



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



# Country Findings

## Namibia

### 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 Namibia, the President himself has expressed concern about violence against women and child abuse in the country. National responses have included promulgation of the Combat Domestic Violence Act by Parliament in 2003, and the establishment of 13 Women and Child Protection Units throughout the country, which provide medical, social and legal assistance. The Multi-Media Campaign against Violence Against Women and Children is engaged in advocacy, law reform, and community education. Until recently, however, there was little information on the magnitude of domestic violence. To address this gap, Namibia participated in the WHO Study. The research was conducted by the Ministry of Health and Social Services, with coordination by WHO and funding from the Rockefeller Foundation. Data collection in the field took place in 2001.

### 2. Methods

In Namibia, the Study involved individual interviews with 1 500 women aged between 15 and 49 years in the capital, Windhoek. The sample included women from all income groups and each ethnic group in the country. In Namibia, women were considered "ever-partnered" if they had ever been married, ever lived with a man or ever had a regular sexual partner. The questionnaire was available in five local languages, and was administered by trained female interviewers fluent in these languages.

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.

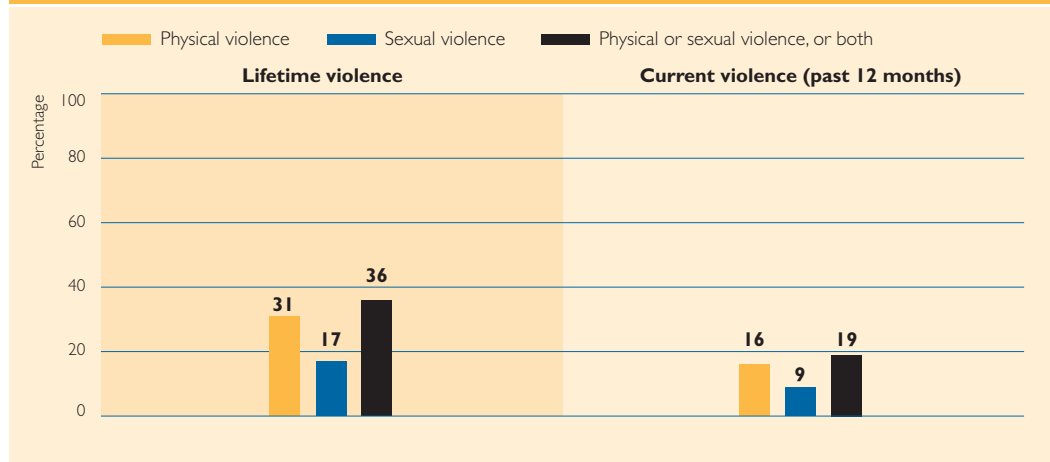
### 3. Main findings

#### 3.1 Prevalence of partner violence

- Over one third (36%) of ever-partnered women reported having at some time experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of an intimate partner; with 31% reporting physical violence and 17% sexual violence.
- 20% of ever-partnered women reported experiencing physical or sexual violence during the past 12 months.



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



### 3.2 Injuries inflicted by a partner

- 31% of the women who experienced physical violence by their partners reported having been injured; among these, 36% reported being injured in the past year. The most common forms of injuries reported included: abrasions and bruising; ear and eye injuries; and cuts, punctures and bites.

### 3.3 Physical violence by a partner during pregnancy

- 6% of the ever-pregnant women interviewed were beaten during at least one pregnancy. Of these women, 49% had been punched or kicked in the abdomen.
- For 27% of the women beaten during pregnancy, the physical violence started when the woman was pregnant. The remaining 73% were also beaten before pregnancy.

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

- 19% of respondents reported that someone other than a partner had been physically violent towards them since the age of 15 years, whereas 6% reported sexual violence by a non-partner. The perpetrators of physical violence included teachers (26% of women reporting such violence), boyfriends (28%), fathers (19%) and female family members (19%). The most commonly mentioned perpetrators of sexual violence were boyfriends (55%).

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

- When interviewed face-to-face, 5% of respondents reported sexual abuse before age 15 years. In anonymous reporting, however, using cards the women marked and put into envelopes themselves, 21% reported sexual abuse before age 15 years.
- About 6% of women reported that their first sexual experience was physically forced. Of those who reported having their first sexual experience before age 15 years, 33% were physically forced.

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

- Women were more likely to report poor general health if they were ever physically or sexually abused by their partner (6% versus 3%). Those suffering physical or sexual abuse had more frequent symptoms such as severe pain, inability to carry out usual activities, dizziness and vaginal discharge.
- Women were more likely to have contemplated suicide if they had ever been physically or sexually abused by their partner than women who were never abused (26% versus 11%).

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

- 21% of physically abused women had not disclosed their experience to anyone, while 35% confided in their parents, 33% in friends and 26% in siblings. Far fewer told police (10%), medical staff (4%), or any other formal service or authority.
- 62% of women physically abused by their partners had never asked any formal agency for help. Only 21% went to the police and 22% visited medical facilities. The main reasons given for seeking help were that they could no longer endure the violence (48% of women who sought help), had been badly injured (36%), or the partner had threatened or tried to kill them (14%).

#### For more information, see

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

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