

Gender Studies & Human Rights Documentation Centre

Facts on Violence Against Women in Ghana

Introduction:

In the last census of 2000, the population of Ghana stood at 18,412,247 with women forming 51 per cent of the total population of Ghana. Women in Ghana, like their sisters in other African countries, have multifaceted roles both at home and at work. In spite of the important role played by the women of Ghana in the socio-economic sector, their contribution to the economy and social life have largely been ignored.

Under Ghana's constitution, both women and men have equal status under the law. Despite these constitutional and legal guarantees, women still play subservient roles to men. Under our customary systems, women are expected to give precedence to men in all things, with the men taking all decision affecting the family.

This position of being the subservient partner has created a situation where Ghanaian women are equated to children. In addition, women are often considered to be the property of their fathers and husbands. This control by men over women has meant that many women have accepted the situation allows men to "punish" them for alleged disobedience.

Violence is a threat to all women in our society. For too long it has been kept silent. Many believe that violence at home is a "family affair" and should be dealt with inside the home. Too often we turn our heads when we know that a woman is being abused. That silence is as dangerous as the abuse itself. By ignoring violence, we are putting every woman we know at risk. Violence against women affects every woman from time they are infants until they are elderly. It affects our daughters. Our mothers, our sisters and our friends. Violence is a threat not only to women, but affects society as a whole.

This information package is to provide you with the details and facts about violence against women. Identifying the violence is the first step in ending it. The information enclosed is the result of a national study done by the Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre and its partners. One of our goals is to help bring an end to the violence against women in Ghana.

Profile of Physical Violence in Ghana:

Physical violence was identified as any number of actions that are generally inflicted upon and/or of consequence to the body, resulting in injury or harm to the body. Some of these are:

- Cruel punishment including starving children, punitive food rationing, inserting pepper and ginger into the genitals of children
- Physical torture usually involving excessive cruelty
- Forced labour where for example maidservants, orphans or stepchildren are forced to work long, hard hours, without pay and/or little time off
- Beatings, ranging from slapping and punching, to kicking and burning
- Assault with a weapon, such as stabbing
- Causing death

Physical Violence 33%

- ❖ 1 in 3 women were experiencing physical violence (beating, slapping or other physical punishment) at the hands of current or previous partners at the time of the study
- ❖ 33% had experienced physical violence in intimate relationships
- ❖ Over half (51%) experience physical violence in 1997

Items used to beat, slap or physically punish women

- 81% a hand was used to beat
- 6% a belt was used
- 6% other objects were used (cane, pestle, bicycle tire, dog chains, etc...)
- 4% a stick was used
- 3% a combination of hand and other objects (belt, legs, stick)

Impacts of Violence:

2 out of 3 women who experienced physical violence suffered injuries

Types of Injuries Suffered

- 89% suffered bruises and body aches
- 14% suffered open wounds
- 5% suffered broken bones
- 10% other injuries (including swollen eyes, blood from ears and swollen face)

For those that suffered injury or bodily pain the last time they were physically abused:

- Over 1 in 3 (37%) stayed in bed after the beating
- Just under 1 in 3 (30%) stayed in the house
- Nearly 2 in 10 (18%) took days off income generating activities

Health Care Costs To The Family

Almost half (49%) of those injured sought treatment for their injuries:

- 16% at a clinic
- 36% at a hospital
- 5% from a herbalist
- 21% at a pharmacy
- 21% through a drug peddler

Profile of Psychological Violence in Ghana

In the Ghana study, psychological violence was identified as behaviour directed at an emotional level or that has an emotional impact. These include:

- Threatening behaviour, such as verbal threats, bullying and destruction of property
- Threats that a woman will be removed from the house that parents will stop paying a child's school fees
- Death threats
- Disrespect for women such as the unilateral termination of relationship without consideration or proper maintenance of woman and children
- When men take on girlfriends
- Taking a second wife without consulting wife
- Male partners refusing their wives sex
- Refusing to eat a woman's food
- Verbal abuse, insults, curses, false accusations, shouting
- Humiliating or shaming a woman in front of others
- Isolating women by refusing to allow them to work, visit family and/or friends
- Confining women to specific spaces, such as the home
- Male partners spending time away from home
- Refusing to talk or listen
- Discrimination and favouritism between wives, biological and stepchildren and between men and women- "when male partners give things to one lot"
- Infantilization of women's values that relegate women to the background as inferior
- When a wife cooks a meal for the day and the husband sleeps with another wife or a girlfriend

Psychological Abuse- 27%

1 in 4 women threatened with a fist or other things that could hurt them

1 in 5 women prevented from seeing family and friends by male partners

1 in 3 women prevented from speaking to other men

1 in 10 women intentionally humiliated or shamed in front of others

1 in 10 women forced to leave the house in which they were living either with or without children

8% of women were prevented from going to work selling or making money

2 in 4 women partners used abusive words as a form of abuse

2 in 4 women had male partners refusing to talk to them as a form of psychological abuse

1 in 10 women had male partners hurt people they cared about as a way of hurting them

1 in 4 women had been hurt by a male partner's staying away, not visiting, or coming home late

5% of women had things of importance damaged

1 in 5 male partner's refused sex as a form of psychological abuse

Sexual Violence

There are many forms of sexual violence which include rape forced sexual intercourse in and out of marriage. Sexual violence takes place usually without the consent of the victim.

- Rape or forced sexual intercourse in marriage and out of marriage
- Women and young girls being touched or being forced to touch someone against their will defilement of young girls
- Sexual harassment unwanted sexual comments, looks and touching
- Women being forced to comply to sexual demands due to a threat that they will not do well in school or may not be promoted
- Forced prostitution
- Forced homosexuality
- Sexual neglect
- Female genital mutilation
- Women's lack of control over reproduction by their being denied family planning
- Forced pregnancy
- Man refusing to wear a condom to protect his wife when he has been sexually active elsewhere

Sexual Violence 27%	
For 2 in 10 women, their first experience of sexual intercourse was by force	
1 in 3 women had been fondled or touched against their will	* 3% below 10 years * 40% between 10-14 years * 54% between 15-18 years * 3% over 19 years
1 in 5 women experienced forced sex by a man	* 17% between 10-14 years * 64% between 15-18 years * 3% over 19 years

2 in 5 women are harassed or coerced when they refuse their partner sex
3 in 10 women are forced by their male partner to have sex sometimes

7% of women had been forced to touch a man's private parts	* 3% below 10 years * 40% between 10-14 years * 53% between 15-18 years * 3% above 19 years
6% had been threatened by a school teacher or principal that schooling would suffer if they did not have sex	* 30% between 10-14 years * 66% between 15-18 years * 4% over 19 years
4 % of women had been threatened with demands for sex before being offered a job or having a favour done	* 12% below aged 15 * 50% between 15-18 years * 26% over 19 years
15% of women surveyed had been circumcised	* 51% below age 1 * 17% between 1-9 years * 17% between 10-14 years * 15% 15 or older

Traditional Practices as Violence:

These are practices that cause physical, emotional and sexual damage to women.

Traditional Violence can include the following:

- Female genital mutilation
- Tribal markings
- Food taboo's that dictate women should not eat certain foods at specific times or at all
- Cultural attitudes that indicate an inferior status for women and children punitive elements of widowhood rights such as food rationing, cold water bathing and lengthy abstentions from sex
- Bride price/dowry which encourage men to see women as property
- Forced marriage or child marriage in which **the girls consent** is not given for the marriage
- Adultery rites that publicly shame women for committing adultery but do not touch the man
- Trokosi, the forced enslavement of young female virgins

“Women not being allowed to eat chicken, magoes or eggs when pregnant, or not allowed to eat proper food for one or two days after giving birth. They prevent her from eating properly by claiming a child will turn into a thief if she eats well.”

“It can be considered a holy war when husbands die and the family of the man wants to take over the wealth and property of the man. The widow is not considered a member of the family and as such she should not have a share.”

“Where a man gives a dowry for the woman he thinks he owns the woman and whatever he says should be taken. If the woman says anything against the man [*sic*] she is beaten.”

“The least important man in the house still more important than the women because some believe that women were created from one rib of man. Women are not complete without men.”

Female Genital Mutilation in Ghana
15% of women and girls are circumcised
85% circumcised before the age of 15
51% circumcised before the age of one

Economic Forms of Violence:

This form of violence is often described as deprivation of essential needs.

Economic violence can include:

- Withholding resources as a form of punishment
- Neglecting to provide money for food, school and the running of the household
- Refusing to allow a woman to work
- Taking a woman's earnings from her and forcing woman to be dependent on the man
- Men spending scarce resources on drink and girlfriends rather than on household needs

8% of younger or oldern women are prohibited from going to work, selling, or making money

Over 1 in 4 (27%) of women have been hurt by male partners refusing to provide money or food stuffs

56% said it was the sole decision of the man whether to buy or sell land

62% said buying household goods was the sole decision of men

42% said that husbands/partners had the final say in household decisions

Reporting:

Reporting of violence is generally low. When women choose to talk about their experiences of violence, the study indicates that they prefer to report informally, to family, friends or members of the community.

When touched against their will	<p>6 in 10 did not report 4 in 10 reported * 46% to parents * 29% to friends * 18% to extended family * 6% to school authorities * 2% to minister/clergy/pastor * 0.4% to chiefs and elders * 0.4% to social welfare</p>
When forced to touch a man's private parts	<p>7 in 10 did not report 3 in 10 did report * 56 % to her own family * 21% to friends * 7% to social welfare *7% to family of boyfriend *4% to police * 2% to church/shrine * 2% to other (including husband)</p>
When forced to have sex	<p>7 in 10 did not report 3 in 10 did report * 51% to parents *30% to friends * 18% to extended family * 0.8% to chiefs/elders * 0.8% to school authorities * 3% to others</p>
Sexual harassment by a teacher/principal	<p>4 in 10 did not report 6 in 10 reported * 51% to friends *29% to parents * 25% to school authorities</p>

1 in 3 women lived with physical violence for years before making the first report	
Shame	<p>*12% of women injured by the physical assault of a male partner did not seek treatment because they were embarrassed or shamed *Almost 1 in 3 (31%) women did not report sexual violence out of shame</p>
Shy/timid	<p>*1 in 4 women did not report their experiences of sexual violence because they were shy</p>

Trivializing experiences of violence	*1 in 4 women did not report their experiences of sexual violence because they felt there was not no need to
Lack of confidence in reporting agencies	*1 in 10 women felt that reporting would not help the situation
Culture and social attitudes	The advice given to women when they reported physical violence was as follows: *34% were advised to talk to husbands or partners *28 % were advised to be patient , tolerant, to forgive or to stay *11% were advised to talk to family members *11 % were advise to withdraw the case *5% were advised to seek medical advice *2% were advised to press charges *9% were given other advice 4 in 10 women accepted the advice given out of respect for those offering the advice
Previous action taken against perpetrator	*2 out of 3 perpetrators (65%) were given a verbal warning *1 in 10 perpetrators had members of family talked to *1 in 10 had no action taken against the perpetrator *3% of perpetrators were arrested
Financial cost	*18% of women injured during a physical assault did not seek treatment because they had no money of their own
Fear	*3 in 10 women did not accept the advice given to them when they reported out of feat of the consequence *Over 2 in 10 women accepted the advice given to them when they reported for fear of divorce *11% of women, who left their partners, did so out of fear for their lives
Family Pressure	*Almost 2 in 10 women (19%) did not leave their male partners who had been violent, due to pressure from family and friends *Almost half of the women interviewed did not leave abusive partners because of children

Reasons Why Women Were Physically or Psychologically Abused

Study findings indicate that anything and everything can be and is used as an excuse to justify the use of violence against women

33% of women experienced violence because they were disobedient including refusing male partners sex, not washing his clothes, going out without permission, refusing to take instruction	19% of women experienced physical violence because of infidelity and flirting including dancing with a husband's friend and gifts for his girlfriend	Issues related to money and maintenance including refusing male partner money, asking for money and food shortages triggered violence for 12% of respondents
14% of women were abused when they raised issues about male partner's behaviour including confronting him about lateness, drunkenness, complaining about his behaviour	Rivalry including when a man goes in for a 2 nd wife, was the reason behind physical violence for 7% of women	For 4% of women disagreements over children and the extended family triggered physical violence – including disagreements over the discipline of children
For 1% of women reproductive issues triggered violence including her practicing family planning	A breakdown in the relationship-including threats of divorce lead to abuse for 1% of women	10% represented other reasons including misplacing his things, refusing to allow them to perform customary rites

Why do women stay in abusive relationships?

- **Denial**
 - Often, a women truly may believe that she is not being abused. Women have been used to being treated as secondary citizens and they undergo so much abuse thatthey may end up thinking abusive behaviour is normal. She may have found ways to explain away the violence or feel that she can “handle” him and avoid serious incidents. At times she may actually feel that she contributes to the abuse.
- **Financial**
 - Women often earn less money than men, or may not work outside of the home. For such a woman, the prespect of leaving home is a bleak one, a future with no roof over her head or without food. She knows that if she leaves the relationship she will have difficulties managing. Her partner may have reinforced these fears by telling her that he will not support her if she leavers. The issue becomes greater when there are children involved and a woman faces taking care of here children and paying school fees without any financial assistance. He may also threaten to make trouble for her at her work. At times the woman's self esteem has been eroded so much that she belives that she is not good for anything and is not capable of doing things to support herself. For many women, the legal system is lengthy and may be too expensive for them to consider.
- **Fear**
 - Abusive men commonly use threats as a means to keep someone in a relationship. A woman may have been told over and over that if she leaves the relationship, terrible things will happen to her. He may have told her that no matter where she goes, he will find her and never leave her alone. She may fear living alone or the prospect of trying to support herself and her children. He may threaten to kill her, the children or himself.

- **Love**
 - A woman will usually want her relationship to work. She is often willing to stay in hopes that things will improve. She may believe the promises and explanations offered to her by her partner.
- **Children**
 - Many women will stay in a relationship for the sake of their children. They may want their children to have a good relationship with their father, she will feel guilty about “breaking up” the family, he will threaten to keep the children away from her, or she will think that the only way to support her children is by staying in with her partner. Sometimes a woman thinks that the change of environment or standard of living may not be the best for her children.
- **Religion**
 - Most religions strongly discourage divorce and the breaking up of a family. These ideals are admirable, but when there is abuse involved, there is little Biblical support remaining. A woman with strong religious convictions can feel an enormous amount of guilt if she leaves her marriage.
- **Family**
 - Many women turn to their families when they are living in abusive relationships. Unfortunately, the advice encourages her to stay with her husband. Families may accept the violence as normal. In smaller communities, leaving the husband may mean that a woman cannot go out on her own, but has to go to her father’s home. This is not always the best option. Her father may discourage a divorce. Also, because of bride price, the family may consider the woman to be the property of the husband and that they would owe money or cattle to the man if she were to leave.
- **No place to go**
 - By the time she decides to leave, her abuser may have succeeded in isolating her from her family and friends. She may feel that she has nowhere to go. She may be embarrassed to ask strangers for help and is reluctant to go to a shelter. Few modern shelters exist in Ghana. Many women may not know that a shelter exists or know where to go for help.

Perpetrator Profiling

Danger Signs for Men

If you are presently involved in an intimate relationship and you show any of the following signs, you may be at risk of becoming an abusive man. If you...

- Are excessively jealous of your partner
- Criticise what she does and she wears
- Like to scare her by doing reckless things
- Become very angry about trivial things
- Tend to be depressed or withdrawn, but won't talk about your feelings
- Come from an abusive home
- Become angry or violent when using drugs or alcohol
- Have traditional ideas about what a woman should be like and should do
- Make threats about hitting her, her friends or pets, or killing yourself
- Have hit her, no matter how sorry you are afterwards

Warning Signals for Women

If you are involved in an intimate relationship, you could become a victim of abuse if you...

- Feel you can't live without him
- Stop seeing other friends or family
- Give up activities you enjoy because he doesn't like them
- Feel you have to "walk on eggshells" to keep the peace
- Are afraid to tell him your worries and feelings about the relationship
- Stop expressing opinions if he does not agree
- Feel that you are the only one who can help him and that you should try to "reform" him
- Believe that his jealousy is a sign of love
- Believe that there is something wrong with you if you don't enjoy the sexual things he makes you do.
- Believes that the man makes the decisions and the woman pleases the man

What are your options?

As an abused woman, there are three real choices that you have in dealing with your situation.

- Stay in the relationship and accept it as it is. This is the most dangerous route. If you accept a violent relationship there is a great possibility that someone will die as a result. Some women are murdered. Other women get pushed to limit and commit murder. Still others commit suicide. If you stay, you must realise that the chances are great that your children will suffer emotional abuse. In addition, children may be suffering abuse either physically or sexually, where or not you are aware. They may die or they may become violent people.
- Stay in the relationship and make changes. You cannot make the changes by yourself. Your partner must admit that he needs help. He needs to understand that it is wrong for him to hurt you or want to control you and that he must seek professional help to change. If he is willing to be held accountable for his use of violence, then it is possible for him to make a change. In order to make the change, he must find an environment that is non-violence, non-judgemental and respectful of women and children. Finally, he must be willing to work through a long process in which he must be painfully honest with himself.

You need someone to talk to either a professional or other women. You need to regain a sense of self-confidence. Do not be ashamed to talk about your problems. You may be surprised to know that there are many other women experiencing similar situations. You need to know that you have nothing to be ashamed of, that the abuse was not your fault.

Finally, if you have children, you should talk to your children and teach them that battering is wrong. Children who live with violence often grow up to abuse their own partners and children. If possible, the children should also get counselling.

- **Get out of the relationship and get on with making a better life.** Deciding to leave someone you love is a painful decision, but leaving does not make you a bad person. It is not immoral to leave an abusive situation. Many people lead happy and fulfilling lives on their own and also raise children.

You need to know that nobody should have to endure the pain, anguish and uncertainty of an abusive relationship.

Risk Assessments

Just as we can evaluate our physical environment, we can assess our emotional environment. Personal relationships form part of that emotional environment. You can evaluate the situation you are living with and determine what your needs are. The following statements may be useful to you in your assessment of your personal relationship.

Do any of the following statements apply to him?

- He is very jealous and doesn't want you to talk to other men.
- He criticizes your women friends and wants you to stop seeing them.
- He wants to know where you are and who you are with all the time.
- He tries to control your contact with family members. He often criticizes what you wear.
- He usually criticizes what you do and say

If these statements apply to your partner, then he is trying to control your activities. If he succeeds, you will be much more dependent on him.

- He tells people about things you did or said that are embarrassing and makes you feel stupid.
- He blames you for the things that go wrong for him
- He makes jokes that put you and other women down
- He calls you stupid, lazy, fat, ugly, a slut, or other things that make you feel bad

If any of these statement apply to him, then he is putting you down and making you feel less confident and in control.

- He like to drive fast or do dangerous things to scare you
- He gets carried away when you are playing and hurts you, or holds you down to make you feel helpless and humiliated
- He becomes angry or violent when he drinks or uses drugs
- He makes threats about hitting you, hurting your friends, your pets, or members of your family if you don't do what he wants
- He threatens to stop paying the children's school fees
- He will not give you chop-money or food
- He threatens to leave you or kill himself if don't obey him
- He forces you to do sexual things that you don't want to do by threatening or by using physical force
- He becomes very angry about small, unimportant things
- He won't express his feelings when asked and then blows up
- He hits you- he may be sorry afterwards, but he hits you

If he does any of these things, he is threatening you. In some cases, using physical violence that can put your life or the lives of your children at risk.

The Do's and Don'ts of helping victims of abuse

DO

Believe her:

Accept what the woman is telling you. Do not dismiss her remarks as those of a “hysterical woman”. Tell her you believe her. Affirmation of the woman is of primary importance. Identify the ways she has developed coping strategies, solved problems and exhibited courage and determination. It is important to affirm her strengths and the efforts she has taken or will take to end the abuse. Give her credit for being in the best position to evaluate the risks of separation or continuing to stay with the abuser. Let her know that she is not responsible for the abuser's behaviour.

Listen and let her talk about her feelings:

Sensitive listening is very important. This may be the first time the abused woman has told her story. Often, it is the experience of an abused woman that no one will listen to or take them seriously. Do not tell an abused woman what she should or should not be thinking. This is all part of being non-judgemental.

Giver her clear messages:

- Violence is never okay of justifiable
- The safety of the woman and her children is almost the most important issue
- Wife assault is a crime
- She did not cause the abuse
- She is not to blame for her partner's behaviour
- She cannot change her partner's behaviour. Only her partner can make those changes.
- Apologies and promises will not end the violence
- She is not alone
- She is not crazy
- Abuse is not loss of control; it is a way of controlling another person

*Talk with her about what she can do to plan for her and her children's safety. Allow her to make her own decisions.

*Help her find the good things about herself and her children

*Get her a copy of community resource list

*Respect her confidentiality

An abused woman needs our support and encouragement in order to make choices that are right for her. However, there are some forms of advice that are not useful and even dangerous for her to hear.

DON'T

- Tell her what to do , when to leave or when not to leave
- Tell her to go back to the situation and try a little harder
- Rescue her by trying to find quick solutions
- Suggest you try to talk to husband and straighten things out
- Tell her she should stay for the sake of the children
- Give false hope – only offer what you can – do not make promises that you cannot keep

- Pass judgement
- Jump to conclusions
- Let the victim's emotions react too directly on your own