

# Impact of International Legislative Regulations on Domestic Violence Against Women in a Developing Country (Some Practical Reflections)

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Received: 22/02/2025 Accepted: 10/01/2026

DOI: 10.22096/hr.2026.2054086.1721

## Abstract

Domestic violence against women remains a significant issue globally, particularly in developing countries like Vietnam, where cultural, social, and legal challenges hinder effective prevention and response. This study examined the current legislative frameworks in Vietnam concerning domestic violence against women, aligning them with international regulations and identifying the gaps that need to be addressed for more effective implementation. Using qualitative research, the study compared and analyzed current legal normative documents in Vietnam, international legislative instruments, and scholarly papers. The findings revealed major challenges such as insufficient legal definitions, lack of enforcement mechanisms, and the gender-insensitive nature of existing Vietnamese laws. In addition, cultural factors, including deep-rooted patriarchal norms, further complicate the situation and create barriers for victims seeking justice. The results indicate that although Vietnam has made progress in ratifying international legislative instruments, the practical adaptation of these regulations remains questionable. Policymakers in Vietnam should work to clarify legal definitions, increase gender sensitivity in laws, strengthen enforcement mechanisms, and invest in victim support services. Moreover, the role of international organizations in assisting Vietnam with policy reforms is crucial, alongside local ownership, to ensure that international frameworks are effectively adapted to the national context.

**Keywords:** Domestic Violence; Framework; Gender Equality; Legislative Regulations; Patriarchal Norms.

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## 1. Introduction

Domestic violence against women is one of the most pervasive and widespread human rights violations worldwide. It transcends national boundaries, cultures, and socio-economic statuses, profoundly affecting the lives of millions of women and their families.<sup>1</sup> domestic violence against women is characterized in various forms, including physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological abuse, which often occur within intimate relationships, homes, or households.<sup>2</sup> This violence not only causes physical harm but also retains long-term psychological damage, perpetuating cycles of fear, subjugation, and gender inequality.<sup>3</sup> In many societies, domestic violence against women remains shrouded in silence due to deeply ingrained cultural norms, religious traditions, and patriarchal systems that normalize or downplay the seriousness of the issue.<sup>4</sup> As a result, women in developing countries, in particular, undergo significant barriers when seeking protection, justice, and support.<sup>5</sup> Notably, Tonsing<sup>6</sup> claims that gender inequality, poverty, lack of education, and weak institutional frameworks exacerbate the vulnerability of women in these contexts, making them disproportionately affected by domestic violence against women. Until now, ongoing global

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<sup>1</sup> Samia Alhabib, Ula Nur, and Roger Jones, "Domestic Violence Against Women: Systematic Review of Prevalence Studies," *Journal of Family Violence* 25, no. 4 (2010): 369–382. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10896-009-9298-4>; M. Flury and E. Nyberg, "Domestic Violence Against Women: Definitions, Epidemiology, Risk Factors and Consequences," *Swiss Medical Weekly* 140, no. 3536 (2010): w13099. <https://doi.org/10.4414/smw.2010.13099>; Martin R. Huecker et al., *Domestic Violence* (Treasure Island, FL: StatPearls Publishing, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> A. Katherine Durante, Eman Tadros, and Danielle C. Slakoff, "Intimate Partner Violence and Partner Incarceration: Perceived and Experienced Challenges During Reentry," *Crime and Delinquency* (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00111287241242477>; Poppy Orr et al., "A Systematic Review of Australian Higher Education Students' and Graduates' Work Readiness," *Higher Education Research and Development* 42, no. 7(2023): 1714–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2023.2192465>.

<sup>3</sup> Vashiti Berry, "Ethical Considerations in Conducting Domestic Violence Research," *Research Ethics Review* 5, no. 3 (2009): 91–100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/174701610900500302>; Angela D. Connors, Jeremy F. Mills, and Andrew L. Gray, "An Evaluation of Intimate Partner Violence Intervention with Incarcerated Offenders," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 27, no. 6 (2012): 1176–1196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260511424499>; C. Jenny Tonsing, "Domestic Violence: Intersection of Culture, Gender, and Context," *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 18, no. 2 (2016): 442–446

<sup>4</sup> Sibylle Artz et al., "A Comprehensive Review of the Literature on the Impact of Exposure to Intimate Partner Violence for Children and Youth," *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies* 5, no. 4 (2014): 493–587. <https://doi.org/10.18357/ijcyfs54201413274>; Alexa R. Yakubovich et al., "Risk and Protective Factors for Intimate Partner Violence Against Women: Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses of Prospective-Longitudinal Studies," *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 7 (2018): e1–e11. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2018.304428>

<sup>5</sup> M. Julie Kafka et al., "Judging Domestic Violence from the Bench: A Narrative Analysis of Judicial Anecdotes About Domestic Violence Protective Order Cases," *Qualitative Health Research* 29, no. 8 (2019): 1132–1144. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732318821691>; Jennifer Koshan, "Preventive Justice? Domestic Violence Protection Orders and Their Intersections with Family and Other Laws and Legal Systems," *Canadian Journal of Family Law* 35, no. 1 (2023): 241–296. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4372318>

<sup>6</sup> Tonsing, "Domestic Violence."

awareness of the problem is a concern for international organizations,<sup>7</sup> human rights advocates, and feminist movements, underlining the necessity for stronger preventive measures and legal protective measures for women.<sup>8</sup> Simultaneously, several international legislative frameworks and conventions have been promulgated to curb domestic violence against women and promote gender equality. These frameworks are regarded as guidelines for any country to adopt and implement laws that provide women with more rights to enjoy adequate legal protection, access to justice, and support services.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the existence of international frameworks to control the challenging problem of domestic violence against women, many developing countries struggle to implement effective legislative and protective measures.<sup>10</sup> A combination of social, cultural, political, and economic challenges hampers the enforcement of international laws at the national level.<sup>11</sup> In particular, patriarchal norms and gender biases within law enforcement agencies, the judiciary, and political institutions hinder the creation and implementation of robust domestic violence laws.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, many international conventions remain non-binding, meaning that countries can choose whether or not to incorporate them into their legal systems.<sup>13</sup> Even when nations ratify these conventions, there still exists a significant gap between the international legal standards and national implementation, particularly in developing countries where institutional weaknesses and limited resources impede progress.<sup>14</sup> This insoluble situation

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, Proceedings of the 85th Plenary Meeting, Geneva, December 20, 1993, A/RES/48/104; "Violence Against Women," World Health Organization, March 25, 2024, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>; Council of Europe, The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), Turkey: Istanbul, May 11, 2011, CETS No. 210.

<sup>8</sup> Myrna Dawson, *Domestic Homicides and Death Reviews: An International Perspective* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Wanda Wieggers, "The Intersection of Child Protection and Family Law Systems in Cases of Domestic Violence," *Canadian Journal of Family Law* 35, no. 1 (2023): 183–239.

<sup>10</sup> Jose Quezada Alfaro et al., "A Nationwide Study of Intimate Partner Violence," *American Surgeon* 86, no. 10 (2020): 1230–1237. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003134820964191>.

<sup>11</sup> Dawson, *Domestic Homicides*; Ana Sani and Ana Isabel Lopes, "Police Intervention in Cases of Violence Against Women and Their Exposed Children," In *Violence Against Women: Global Perspectives, Challenges and Issues of the 21st Century*, ed. Marika Guggisberg and Jan Henricksen (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Anat Vass and Julia Krane, "Religious, Practical and Future-Oriented Coping Strategies to End Intimate Partner Violence: An In-Depth Examination of Ultraorthodox Israeli Women's Narratives," *Journal of Family Violence* (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-024-00737-5>.

<sup>13</sup> Alhabib, Nur, and Jones, "Domestic Violence Against Women;" Lyndal Bugeja et al., "The Implementation of Domestic Violence Death Reviews in Australia," *Homicide Studies* 17, no. 4 (2013): 353–374. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088767913494787>; Dawson, *Domestic Homicides*.

<sup>14</sup> Kafka et al., "Judging Domestic Violence;" S. Gillian Macdonald, "Domestic Violence and Private Family Court Proceedings," *Violence Against Women* 22, no. 7 (2016): 832–852. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801215612600>; Lenore E. A. Walker, "Nonjudicial Influence on

leads to inconsistent protection for women, leaving many vulnerable to ongoing violence. The central problem lies in the disconnect between international legislative efforts and their practical application in developing countries.<sup>15</sup> Tonsing<sup>16</sup> states that while international conventions provide a strong foundation for addressing domestic violence against women, their effectiveness depends on how well they are integrated into local legal systems and cultural contexts.

This research, therefore, examined the influential impact of international legislative frameworks in preventing and combating domestic violence against women in developing countries, with a focus on the challenges and opportunities associated with their implementation.<sup>17</sup> Although domestic violence against women is a global issue, this study was limited to a representative middle-income Vietnamese context to illustrate the prevalence of domestic violence against women in developing countries where its cases are commonly reported higher due to intersecting factors such as poverty, gender inequality, and weak governance structures.<sup>18</sup> Besides, this research conducted a comparative analysis of several case studies from different regions to illustrate the varying degrees of success in implementing international legal frameworks. It further reviewed the influential functions of international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), in supporting the prevention and reduction of domestic violence against women through promulgating legislative initiatives and advocacy. Through a comprehensive overview of secondary sources, this research aimed to contribute to the ongoing global efforts to eliminate domestic violence against women and promote gender equality in developing countries. The following questions would be set forth to navigate this comparative analysis as follows:

1. How have international legislative frameworks influenced the prevention and combat against domestic violence against women in Vietnam?

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Family Violence Court Cases,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 64, no. 12 (2020): 1749–1767. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764220956688>.

<sup>15</sup> Alhabib, Nur, and Jones, “Domestic Violence Against Women;” Koshan, “Preventive Justice;” Lesley Laing, “Secondary Victimization: Domestic Violence Survivors Navigating the Family Law System,” *Violence Against Women* 23, no. 11 (2016): 1314–1335. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801216659942>.

<sup>16</sup> Tonsing, “Domestic Violence.”

<sup>17</sup> Koshan, “Preventive Justice;” Laing, “Secondary Victimization;” Walker, “Nonjudicial Influence.”

<sup>18</sup> Thi Hoa Dang, “Current Status of Factors Affecting Domestic Violence from Social and Cultural Perspectives,” *Vietnam Women's Academy Journal of Sciences* 3 (2018): 1–9; Tanja Ignjatović, “Violence Against Woman After Separation and Divorce of the Partners: Challenges in Assessments and Decisions on Protection Measures,” *Temida* 22, no. 2 (2019): 189–208. <https://doi.org/10.2298/TEM1902189I>; Eileen Skinnider et al., *Access to Criminal Justice by Women Subjected to Violence in Vietnam: Women's Justice Perception (Study Research Report)* (Hanoi: UN Women Vietnam Country Office, 2017).

2. What are the main challenges that Vietnam confronts in implementing international legal standards related to domestic violence against women?
3. What recommendations can be made to improve the implementation of international legislative frameworks in the fight against domestic violence against women in Vietnam?

## 2. Methodology

This study conducted a qualitative approach in systematically reviewing and analyzing the secondary sources to compare and contrast international instruments and domestic laws of developing countries concerning domestic violence against women therein. The study used a qualitative structural approach of comparative law research, introduced by Samuel,<sup>19</sup> to gain comprehensive insights into how current legislative regulations address this matter, especially the influential role of international instruments in rule-making processes in developing countries. Besides, this analytical and comparative approach was conducted under the concepts of the most-similar and most-different systems proposed by Ankar.<sup>20</sup> The results would serve as resourceful references to contribute to the reformative rule-making process in combating and preventing domestic violence against women in developing countries.

## 3. Analytical Discussion

### 3.1. Generally Evaluating Current Legislation Relative to Domestic Violence Against Women in Vietnam

Vietnam has made significant strides in addressing domestic violence against women through legislative measures until now, yet several challenges persist in fully implementing adequate legal protections for victims. As reported in Decision No: 1478/QĐ-BVHTTDL,<sup>21</sup> it points out that while Vietnam's legal framework has recently evolved, harmonizing with international human rights norms, it still experiences critical gaps that restrain its effectiveness in preventing and combating domestic violence. In particular, Law No. 13/2022/QH15<sup>22</sup> and Decree 144/2021/ND-CP<sup>23</sup> highlight the nation's

<sup>19</sup> Geoffrey Samuel, *An Introduction to Comparative Law*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Carsten Ankar, "The Most-Similar and Most-Different Systems Design in Comparative Policy Analysis," In *Handbook of Research Methods and Applications in Comparative Policy Analysis*, ed. Guy Peters and Guillaume Fontaine (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> Vietnam, Government, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Decision No: 1478/QĐ-BVHTTDL on Promulgating the Plan to Implement the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control and Decree No. 76/2023/ND-CP Dated November 1, 2023 of the Government Detailing a Number of Articles of the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control, June 4, 2024.

<sup>22</sup> Vietnam, National Assembly, Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control. No. 13/2022/QH15. December 15, 2022.

<sup>23</sup> Vietnam, Government, 2021. Decree No. 144/2021/ND-CP on Administrative Penalties for Violations Against Regulations on Social Safety, Security, Order; Social Evils, Fire Prevention and Firefighting; Rescue; Domestic Violence Prevention and Control, December 31, 2021.

commitment to putting domestic violence against women under control, but their application in actual scenarios remains inconsistent and often inadequate. Specially, the law mandates reporting, protection orders, and support for victims, but enforcement mechanisms are commonly weak, with limited monitoring and accountability. Remarkably, although the law calls for police intervention in cases of domestic violence, reports indicate that local law enforcement may not always act promptly or adequately, often influenced by patriarchal values that prioritize family privacy over women's safety.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, while Law No. 13/2022/QH15<sup>25</sup> criminalizes abuse and requires various protective measures, a study by Vass and Krane<sup>26</sup> emphasizes that many women are reluctant to report abuse due to fear of social stigma and the belief that law enforcement might not offer practical assistance. This reluctance is supposed to originate from a lack of public awareness about legal rights and protection mechanisms, which is the source of weakening the law's effectiveness in practice.

One of the most significant challenges is the legislative gaps and challenges that Vietnam faces in its domestic violence laws. Although Law No. 13/2022/QH15<sup>27</sup> comprehensively includes various forms of abuse, there is still ambiguity in its implementation. For instance, the law does not clearly define certain terms, such as "psychological violence," which makes it difficult to prosecute cases of non-physical abuse.<sup>28</sup> While the law promotes the establishment of support centers for domestic violence victims, these resources are typically underfunded and are unevenly distributed, particularly in rural areas where cultural and economic barriers prevent women from accessing help.<sup>29</sup> The problem even becomes more severe by the lack of clear and enforceable procedures to impose and penalize non-compliance with protection orders, resulting in victims' ongoing vulnerability to violence. Another obstacle stems from the influence of cultural, religious, and social norms on law enforcement. In many parts of Vietnam, deep-rooted patriarchal values and traditional views on gender roles shape how domestic violence circumstances are tackled by both the public and law enforcement agencies.<sup>30</sup> There is often a prevailing belief that family issues should be dealt with privately, and police and judicial personnel may not be fully equipped or motivated to challenge these cultural norms. For example, religious views emphasizing women's subservience to their husbands can lead to the minimization of the severity of domestic violence, with families or local

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<sup>24</sup> Dang, "Current Status of Factors;" Skinnider et al., *Access to Criminal Justice*.

<sup>25</sup> Vietnam, National Assembly, Law on Domestic Violence.

<sup>26</sup> Vass and Krane, "Religious, Practical and Future-Oriented."

<sup>27</sup> Vietnam, National Assembly, Law on Domestic Violence.

<sup>28</sup> Orr et al., "A Systematic Review."

<sup>29</sup> Koshan, "Preventive Justice."

<sup>30</sup> Skinnider et al., *Access to Criminal Justice*; Tonsing, "Domestic Violence."

authorities preferring reconciliation over legal action. In a study on domestic violence in Vietnam, Dang<sup>31</sup> observed that many victims undergo societal pressure to forgive their abusers, especially when the violence is not immediately visible, such as in cases of emotional or psychological abuse. This cultural context impedes the reporting of domestic violence and affects how laws are enforced. Besides, the police and judicial systems may prioritize mediation and family reconciliation for the purpose of ensuring the safety and autonomy of victims.<sup>32</sup> Legal proceedings are sometimes prolonged or sidestepped altogether, undermining victims' access to justice and protection.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the stigma attached to victims of domestic violence - who are often blamed for the abuse they suffer - further discourages women from seeking legal assistance. Therefore, it is vital to clarify the sociocultural norms to create an environment where laws are promulgated, respected, and followed by both authorities and society.

### **3.2. The Role of International Legislative Regulations in Combating and Preventing Domestic Violence Against Women**

Domestic violence against women is a severe human rights violation that has been overviewed through many international legislative regulations to prevent abuse and ensure justice for victims. The impact of these international legal instruments is great, particularly in influencing national legislation and ensuring that countries adopt universal standards for protecting women from violence. However, the effectiveness of international legislative regulations depends on their successful incorporation into local legal systems and the ability of jurisdictions to enforce them effectively. International organizations such as the UN, the Council of Europe, and the World Health Organization (WHO) have played key roles in developing legally binding conventions, declarations, and guidelines that serve as global models for addressing domestic violence.<sup>34</sup> While these regulations establish overarching principles, their implementation is dependent mainly on the political will and capacity of national governments to enforce them within their local jurisdictions.<sup>35</sup>

A critical issue in combating domestic violence through international legal mechanisms is the balance between international and local jurisdiction. Many international treaties and conventions provide broad guidelines, but their direct enforceability within a country often depends on ratification and incorporation into national law.<sup>36</sup> While countries may sign international agreements, the lack of direct enforcement mechanisms means that the actual

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<sup>31</sup> Dang, "Current Status of Factors."

<sup>32</sup> Skinnider et al., *Access to Criminal Justice*.

<sup>33</sup> Ana Rita Ferreira and Ana Isabel Sani, "Domestic Violence and Custody Proceedings: An Analysis of Judicial Decisions in Portugal," *Journal of Family Violence* (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-024-00739-3>.

<sup>34</sup> Council of Europe. Istanbul Convention.

<sup>35</sup> "Violence Against Women."

<sup>36</sup> United Nations. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

implementation varies significantly from one country to another<sup>37</sup> For example, the Istanbul Convention<sup>38</sup> serves as one of the most comprehensive legal frameworks for addressing domestic violence globally. However, not all member states have fully integrated its provisions into their national legislation, leading to gaps in enforcement. This is a challenge, particularly in developing countries like Vietnam, where legal systems are weak, cultural barriers persist, and law enforcement agencies cannot uphold international standards.<sup>39</sup> To solve this loophole, many countries have made efforts to incorporate international legal standards into their national laws to align with global human rights norms. For instance, following the UN,<sup>40</sup> numerous countries introduced specific domestic violence laws that recognized gender-based violence as a distinct legal issue rather than a private family matter. In some regions, domestic violence legislation has been influenced by the UN recommendations, such as providing emergency protection orders, establishing specialized courts, and implementing law enforcement training programs. However, even when international standards are incorporated, loopholes in national legal frameworks, lack of judicial accountability, and poor resource allocation continue to limit their effectiveness.<sup>41</sup>

Several key international legislative instruments have shaped global and national responses to domestic violence. The Istanbul Convention (2014)<sup>42</sup> is one of the most comprehensive international treaties focusing on prevention, protection, prosecution, and coordinated policies to combat domestic violence. It outlines legally binding obligations for governments to criminalize psychological violence, stalking, physical abuse, sexual violence, forced marriage, and female genital mutilation. Additionally, the UN<sup>43</sup> provides a foundational framework that defines violence against women as a human rights violation and calls for international cooperation in overcoming this burdensome situation. Meanwhile, the WHO has continuously emphasized the public health impact of domestic violence, advocating for health sector involvement in supporting survivors and preventing abuse.<sup>44</sup> These international frameworks have collectively influenced national policies, although their implementation varies depending on political stability, economic conditions, and societal attitudes in different countries.<sup>45</sup> Another crucial aspect of international legislative regulations is the role of advocacy

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<sup>37</sup> Alhabib, Nur, and Jones, "Domestic Violence Against Women;" Huecker et al., *Domestic Violence*; Wiegers, "The Intersection of Child Protection."

<sup>38</sup> Council of Europe. Istanbul Convention.

<sup>39</sup> Tonsing, "Domestic Violence;" Vass and Krane, "Religious, Practical and Future-Oriented."

<sup>40</sup> United Nations. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

<sup>41</sup> "Violence Against Women."

<sup>42</sup> Council of Europe. Istanbul Convention.

<sup>43</sup> United Nations. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

<sup>44</sup> "Violence Against Women."

<sup>45</sup> Alfaro et al., "A Nationwide Study."

groups and NGOs in promoting their enforcement. While government agencies are responsible for implementing laws, civil society organizations play a vital role in ensuring that these regulations translate into fundamental protections for victims. Organizations such as Amnesty International,<sup>46</sup> Human Rights Watch,<sup>47</sup> and local women's rights groups have been instrumental in pressuring governments to adopt stronger domestic violence laws, monitoring compliance with international treaties, and providing direct support to victims.<sup>48</sup> In many countries, NGOs work alongside governments to provide legal aid, counselling services, and shelter support, filling the gaps left by insufficient government intervention.<sup>49</sup> For example, in India and Bangladesh, women's rights groups have successfully advocated for stricter domestic violence laws, while in Latin America, feminist movements have led to the criminalization of femicide and the expansion of protective services for survivors.<sup>50</sup> The effectiveness of international legislative frameworks is therefore strengthened when NGOs and advocacy groups actively monitor implementation, educate communities and support survivors. Hence, the urgent call for stronger collaboration between international organizations, governments, and civil society is essential to closing the gaps in enforcement and ensuring that domestic violence laws are effectively implemented.

### **3.3. Some Loopholes of International Legislative Frameworks Compared with Vietnam Legal System Concerning the Prevention and Combat Against Domestic Violence Against Women**

Despite the strong frameworks established by international legislative instruments to combat domestic violence, there remain significant loopholes when these frameworks are compared with Vietnam's national legal system. International conventions, such as the UN<sup>51</sup> and the Istanbul Convention,<sup>52</sup> provide a broad and aspirational outline for preventing domestic violence and protecting victims. However, these frameworks are inclined to experience challenges in actual implementation, mainly when applied to developing countries like Vietnam, with unique legal systems, cultural contexts, and resource limitations.<sup>53</sup> Some typical gaps in the international legal framework and the Vietnam legal system are supposed to be multifaceted, including a

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<sup>46</sup> Available at <https://www.amnesty.org>.

<sup>47</sup> Available at <https://www.hrw.org>.

<sup>48</sup> Dawson, *Domestic Homicides*.

<sup>49</sup> Iris Cardenas, "Advancing Intersectionality Approaches in Intimate Partner Violence Research: A Social Justice Approach," *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work* 32, no. 1 (2023): 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15313204.2020.1855494>; Ferreira and Sani, "Domestic Violence;" Cathy Humphreys et al., "Beyond Co-Occurrence: Addressing the Intersections of Domestic Violence, Mental Health and Substance Misuse," *Child and Family Social Work* 27, no. 2 (2022): 299–310. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12885>

<sup>50</sup> Tonsing, "Domestic Violence."

<sup>51</sup> United Nations. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

<sup>52</sup> Council of Europe. Istanbul Convention.

<sup>53</sup> Cardenas, "Advancing Intersectionality Approaches;" Huecker et al., *Domestic Violence*.

lack of enforcement mechanisms, inconsistency in definitions, a lack of gender sensitivity, and limited monitoring and data collection.

Concerning the comparison between international legislative frameworks and Vietnam's domestic legal system, one of the most common loopholes accounts for the mismatch of effective enforcement mechanisms. Although International laws provide general principles for the prevention of domestic violence, they often fail to stipulate specific tools or measures for ensuring enforcement at the national level. The Istanbul Convention,<sup>54</sup> for example, calls for effective law enforcement to combat domestic violence but leaves much of the responsibility to national governments without specifying mechanisms to hold governments accountable for non-compliance. In Vietnam, while the 2014 Law on marriage and family,<sup>55</sup> the 2015 Civil Code amended 2017,<sup>56</sup> and the 2015 Criminal Code amended 2017<sup>57</sup> includes provisions criminalizing domestic violence, enforcement remains a significant challenge. Law enforcement agencies seem to lack the training and resources to address domestic violence cases appropriately. Moreover, the police are seemingly unwilling to intervene in family affairs since they do not want to infringe their citizens' privacy.<sup>58</sup> As such, this mismatch between international ideals and domestic application typically leads to ineffective prosecution and a lack of justice for victims. So, the provisions of the international framework are rendered impotent if there are no strong enforcement mechanisms at the national level.

Vietnam's legal framework is a significant challenge in adapting international regulations to its legal context. The country's national legal framework is ambiguous, with the Istanbul Convention<sup>59</sup> defining domestic violence as any act of gender-based violence leading to physical, sexual, or psychological harm. Law No. 13/2022/QH15<sup>60</sup> lacks clarity in the definition of "domestic violence," focusing mainly on physical violence while giving insufficient attention to psychological and sexual violence. This narrow concentration may result in victims of non-physical abuse being excluded from legal protection. The inconsistent implementation of laws across Vietnam's urban and rural areas creates disparities in how domestic violence cases are handled, leading to confusion for victims seeking justice.<sup>61</sup> Another major loophole is the lack of gender sensitivity in certain international and local legislative frameworks. While international conventions emphasize

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<sup>54</sup> Council of Europe. Istanbul Convention.

<sup>55</sup> Vietnam, National Assembly, Law on Marriage and Family, June 2014, 52/2014/QH13.

<sup>56</sup> Vietnam, National Assembly, Civil Code, 2015, amended 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Vietnam, National Assembly, Criminal Code, 2015, amended 2017.

<sup>58</sup> Bugeja et al., "The Implementation of Domestic Violence."

<sup>59</sup> Council of Europe. Istanbul Convention.

<sup>60</sup> Vietnam, National Assembly, Law on Domestic Violence.

<sup>61</sup> Cardenas, "Advancing Intersectionality Approaches;" Kafka et al., "Judging Domestic Violence;" Koshan, "Preventive Justice."

gender equality and the need for laws to address gender-based violence, not all national legal systems have thoroughly encompassed this approach.<sup>62</sup> Vietnam's legal framework, despite improvements, still has some gender-neutral language that does not fully account for the gendered nature of domestic violence. This lack of gendered analysis in domestic and international regulations means that laws are not effective in addressing the root causes of domestic violence or adequately protecting women from systemic abuse.

The monitoring and reporting of domestic violence cases are another aspect where both international and Vietnamese systems are not in harmony. International frameworks like the Istanbul Convention<sup>63</sup> underline the importance of data collection for evaluating the effectiveness of domestic violence laws. However, many developing countries, including Vietnam, experience challenges in implementing robust data collection systems.<sup>64</sup> Currently, there is a lack of comprehensive national statistics on domestic violence in Vietnam. Most data are gathered from local NGOs and advocacy groups, but the absence of a centralized data system limits the country's ability to assess the scale of domestic violence, the effectiveness of legal reforms, and the success of victim support services.<sup>65</sup> According to the WTO,<sup>66</sup> effective monitoring necessitates collecting event data, victim surveys, and evaluating law enforcement responses. The absence of cooperation between national and local governments over reporting and data gathering obscures clarity, consequently impeding evidence-based policymaking and future reforms.<sup>67</sup> Consequently, Vietnam must enhance the gender sensitivity of its legal frameworks, improve enforcement mechanisms, standardize the implementation of laws nationwide, and invest in comprehensive data collection systems. These practical actions enable Vietnam to align more closely with international standards, ensuring better protection for women and ultimately reducing domestic violence in the country.

#### **3.4. Challenges in Adapting International Regulations to Vietnam Situation Regarding the Prevention and Combat Against Domestic Violence Against Women**

International instruments have, to a certain extent, influenced the establishment and development of Vietnam legislation in addressing the

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<sup>62</sup> Tonsing, "Domestic Violence."

<sup>63</sup> Council of Europe. Istanbul Convention.

<sup>64</sup> Cardenas, "Advancing Intersectionality Approaches;" Huecker et al., *Domestic Violence*; Yakubovich et al., "Risk and Protective Factors."

<sup>65</sup> Humphreys et al., "Beyond Co-Occurrence;" Wieggers, "The Intersection of Child Protection."

<sup>66</sup> "Violence Against Women."

<sup>67</sup> K. Annah Bender, "Ethics, Methods, and Measures in Intimate Partner Violence Research: The Current State of the Field," *Violence Against Women* 23, no. 11 (2017): 1382–1413. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801216658977>.

burning issue of domestic violence against women. However, there are still substantial challenges in fully implementing international regulations to combat and prevent domestic violence against women. These challenges derive from a variety of political, legal, economic, social, and institutional factors that impede the effectiveness of laws and regulations in Vietnam. While the government has taken positive steps by ratifying international treaties like the UN<sup>68</sup> and the CEDAW,<sup>69</sup> adapting and enforcing international standards in Vietnam's context is far from straightforward. This process is further complicated by political and legal impediments, economic barriers, social and cultural resistance, and the lack of resources and infrastructure. The political and legal environment in Vietnam is one of the most significant barriers to the implementation of international regulations. As the highest organ of state power, the NA<sup>70</sup> is vested with a sacred and exclusive power to make laws in a centralized legal system in Vietnam. One of the most significant barriers to the implementation of international regulations in Vietnam is the political and legal environment. Vietnam has a centralized legal system, where the NA<sup>71</sup> has its unique right to make laws. The Vietnam Criminal Code<sup>72</sup> generally recognizes acts of domestic violence, such as physical abuse or psychological violence, as criminal acts and subject to punishments; however, many of the provisions are lacking in clear definition and specificity and, thus, do not always serve as effective deterrents against abusers. Domestic violence does not have any legal clarity on it, so that leads to loopholes for law enforcement and the judicial, and that makes it difficult to bring victims to justice. Furthermore, some regulations outlined in international treaties, like the Istanbul Convention<sup>73</sup> on preventive measures and support services for victims, have not been fully internalized into Vietnam's legal framework. Another significant variable is political will, in which the Vietnamese government complies with all international conventions and vows to tackle domestic violence, but the reality is that the political climate and bureaucratic inertia can prevent policies and national government regulations from being fully implemented. Resistance within the government and lack of prioritization for women's issues results in weak enforcement and underfunded programs, thus delaying the realization of meaningful change in domestic violence law enforcement.

Vietnam faces significant economic challenges in preventing and combating domestic violence, despite rapid economic growth. Local

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<sup>68</sup> United Nations. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

<sup>69</sup> "Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women," UN Human Rights Office, accessed February 22, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw>.

<sup>70</sup>, "Introducing the Apparatus of National Assembly," National Assembly Electronic Information Portal, accessed February 22, 2025, <https://quochoi.vn/Pages/default.aspx>.

<sup>71</sup> "Introducing the Apparatus of National Assembly."

<sup>72</sup> Vietnam, National Assembly, Criminal Code.

<sup>73</sup> Council of Europe. Istanbul Convention.

governments often lack the resources to implement domestic violence laws and programs, leading to limited access to support centers and hotlines in rural areas. The economic dependence of many women on their husbands in rural areas makes it difficult for them to leave abusive relationships. Limited access to social services and lack of financial independence further exacerbates the situation, as lower-income women, often from ethnic minorities, face heightened risks of domestic violence and are less likely to seek help. Additionally, adapting international regulations to the Vietnamese context is challenging due to strong social and cultural resistance to addressing domestic violence. Traditional gender roles in Vietnam, where women are expected to fulfill domestic duties and remain submissive to their husbands, perpetuate the idea that women should tolerate abuse for the sake of the family. This deeply rooted patriarchal mindset makes it difficult to change current norms and practices that keep domestic violence more severe. Stigma and shame often prevent victims from reporting abuse, leading to social ostracization and prejudice. This undermines the implementation of international standards that call for zero tolerance of violence and the empowerment of women.

Weak monitoring and reporting mechanisms further hinder the effectiveness of international regulations in Vietnam. Although domestic violence is criminalized, the reporting process for domestic violence cases remains cumbersome and intimidating for victims. Many victims of domestic violence do not report incidents due to fear of retaliation, lack of trust in the law enforcement system, or because they believe that their complaints will be ignored. The police and judiciary are not specially trained to handle domestic violence cases sensitively, so complaints may not always be taken seriously or managed appropriately. Moreover, domestic violence is largely underreported, and there is no data to inform policy interventions. Without robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms, international regulations cannot be fully implemented or adapted to the local context.<sup>74</sup> After all, the lack of resources and infrastructure in Vietnam poses a fundamental challenge to the effective implementation of international regulations against domestic violence. While Vietnam has made some improvements in creating legal frameworks and setting up support mechanisms, such as shelters for victims of domestic violence, these resources remain inadequate and unevenly distributed across the country. Urban centers may have better access to victim services, but rural areas often lack shelters, hotlines, and victim support services. Also, many parts of the country do not adequately train police officers, judges and health care providers on how to handle cases of domestic violence. Inadequate infrastructure and limited resources make it challenging to provide the necessary services to support victims and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable. With sustained effort from both the

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<sup>74</sup> “Violence Against Women.”

government and civil society, Vietnam can continue to make progress in combating domestic violence and improving the lives of women.

#### **4. Some Recommendations for Perfecting Legislative Documents in Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence Against Women in Vietnam**

In general, Vietnam is working on reforming its legal and policy frameworks to address the gendered nature of domestic violence. The current legal framework, Law No. 13/2022/QH15,<sup>75</sup> primarily addresses physical violence but fails to fully integrate psychological, sexual, and economic abuse, which are increasingly recognized as critical components of gender-based violence. The Vietnamese legal framework should ensure all possible victims of domestic violence are protected, and policies should consider the gendered lens approach, addressing deeper underlying factors such as gender-based discrimination and societal power structures. Establishing dedicated gender units within key governmental ministries, such as the Ministry of Justice (MOJ)<sup>76</sup> and the Ministry of Public Security (MPS),<sup>77</sup> can help formulate policies, train public servants, and spearhead advocacy campaigns. Gender-based violence is a legal and social issue, and a coordinated multi-sector response is vital. Adequate detailed information is also needed to tackle the problem. Proactive measures such as effective monitoring and evaluation processes can help identify gaps, allocate resources, and design responsive legislation. International organizations like the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)<sup>78</sup> and WHO can support Vietnam in establishing robust data collection systems and ensuring gender-sensitive disaggregated data is regularly collected and analyzed.

The legal system should provide transparent and accessible legal remedies for domestic violence victims through enhanced temporary protection orders and legal support. Victims of violence in Vietnam often avoid reporting incidents as they distrust legal responses and worry about the costs and emotional toll involved in pursuing justice. The accessibility of temporary protection orders alongside improved legal aid services will enable Vietnam to enhance victim access to justice and establish a safer environment for women.<sup>79</sup> International organizations have done their best to support national efforts to prevent and combat domestic violence against women. These organizations can provide technical assistance, capacity building, and financial resources to help Vietnam enhance its policy frameworks and

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<sup>75</sup> Vietnam, National Assembly, Law on Domestic Violence.

<sup>76</sup> Available at: <https://moj.gov.vn/en/Pages/home.aspx>.

<sup>77</sup> Available at: <https://en.bocongan.gov.vn>.

<sup>78</sup> Steliana Nedera, "Violence Against Women and Girls: Read the Signals, Engage and Take Action to Prevent." United Nations Development Program, December 8, 2023, <https://www.undp.org/eurasia/blog/violence-against-women-and-girls-read-signals-engage-and-take-action-prevent>.

<sup>79</sup> Dang, "Current Status of Factors."

legislative documents. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women),<sup>80</sup> for example, is instrumental in offering support in areas such as Advocacy, policy development, and technical expertise on gender-based violence. UN Women's efforts in promoting gender-sensitive policies can help Vietnam align its national legislation with international treaties such as the Istanbul Convention<sup>81</sup> and the CEDAW.<sup>82</sup>

In addition, global institutions should promote the sharing of lessons and best practices of countries that have successfully passed gender violence laws. Countries like Vietnam can learn from Spain, which has addressed domestic violence through comprehensive laws and gender violence specialized courts.<sup>83</sup> Vietnam will gain from these exchanges, valuable strategies, and techniques that enable it to deal with local challenges and legal execution. Furthermore, the support of foreign donors is crucial for the timely implementation of essential parts of Vietnam's laws regarding domestic violence. International organizations support public awareness campaigns, training for law enforcement, and services for victims, including counselling, shelters, and legal assistance. The programs would facilitate women in accessing support and taking legal action while providing law enforcement with appropriate training to address gender-based violence in a sensitive and effective manner. The advancement of domestic violence law enforcement in Vietnam depends heavily on international advocacy efforts. Vietnam's dedication to domestic violence eradication through legal frameworks like Law No. 13/2022/QH15<sup>84</sup> remains a gap between policy intention and policy results. Advocacy from international organizations, civil society groups, and NGOs can drive political will and increase accountability for effective implementation. International campaigns, such as those coordinated by UN Women,<sup>85</sup> Amnesty International, and the Global Network of Women's Shelters, can create international pressure that holds the Vietnamese government accountable for its commitments. These campaigns can also raise the profile of domestic violence issues within Vietnam, promoting dialogue between civil society, law enforcement, and government officials. An important component of international Advocacy is monitoring compliance with international treaties and agreements. The CEDAW<sup>86</sup> and the UN Special

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<sup>80</sup> Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en>

<sup>81</sup> Council of Europe. Istanbul Convention.

<sup>82</sup> "Introducing the Apparatus of National Assembly."

<sup>83</sup> Walker, "Nonjudicial Influence."

<sup>84</sup> Vietnam, National Assembly, Law on Domestic Violence.

<sup>85</sup> "What We Do: Ending Violence Against Women," UN Women, accessed February 22, 2025, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women>

<sup>86</sup> "Introducing the Apparatus of National Assembly."

Rapporteur,<sup>87</sup> for instance, have records in preparing periods of assessing and issuing recommendations and reports to hold governments accountable. Any override on Vietnam's legal restructuring is documented by the international supervisory body to guarantee that laws are adequately implemented and that all delays or problems are solved swiftly. Advocacy organizations strengthen domestic violence victims' narratives and data collection operations to boost their voices and guarantee international awareness of their struggles. International Advocacy efforts should target the revision and enhancement of Vietnam's laws and policies that require modernization or reinforcement.

Moreover, global initiatives can seek to alter certain outdated laws and policies in Vietnam. Global coalitions of women's rights groups offer great potential for gaining legal changes and policymaking through public education and Advocacy for policymaking. Such support is needed to ensure that the government of Vietnam remains active in dealing with domestic violence. The success of international policies and legislation regarding Vietnam's domestic violence is important. However, possessing these standards makes their use more sustainable and effective. The success of international regulations depends mainly on how well they are adapted and implemented at the national and local levels. For a country like Vietnam to have local ownership of international standards, it is obligatory to sign international agreements and simultaneously ensure that national laws are developed to incorporate these principles in a manner that resonates with the social and cultural realities of Vietnam. Another way to increase local ownership is to use local community leaders, women's rights activists, and even victim support organizations to help adopt and implement these international regulations since these people understand the norms and the needs of the locals. Such a process guarantees that local laws are parallel to the local socio-economic environment and that the needs of the victims will immediately be addressed through relevant legal frameworks. By giving local communities a more significant stake in the legal process, Vietnam can also foster public support for laws related to domestic violence, which is often a critical factor in their success. These international recommendations would be valuable for the Vietnamese government to implement in order for Law No. 13/2022/QH15<sup>88</sup> to align straightforwardly with international norms, but those are still consistent with the realities of the Vietnamese context. The requirements for Vietnam's legal approach relevant to international human rights standards exemplify the need for globalized policies, but still comply with the specific cultural, historical, and religious contexts therein. Besides,

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<sup>87</sup> "Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls," UN Human Rights Office, accessed February 22, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-violence-against-women>

<sup>88</sup> Vietnam, National Assembly, Law on Domestic Violence.

international gender experts can assist in developing context-specific strategies that resonate with local communities, creating a bridge between international norms and Vietnamese values. Thanks to these combined efforts, developing countries like Vietnam can better establish and perfect their legal systems to create a safer, more equitable environment for women and eliminate domestic violence in all its forms.

### **5. Conclusion**

The research has analyzed the regulatory framework on domestic violence against women in Vietnam, revealing the insufficiency of current legislation and the need to match Vietnam's laws with international standards and best practices. The study documents that legal reform needs to happen on two levels, particularly the systemic reformation of legal tools that consider not only enforcement mechanisms but also gender inclusivity, and support for victims. The main finding of this study is that the visibility of domestic violence in Vietnam is limited because the legal definition of domestic violence does not fully account for the types of abuse women experience. Current law centers on physical violence and omits psychological, economic or sexual abuse. Although the Istanbul Convention emphasizes freedom from violence in the home, the increased knowledge regarding the differentiated forms of domestic violence has not been adequately translated into the language of domestic law. There are significant barriers to law enforcement due to insufficient training of police officers and court officials and lack of victim support mechanisms. This research is another reminder that laws on the books do not stop domestic violence; it is about the police enforcing them consistently and effectively. Vietnam has yet to see the enactment of any law that punishes the abuser, not to mention a lack of resources, a lack of shelters, a lack of rights, a lack of legal support, as well as psychological guidance for victims that can help them live a better life. Domestic violence is a crime that the local authorities are generally unable to monitor and report, adding to the scale of the problem and hindering accurate measurement of domestic violence in Vietnam. Beyond the law and its implementation, cultural and societal norms in Vietnam are turning into serious barriers to women's complete legal protection. Laws can only go so far when patriarchal norms run so deep, women victimized by domestic violence suffer stigma and shame, and self-blame and silence are the norm. Internationally, advocacy groups and international organizations have been key actors in shaping Vietnam's legislative development. However, the study has also brought to light that what is internationally agreed on for a safe route to the moon often meets challenges on the national front when it comes to full adoption and implementation. Although Vietnam has ratified a number of international treaties, implementation is inconsistent and local circumstances often prevent the full application of international norms. Vietnamese law and disease prevention measures are unable to protect women from domestic violence,

along with limited mechanisms for monitoring and reporting domestic violence cases, according to the research. Often, data on domestic violence is incomplete or unreliable, making it difficult for policymakers and advocacy groups to understand trends and make informed decisions. Data collection methods should be strengthened, and effective reporting mechanisms should be established to enhance policy and measure the introduction of legislative reforms. Resources and infrastructure are still the biggest challenges in addressing domestic violence in Vietnam. Even though the government attempted to ensure support services available across the country, including shelters and hotlines, it often turned out to be insufficient and unevenly distributed across the nation, especially in rural or far-reaching regions. A fully national strategy, including resourcing and local capacity development, must be put in place to ensure all women, no matter where they are, have access to adequate safety and support.

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