



PEACE IN MY HOME, PEACE IN MY COUNTRY

Informing Malawi's National Response to Intimate Partner Violence

The World Health Organization defines intimate partner violence as “behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours.”

Prevalence and Impact

In Malawi, as elsewhere, intimate partner violence is widespread. National surveys estimate that 21.7 percent of Malawian women have experienced physical intimate partner violence (e.g. pushing, punching, or burning)—6.2 percent while they were pregnant (Malawi Demographic and Health Survey [MDHS], 2010). Sexual intimate partner violence—that is, any forced sexual act—affects 18.9 percent (MDHS, 2010). Emotional intimate partner violence, such as criticism in front of the children, denial of freedom, sexual harassment, and humiliation, affects 25.2 percent (National Statistical Office, et al., 2012). Although rarely examined, economic intimate partner violence (restricting women's access to money or their ability to generate income) affects close to one in three Malawian women (Pelser et al., 2005).

Intimate partner violence is an expensive problem. One study (United Nations Economic Commission of Africa and UN Women, 2013), estimated the total

direct economic cost of services for survivors of physical domestic violence in Malawi to be MK 877 million in 2013 (US\$1 equals MK 325). It estimated the indirect costs of this violence—such as the imputed value of pain and suffering and the inability to perform household tasks—to be even greater: about MK 28 billion per year. This puts the estimated total annual cost to the Malawi economy at close to MK 29 billion.

The Ministry of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare recognizes the breadth and seriousness of intimate partner violence and coordinates the national response to end this violence and strengthen support for survivors. To aid the ministry's efforts, the Health Policy Project (funded by USAID and PEPFAR) reviewed research, program reports, and government documents to produce a profile of what is documented about intimate partner violence (and gender-based violence, more generally) in Malawi, how the problem has been handled to date, and where action is needed most urgently. The findings are the basis for this brief.

Risk Factors

Many women and girls, regardless of age, education, or economic class, suffer from intimate partner violence. Several factors, however, put a person at greater risk.

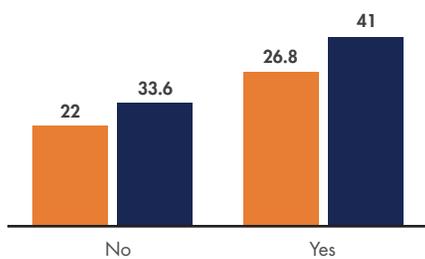
For example, women who work for cash are more likely to experience physical and/or sexual violence than women who are paid in some other way, or who don't have a job. Women who have between one and four children are at greater risk than those who have five or more, or none (but childless women are most likely to experience emotional violence). Women whose mothers were beaten by their fathers are far more likely to experience all forms of intimate partner violence than those who grew up in households without this violence. Women whose partners are often drunk face more than twice the risk of physical, sexual, and emotional violence than those whose husbands don't drink alcohol or never get drunk. (See graphs on page 2.)

There has been little decline in intimate partner violence over the years, in part because many Malawians accept it. Typically taking place within the home, it is often surrounded by secrecy. One household survey showed that most Malawians (75 percent of men and 80 percent of women) believe that violence between a man and a woman is a private matter and others should not interfere (Andersson et al., 2007). The 2010 MDHS reported that an equal share of women and men (12.6 %) think that a husband is right to beat his wife if she burns the food, argues with him, goes out without telling him, neglects the children, or refuses to have sexual intercourse with him.

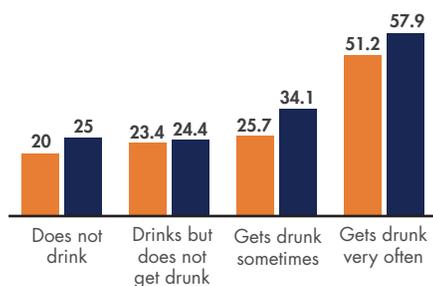
RISK FACTORS FOR VIOLENCE

■ Physical and/or sexual violence
■ Emotional violence

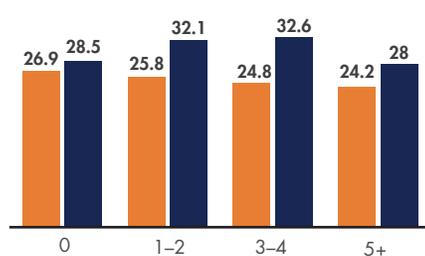
Respondent's father beat her mother



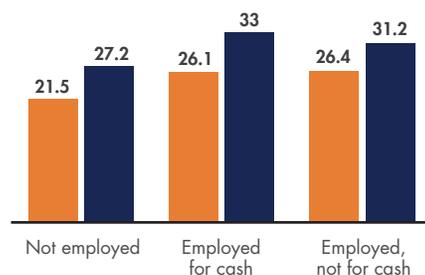
Husband/partner's alcohol consumption



Number of living children



Woman's work status



All figures are percentages of ever-married women ages 15-49 who have ever experienced either emotional violence or physical and/or sexual violence.

Source: MDHS, 2010.

Stepping Up Malawi's National Response

Malawi has a strong set of government policies, guidelines, and legal frameworks on violence against women, including the Penal Code, the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act, the Deceased Estate Act, the Child Care Protection Act, the Marriage Act, the Gender Equality Act, and the National Gender Policy. Unfortunately, only about 40 percent of Malawians report having heard of them (National Statistical Office et al., 2012) and implementation, especially at the community level, is weak. Malawi also has robust data on prevalence rates of violence against women. Many studies have been done in the country, and although they lack comparability in their definitions, study populations, and methods, their findings agree on the magnitude and consequences of the problem.

Still, information gaps exist, the most critical of which is the lack of documentation on the effectiveness of interventions to stop intimate partner violence. Policymakers need this information to allocate scarce resources strategically and rationally to achieve the greatest impact.

Recommendations

Given these and other findings (explained in the forthcoming full report, referenced below), the following steps can strengthen the national response:

- Translate policies into practice to make a real difference in the lives of women and their families, especially at the grassroots level.
- Strengthen strategies that involve men as change agents in the national response to violence against women.
- Implement and evaluate interventions at the individual, couple, household, community, and societal levels to address harmful attitudes, beliefs, and practices that perpetuate intimate partner violence and trivialize its impact.
- Build the capacity of government agencies, organizations, and individuals to implement and scale up evidence-based interventions.

References

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