



Intimate Partner Violence: High Costs to Households and Communities

Violence against women most often is thought of as a basic human rights violation. Increasingly, however, the global community sees such violence as a key development issue that undermines economic growth.

To better understand the economic costs of violence, especially locally where its impact is most direct and immediate, ICRW and its partners – Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Hassan II University in Morocco and Economic Policy Research Centre in Uganda – with support from UNFPA, undertook a three-country study to estimate these costs at the household and community levels (see related box).

Overall, the study suggests that intimate partner violence is pervasive and severe, most women who experience violence do not seek help, out-of-pocket costs to women and service providers are high, and indirect costs may dwarf direct costs. These findings join a growing body of evidence which suggests that violence against women is both a human rights violation and a drain on economic resources that reaches through households to communities and societies at large.

Key Findings

In all three countries, intimate partner violence is prevalent, frequent, severe.

In Uganda, about half of women report experiencing physical intimate partner violence in their lifetime. More than 60 percent of women in Bangladesh have experienced sexual violence from an intimate partner. Women in all three countries report multiple incidents as well as multiple and severe forms of intimate partner violence. In Morocco, about 46 percent of women who experienced physical violence report more than one incident. In Uganda, of the 1,193 incidents reported, 10 percent resulted in physical injury, including deep cuts, eye injuries, burns and broken bones.

The majority of women who experience violence do not seek help.

Only 17 percent of women in Morocco and 10 percent of women in Bangladesh used a health service at least once after being abused during the 12 months prior to the study; in Uganda 11 percent of all reported violence incidents resulted in service use. Given the injuries women report, their use of health services appear to be lower than the actual need.

For a handful of women who experience violence in Bangladesh and Uganda, informal community structures are the first point of contact and recourse. In Uganda, women used the local council mechanism in 8.5 percent of all violence incidents, in contrast to 2 percent who reported using the police and 0.2 percent the formal justice system. Findings are similar in Bangladesh, where the local *Salish* works like the local councils.

Costs of intimate partner violence to households, service providers are significant.

In Uganda, the average out-of-pocket expense for a violence incident is 11,337 UGS or \$5, with police support costing nearly double that (17,904 UGS or \$10). In Morocco, use of the justice system is costliest

Study Background & Methodology

ICRW and its partners undertook the intimate partner violence study in Bangladesh, Morocco and Uganda, using a household and community level analysis to examine the violence's relationship to household economic vulnerability and the extent to which public resources for essential services are diverted for intimate partner violence.

In each country, the research team administered a survey to a woman living in a randomly selected household who was in a co-habiting relationship at the time or during the previous 12 months. The sample size was 2,003 in Bangladesh, 2,122 in Morocco and 1,272 in Uganda. Data also were collected in each country from service providers in health, criminal justice and law.

(2,349 DH or \$274) followed by health (1,875 DH or \$211). When taken in the context of these countries' gross national income (GNI) per capita – \$340 in Uganda and \$2,250 in Morocco,¹ for example – the related costs for households are high.

Costs to service providers also are significant. Health providers report average labor costs of one intimate partner violence case at \$1.20 in Uganda and \$196 in Morocco. In Uganda, 68 percent of hospital providers surveyed report seeing at least one case of physical injury due to intimate partner violence each week. When personnel and other labor costs are taken into account, the estimated costs grow to \$1.2 million annually.

The indirect costs of intimate partner violence may dwarf direct costs.

In Uganda, about 12.5 percent of women report losing time from household work, especially washing clothes and fetching water and fuel wood, because of intimate partner violence. Nearly 10 percent of incidents resulted in women losing paid work days, an average of 11 days annually.

In Bangladesh, more than two-thirds of the study households reported that intimate partner violence affected a member's work – both productive and reproductive. Using the average market wage rate of women with similar education, the average value of lost work per violent incident to households is estimated at about TK 340 or \$5 – 4.5 percent (TK 7,626 or \$112) of the average monthly income of the households studied.

Conclusion

The direct and indirect costs of intimate partner violence are high for women, their families, communities and nations. The cost findings from this study are especially alarming given the low rate that women use formal, more costly services related to violence. These findings also do not include the high costs of violence beyond physical injuries² (e.g., chronic pain, reproductive health problems, depression and sexually transmitted infections) and the immeasurable cost of lost life when women are murdered.

Reducing violence against women must be a key development goal: *Governments cannot afford to ignore the high costs of violence against women to economic growth.*

Initiatives such as Bangladesh's Multi-Sectoral Program on Violence against Women, Morocco's recent national plan to address violence against women, and Uganda's pending Domestic Violence Bill are a good start. Still more is needed. National governments and donors should provide support services for survivors of violence. Moreover, they should invest in informal dispute resolution mechanisms for women, including additional research to assess the effectiveness of these systems, and ensure that they work for women.

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¹ 2007 GNI

² García-Moreno C, Jansen HA, Ellsberg M, Heise L, Watts C, [WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women. Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses](#). Geneva, Switzerland, World Health Organization [WHO], 2005.