKS OF TIME TO WORK ON THE REPORT

A one-week 'writeshop' at the start of the analysis write-up process allowed the team a solid block of time away from their other responsibilities. The NSO team had a report template and dummy Excel tables provided by the kNOwVAWdata Initiative that provided a solid starting point for drafting the main report. With support from a technical advisor, they spent the week analyzing and discussing the data, working individually on different parts of the report, and presenting and explaining their findings. There was still plenty of work remaining at the end of the writeshop, but this block of time helped the team make significant progress.

VERSION CONTROL CAN BE A CHALLENGE

English was used as the working language for the draft report to enable regular review by the technical advisors from UNFPA. Most of the NSO team preferred to do their initial work in Mongolian and then translate it into English for expert review. For efficiency and quality control, including reviews by the international experts, this needed to be adjusted and work on the English version needed to be prioritized with different persons in charge of and managing the two language versions. A small team of UNFPA translation experts helped by cross-checking the translations. Working in two languages added a layer of complexity, and version control presented challenges throughout the drafting and review processes.

FIGURE 4: The NSO Study Team begins work on the analysis and write up, November 2017



Chapter 6

LAUNCHING AND USING THE RESULTS

I wish things would change for the better for Mongolian women once the results are out!

Respondent

The national study's end goal is to provide reliable and accurate data that are useful and used. The complex nature of conducting research on violence against women calls for significant investment in study planning, design and fieldwork. Throughout these processes, the team needed to think ahead to the eventual use of the data.

Too often we are focused on data collection. A study like this only begins with the collection of the data.

We have to think ahead about how the data will be used and to make sure it is used for change.

Ms Kitahara, Country Representative,
UNFPA Mongolia

PREPARING TO RELEASE THE RESULTS

Planning for dissemination of the results should be done well in advance. When the fieldwork was over, the NSO team turned back to focus on the plans for dissemination. Building on the initial ideas in the study protocol and plan, they used a generic dissemination strategy template to describe the target audiences, the types of products to be developed to support the main report, and how to promote them to have maximum reach and impact.

Finalizing the main English report, the NSO translated it into Mongolian to prepare for publication in both languages. The report was going through a final review by technical advisors at the same time and any issues needed to be addressed in both

versions. In the end, the process was rushed to meet the deadline, and the review and translation were still being done when the design and layout began. Infographics, a brochure, and a factsheet of frequently asked questions (FAQs) were also being finalized to accompany the main report.

The designer created a great looking series of products. The NSO team and technical advisors checked the layout carefully for any typos and errors introduced through the designer's presentation or graphics choice. They found many minor issues, and, as the launch date neared, there was still a long list of things that needed correction. It was stressful to get all the products finalized for print in time.

ORGANIZING A NATIONAL LAUNCH EVENT

One thing which UNFPA, NSO and stakeholders were collectively careful about was embargo.¹⁴ It is important that findings of the study are not leaked out to the media or others before the launching event. If so, statistics may not be well explained, cited correctly or interpreted correctly. Some media kept calling to ask for copy of the report in advance of the launch, but this was refused. Some media were keen to be ahead of the game for profits-orientation. It is important that everybody involved in the study and the launch understands the embargo must be strongly enforced.

The NSO team arranged a major launch in the nation's capital to be held in June 2018. They prepared a comprehensive presentation and script for the launch event, which over 100 people attended. The well-organized half-day event started with senior representatives of donor agencies opening the proceedings and then several senior statisticians presented the key findings. The NSO team invited the interviewers involved in the study to attend the launch and acknowledged their work and the respondents during the proceedings. A senior politician was the final speaker. She emphasized the importance of the study results for action through government policymaking and use of the data.

There is a lot of material to cover in a study like this. It was essential to narrow the information to the most compelling findings, prepare well, and practice

the presentations before they were delivered.

UNFPA helped coordinate a large media campaign at the time of the launch. This included TV talk shows, newspaper, radio and other media interviews as well and articles in newspapers and online. The stories and social media posts are still available online (see Figure 5 for an example).

PUTTING THE STUDY FINDINGS TO USE

The eventual uses of the study findings were a priority from the outset. The NSO team had to understand the policies and services for survivors of violence and the role data play in policy and decision-making. Having this in mind helped them to communicate the data appropriately.

So far, evidence from the Mongolia study has been used by:

- the GBV project and other partners to identify locations for new one-stop service centres;
- the Ministry of Justice in awareness-raising and behaviour change campaigns;
- the police for building the capacity of police officers to respond appropriately to gender-based violence;
- the Ministry of Health for programming health services; and
- non-government organizations when applying for grants and programming their work.

DISSEMINATION IS ONGOING

The launch is an important milestone, taking significant preparation to release national prevalence estimates for the first time. But, it is not the only opportunity for dissemination. The products remain easy to find online, and years later, the NSO team continues to present and share the study results at various conferences and meetings (Figure 6).

National studies on violence against women prevalence remain a good source of evidence for many years after they are produced. Data users should be regularly reminded of and encouraged to use the data.

¹⁴ An embargo is an agreement between a source and a media outlet that information—often contained in a press release—will not be published until a predetermined time.

FIGURE 5: Article about the 2017 VAW Study on Devex



Source: Rogers, Kelli. 14 June 2018. What Mongolia learned from its first gender-based violence survey. Devex. <https://www.devex.com/news/what-mongolia-learned-from-its-first-gender-based-violence-survey-92931>

FIGURE 6: Dissemination activities for the 2017 VAW Study in Mongolia¹⁵



¹⁵ From left to right: cover of the main report (https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2017%20National%20Study%20on%20Gender-based%20Violence%20in%20Mongolia_0.pdf); Facebook post on 6 December 2020 (<https://fb.watch/4uwvRsi2vU/>); photo of panel members during launch of the findings in Ulaanbaatar; paper presented at the 2020 Asia-Pacific Statistics Week organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in June 2020 and held virtually.

CONCLUSIONS

Many valuable experiences and lessons come from researching violence against women. Every country is different, and the experience of conducting a national prevalence study should be captured. There is a great deal to be learned from how others have tackled the challenges of this critical work. Documenting the lessons learned provides a record of challenges, solutions and recommendations for future studies.

Gender-based violence is hidden, but such a hidden story must be told. It is a very recent attempt in development practices to conduct a study on violence against women, and until some decades ago, GBV was never spoken in public spheres. It is one of the best investments which UNFPA has made, in partnership with Australian DFAT and others, to save the lives of women and girls and safeguard their human rights. Reliable and well understood data can show where priorities must be given in any country's sustainable development efforts.

This publication will help people outside Mongolia gain from their experience conducting this study for the first time. For those people who worked on the study, this is a record of the achievements and can be used to support the second survey when it is run in the future.

Readers are encouraged to share this publication widely and continue discussing the issues via virtual or face-to-face forums about violence against women data.



Quotes from survivors is one reason why the report on the study findings is so comprehensive and has had a big impact. The stories have brought tears to our eyes and touched people's hearts.



Interviewer in the field



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