



FACT SHEET - IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON WOMEN'S HEALTH AND WOMEN'S ATTITUDES TOWARD GENDER

There has been little work done on masculinities, both as a field of inquiry and site of advocacy, in Sri Lanka. To address the gap in evidence-based studies of masculinities, CARE Sri Lanka undertook a study on men's knowledge, practices and attitudes toward gender and gender-based violence (GBV) in Colombo, Hambantota, Nuwara Eliya and Batticaloa districts. The study is part of the UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence, coordinated by Partners for Prevention, a UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV regional joint programme for gender-based violence prevention in Asia and the Pacific, which explores gender-based violence and masculinities to inform evidence-based violence prevention interventions.

The study highlights the prevalence of violence against women in diverse forms, manifesting in different spheres. The health impact of male violence against women was found to be significant, even though the problem of intimate partner violence (IPV) may be largely underreported by women. It is also intriguing to see the high rates of gender inequitable attitudes of women, which highlights the need for more work focusing on attitudes of women and girls toward gender.

Key findings

WOMEN'S REPORTS OF VIOLENCE

- ❖ Women's reports of experiencing non-partner sexual violence were almost half that of male reports of perpetration.
- ❖ Only 10% of women said they were forced into sex by an intimate partner, compared to 14% of men who reported forcing their intimate partner to have sex. Women's underreporting may be due to the stigma attached to sexual violence and the taboo of talking openly about conjugal sexual relations.
- ❖ Overall the problem of IPV remained largely underreported by women. The significant levels of suppression by women of their feelings of anger, hurt, vulnerability and insecurity following IPV has an impact on their mental health.
- ❖ Just 13% of women who experienced IPV and 8% of women who experienced non-partner sexual violence reported this violence to the police.
- ❖ Only 32% of female victims of IPV who sought medical aid reported the violence at all and, only 10% of women victims of IPV or non-partner sexual violence told their families about the violence and the trauma they suffered.



IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON WOMEN'S HEALTH

- ❖ Approximately half of all women who experienced physical IPV were injured by their husbands or male partners.
- ❖ Over a quarter of these women had to stay in bed, 16% had to take days off work and 32% had to seek medical attention, because of injuries relating to the physical violence.
- ❖ While violence during pregnancy was rare, women who experienced IPV were more likely to have ever miscarried than women who did not experienced IPV. Similarly, 7% of women who were physically or sexually abused by their male intimate partner had ever had an abortion, in comparison to 0.7% of women who never experienced IPV.
- ❖ Women who were physically or sexually abused by an intimate partner were less likely to use contraception than women who never experienced IPV.
- ❖ Among women who experienced IPV, 25% ever had suicidal thoughts, compared with only 7% of women who never experienced IPV.

WOMEN'S ATTITUDES

- ❖ Women in Sri Lanka also hold gender inequitable attitudes – often more inequitable than men's attitudes – particularly in terms of rape.
- ❖ Sixteen percent of women in Nuwara Eliya displayed low gender-equity in their attitudes, compared to 12% in Hambantota, 11% in Batticaloa and 5% of women in Colombo.
- ❖ Two thirds of the female sample (67%), as opposed to 55% of men also affirmed that 'in any rape case, one would have to question whether the victim is promiscuous or has a bad reputation.'
- ❖ Women's attitudes reflect a deeper acceptance than men of social and cultural attitudes that discriminate against women. For example, 58% of women, compared to 41% of men, believed that a woman should tolerate violence in order keep the family together.
- ❖ Women also maintain hegemonic ideals of masculinity. For example, 42% of women (and 25% of men) declared that 'A real man produces a male child,' while 66% of women (and 58% of men) affirmed that 'It is manly to defend the honour of your family even by violent means.'