

## Best Practices in Defining Violence against Women

Internationally, violence against women is defined to include all forms of gender based violence that is directed at women or affects women disproportionately. VAW may occur in women's public or private life and results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women.

Under due diligence standards, States are required to adopt comprehensive definitions of VAW that, *inter alia*:

- Recognize VAW as a human rights violation. For example, the Philippines reformed its rape laws to categorize rape as a crime against a person instead of a crime against chastity, which is associated with gender-stereotypical roles; reflect the full range of women's experience of violence, as forms and manifestations of VAW vary depending on specific social, economic, cultural and political contexts.

For example, it is internationally recommended that definitions of DV should include physical, sexual, psychological, emotional and economic violence.<sup>4</sup> Hence, DV is commonly defined to include, in addition to acts of physical violence:

Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW)  
Definition of VAW in domestic settings:

"Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence, and violence related to exploitation."

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4. However, it must be noted that not all acts of DV, as defined under special laws, amount to criminal offences. Under special legislation, definitions of DV are aimed at providing protection orders and access to supportive services. Acts of DV that result in grave injury or amount to an offence under penal law are criminalized.