



WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women



Country Findings

Bangladesh

1. Introduction

The Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women, sponsored by the World Health Organization, between 2000 and 2003 collected data from over 24 000 women in Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, Japan, Namibia, Peru, Samoa, Serbia and Montenegro, Thailand, and the United Republic of Tanzania. The Study assessed women's experiences of violence using a questionnaire developed and validated for cross-cultural use, with a special focus on violence by intimate partners. It also investigated how such violence is associated with ill-health and injury, and the strategies that women use to cope with the violence.

In Bangladesh, two institutions based in Dhaka participated in the Study: ICDDR,B: Centre for Health and Population Research, and Naripokkho. The Study implementation was funded by the Urban Primary Health Care Project (Government of Bangladesh–Asian Development Bank). Data collection in the field took place in 2001.

2. Methods

In Bangladesh, a cross-sectional survey of women aged 15–49 years was carried out, with 1 603 interviewees in the capital city Dhaka and 1 527 in the rural area Matlab. There was little difference between the two settings in the marital status of respondents; 86% of respondents in Dhaka and 87% in Matlab had ever been married. In Bangladesh, only women who had ever been married were considered "ever-partnered". Respondents, however, differed in educational level: in Matlab 37% of respondents had never attended school, compared to only 18% in Dhaka.

Women were interviewed in private, and counselling services were offered to abused women. In the Study, the following definitions of partner violence were used. *Physical violence* meant the woman had been: slapped, or had something thrown at her; pushed or shoved; hit with a fist or something else that could hurt; kicked, dragged or beaten up; choked or burnt; threatened with or had a weapon used against her. *Sexual violence* meant the woman had: been physically forced to have sexual intercourse; had sexual intercourse because she was afraid of what her partner might do; been forced to do something sexual she found degrading or humiliating.

3. Main findings

3.1 Prevalence of partner violence

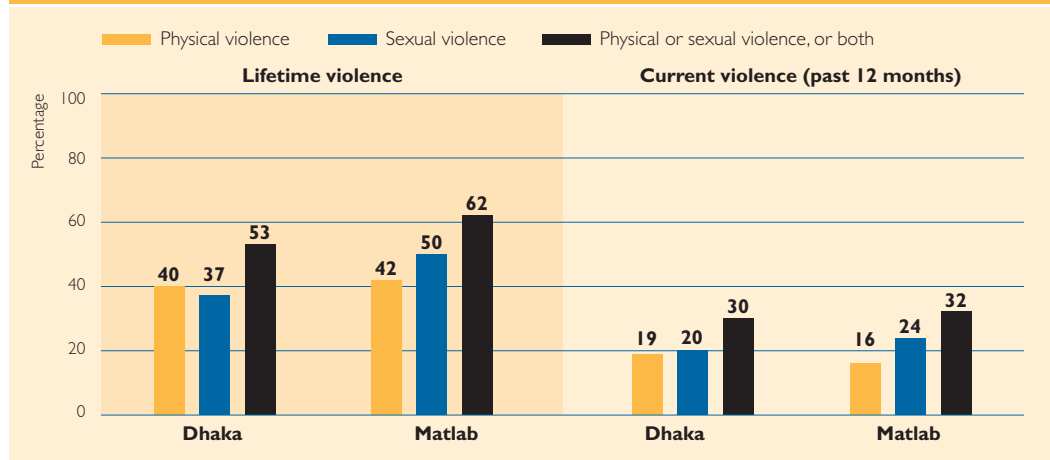
- Among ever-married women, 40% in Dhaka and 42% in Matlab reported physical violence; 37% in Dhaka and 50% in Matlab reported sexual violence by their husband, ever in their lifetime.
- 19% of ever-married women in Dhaka and 16% in Matlab had been physically abused within the past year, while 20% and 24%, respectively, were sexually abused during that period.
- Combining data for physical and sexual violence, 53% of ever-married women in Dhaka and 62% in Matlab had ever experienced physical or sexual violence.

3.2 Injuries inflicted by a partner

- In both sites, one in four women who had experienced physical abuse by a husband reported that they had been injured at least once in their lifetime; a third of them in the past 12 months.



Percentage of women who experienced violence by an intimate partner, among ever-partnered women aged 15–49 years, Bangladesh



- Among women who had been injured, 68% in Dhaka and 80% in Matlab needed health care at least once as a result of their injuries.

3.3 Physical violence by a partner during pregnancy

- 10% of ever-pregnant women in Dhaka and 12% in Matlab were physically abused during at least one pregnancy. Of these, 37% in Dhaka and 25% in Matlab were punched or kicked in the abdomen.
- More than 80% of the women who were beaten during pregnancy had also been beaten by the same person before their pregnancy. Among the women who had been abused before their pregnancy, 12% in Dhaka and 8% in Matlab said the abuse got worse when they were pregnant.

3.4 Non-partner physical and sexual violence since the age of 15 years

- In Dhaka, among all women, 17% reported physical violence and 8% reported sexual violence by perpetrators other than their partners. For Matlab, the corresponding percentages were 11% and 0.5%. In both sites, perpetrators of physical violence were usually relatives. Among the women in Dhaka who reported sexual violence by non-partners 79% said their abusers were strangers.

3.5 Sexual abuse of girls under 15 years of age and forced first sex

- 7% of respondents in Dhaka and 1% in Matlab reported sexual abuse before 15 years of age.
- The younger a woman's age at first sex, the greater the likelihood that her first sexual experience was forced. Of those who had their first sexual experience before 15 years of age, 38% of women in Dhaka and 36% in Matlab said it was forced.

3.6 Impact on women's health of violence by a partner

- 19% of women in Dhaka who experienced physical or sexual violence by a partner and 21% in Matlab reported poor general health, compared to only 13% and 16%, respectively, who never experienced violence.
- In both sites, ever-abused women who had ever been pregnant were almost twice as likely to have had induced abortions.
- In both sites, ever-abused women were three times as likely to have thought of committing suicide than those who had not been abused.

3.7 Help-seeking by women experiencing physical violence by a partner

- In both sites, 66% of women who were physically abused by their husband, never told anyone about the violence. About 18% told their parents, 10% in Dhaka and 12% in Matlab told their neighbours.
- Only 5% of physically abused women in Dhaka and 7% in Matlab ever sought help for the violence. Local leaders were most commonly appealed to (by 2% of abused women in Dhaka and by 6% in Matlab), followed by the police (2% in Dhaka and 1% in Matlab).
- Over half of the women who had experienced physical violence and who had not sought help said they did not seek help because they did not think the violence was very serious, while 31% in Dhaka and 43% in Matlab remained silent because of feelings of shame or because they feared they would not be believed.

For more information, see

<http://www.who.int/gender/violence/en/>

or contact:

Ruchira Tabassum Naved PhD
Gender and Reproductive
Health Specialist,
Public Health Sciences Division,
ICDDR,B: Centre for Health and
Population Research,
Mohakhali,
Dhaka 1212,
Dhaka, Bangladesh
Tel.: +880 2 881 1751–60 (Ext. 2241),
+880 2 881 0021,
Fax: +880 2 882 6050
email: ruchira@icddr.org

Department of Gender,
Women and Health,
World Health Organization,
Avenue Appia 20,
1211 Geneva 27,
Switzerland.
Fax: +41 22 791 1585
email: genderandhealth@who.int