



WhatWorks

TO PREVENT VIOLENCE

Economic and Social Costs of
Violence Against Women and Girls

ECONOMIC & SOCIAL COSTS OF VAWG

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Violence Against Women & Girls
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Evidence Brief March 2020



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INTRODUCTION

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This evidence brief presents key findings about the impact of VAWG on national economies and society in Ghana, South Sudan and Pakistan. It demonstrates that VAWG causes a drag on economic activity at the level of individuals, families, businesses and national economies. This economic drag is the cost that governments incur by failing to invest in the prevention and prosecution of VAWG and the protection of victims and survivors. Further, VAWG impedes important activities for social reproduction typically performed by women, including caring for others, sustaining relationships and networks, and participating in a wide range of community, social and political activities, and thus impacts on women's empowerment and capabilities.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is widely recognised as a violation of human rights and a challenge to public health. The World Health Organisation has documented the health impacts of VAWG, which imposes a burden of physical injury, reproductive harms, long term chronic injury and deleterious mental health impacts.¹ However, VAWG also has economic and social costs that have not been adequately recognised internationally. These costs not only impact individual women and their families but also ripple through society and the economy at large.

This research contributes to addressing this knowledge gap by exploring the tangible and intangible costs of violence on the individuals, families, communities and businesses in developing countries. This information demonstrates the economic case for investment by government and donors in the prevention of VAWG. In addition to economic impacts, the study demonstrated multiple ways in which VAWG limited women's individual freedoms and removed women from public life.

¹García Moreno and Pallitto 2013. Global and Regional Estimates of Violence Against Women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence WHO: Geneva

RESEARCH

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Recognising the lack of knowledge of the impacts and costs of VAWG, particularly in fragile and developing contexts, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) funded this research project. It investigates the social and economic costs of VAWG in Ghana, Pakistan and South Sudan (2014–2019), as part of the wider What Works to Prevent Violence research and innovation programme. These countries reflect very different cultural, religious, economic and social contexts, as well as different political contexts, including stable, fragile and conflict-affected and were chosen to allow for comparison and contextual analysis.

The study used both quantitative approaches (Ghana, Pakistan and South Sudan) and qualitative approaches (Ghana and Pakistan).² Quantitative data was collected through nationally representative surveys of individual women and households, and with male and female employees and managers in businesses. Qualitative data was collected through focus group discussions (FGD), in-depth individual interviews and key informant interviews. The forms of VAWG explored in this study included intimate partner violence (IPV), violence by other family members, violence in the workplace, educational institutes and in public spaces. In terms of the types of violence, the study was not limited only to physical and sexual violence but also gathered data on experiences of economic and psychological violence.

The study moves beyond conventional approaches to costing. It is not limited to aggregation of individual costs but estimates the overall impact to the macro economy. It further assesses the social impacts of VAWG to wider society.

It is important however to recognise that the estimates of costs in this research are not comprehensive, given the narrow focus on tangible costs. If all the economic and social impacts of VAWG were quantified, the overall loss would be many times the current estimates. The monetary costs outlined here are based only on tangible economic impacts detailed in this brief.

² See for example Asante, F. et al (2019) Economic and Social Costs of Violence Against Women Girls: Country Technical Report. Galway: NUI Galway for further details on survey methodology and cost model



KEY FINDINGS

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VAWG removes productive individuals from the workforce

VAWG leads to absenteeism and presenteeism (where individuals are at work but not productive due to sickness, distraction or distress) among women who experience violence. As a result, businesses are less productive, and individuals lose out on income. This in turn has a knock-on impact on the economy.

According to our surveys with women in their homes, the national loss in productivity in Ghana through missing work and/or being less productive at work due to VAWG was approximately 64 million days annually, **equivalent to 4.5% of all employed women in effect not working**.

In South Sudan, this amounted to 8.5 million lost days of work in the past year or **equivalent to 6% of the total employed women not working** in the regions of South Sudan covered in this study. Where economic models promote full employment, this study demonstrates precisely how VAWG removes women from the workforce and affects productivity.

“A woman [who is abused by her husband] will not be able to focus on her work, so her income level will reduce. If you are working for someone, and you always have a divided attention, you will not be able to meet your set target”

– Focus group urban, women-youth, Ghana

VAWG affects the bottom line of businesses

Businesses lose out on hours and days of labour due to the productivity impact of VAWG on employees. **One in seven female employees** in the businesses surveyed in Pakistan reported productivity loss as a result of IPV. Among these female employees, the **average productivity loss was equivalent to missing 17 days of work in the last year**. In South Sudan, **just over one in four (28%) of female employees reported productivity loss due to IPV, equivalent to an average of 10 days in the previous 12 months**. In addition, **45% of female employees in South Sudan reported non-partner sexual violence in the past year, with about half of these reporting productivity loss equivalent to an average of 9 days due to the NPSV experience**. These figures show very clearly that VAWG is a workplace issue, which needs to be addressed by business leaders.

Households also experience loss of income due to members missing paid work.

Households across Ghana lost nearly US\$286m annually in income loss due to VAWG in the last year; in Pakistan the equivalent figure was nearly US\$146m. Such losses can put working families at risk of poverty (see below), and they also undermine the consumer economy by drawing money out of the local economy.

VAWG increases the risk of household poverty

Many women who experience VAWG bear increased costs due to violence, for example for medical care. These expenses can tip precarious households into deepening poverty. In South Sudan, where 82% of the population live on less than US\$1.90 per day³, **women who sought services due to VAWG incurred, an average of US\$21.30 per survivor** in out of pocket expenses annually. In the case of Pakistan, women survivors of violence who accessed services incurred **US\$52 on average annually in out-of-pocket expenditure** for medical, legal, shelter and replacement of property expenses. **This is equivalent to approximately 19% of the per capita annual expenditure on non-food consumption in Pakistan**. In Ghana, women experiencing VAWG spent on average US\$53, or **12% of annual non-food household consumption**, as a result of the violence.

“...I was speaking to a woman about this yesterday, and she said when her husband gets angry at her, he just destroys things that belong to her... when she came back he had disconnected the light and spoilt her kettle...”

– Rural in-depth interview, female, Ghana

VAWG results in intergenerational impacts

It is well established that exposure to VAWG has a profound and lasting effect on children’s health and that it can cause trauma. Less information is available about the impact that VAWG has on the education and skills of children.⁴ It is estimated that **2.4 million school days were missed by children per year in Pakistan, and 300,000 days were missed by children in Ghana**, due to their mothers’ experience of violence. This missed schooling has long-term impacts on capabilities and future earnings of children of women who experience violence, which impacts long-term economic security of the household

VAWG has knock-on impact on the overall economy

The losses at the individual, household and business sector have a knock-on impact on the overall economy. Using the Social Accounting Matrix (SAM), which provides a snapshot of the interlinkages between production sectors, households, and the government, the study explores how missed work at the household level translates into a multiplier loss for the overall economy.

In the case of Ghana, the analysis using the SAM highlights that for every \$100 of lost income due to VAWG for households there is an additional loss of \$57 to the economy through interactions of demand between productive sectors. Overall the **total loss from the days of absenteeism comes to 0.94% of Ghana’s GDP in 2017**, which is a permanent, invisible, loss to the macro economy. Projections of this yearly loss translates into **cumulative loss that is more than 14% of GDP in the 14 years from 2010 to 2024**.

“My children and I remain upset because of my husband’s aggressive attitude. It negatively impacts children, as they get scared. We all live in an environment of fear. Because of this, children think of killing themselves either by taking poison or by car accident.”

– Rural IDI, Pakistan

VAWG impacts on women’s agency

Drawing from the qualitative data, many women said that the most significant effects of violence were on their agency or individual freedom. In particular, many women described how their working lives were considered a threat, and so they withdrew from workplace activities or even left their jobs as a way of trying to manage the risk of violence. Other women modified their activities in the home, for instance by staying out of sight and being confined to a single room, due to the risk of violence.

³ Figure based on 2016 data using the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) poverty line. From, World Bank. 2019. The World Bank in South Sudan. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/southsudan/overview>

⁴ Assaad, R., Friedemann-Sánchez, G. and Levison, D. 2017. “Impact of domestic violence on children’s education in Colombia: methodological challenges” Violence Against Women 23(12)

'I used to make chapattis (bread) to earn. Husband did not like it and often get annoyed. Due to this I stopped doing that. When I was earning, I have money to spend by my choice and I could buy a few little things for children and myself. Now I cannot do this which is a problem'

– Rural IDI, Pakistan

One woman who experienced IPV did not disclose or seek help for the violence she experienced in order to be able to maintain her leadership role. Still others identified how they had to withdraw from groups or social spaces out of anticipation of the negative reactions of others or in an attempt to manage risk of further violence.

Stigma related to VAWG limits women's ability to negotiate safety

Women's individual testimonies in interviews and focus group discussions in all three countries demonstrated a strong social stigma against victims-survivors of VAWG, and especially against speaking publicly about VAWG. This made it difficult to seek support to overcome the impacts of violence.

VAWG undermines women's empowerment and leadership

These impacts also threatened or limited the potential for women's. In Ghana, a number of participants said that women who experienced violence would be seen as unfit for leadership roles.

'If for instance she was a fellowship leader in the church or community, it will not give her the moral right to advice people and she will feel that she has failed at home and so she is not in the position of giving any form of advice...'

– Rural In-Depth Interview, Ghana



RECOMMENDATIONS

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1 Integrate knowledge of the costs of VAWG in social and economic policy-making

Newly developed methodologies for costing and budgeting can be used to give greater clarity on the real costs to governments and businesses of inaction on violence against women and girls. These approaches provide concrete evidence on the benefit for society of investing in the elimination of VAWG wherever it occurs. They can unlock the necessary political will to act against VAWG. By using the economic tools developed through this research, advocates can demonstrate that the prevention of and response to VAW are neither luxuries nor unaffordable, and further demonstrate that expenditure on prevention and response is a sound economic investment.



2 Governments in particular need to scale up prevention efforts to reach the SDG 5.2 2030 target of eliminating all forms of VAWG

Government, through its agencies at the national and local levels, should invest in violence prevention and provide dedicated resources in annual budgets. The costs associated with violence are enormous and its prevention is more cost-effective to implement than taking remedial measures after the violence has occurred. This is not to overlook the importance of putting in place laws and institutions to prosecute perpetrators and ensure justice for survivors.



3 Businesses should expand investment in prevention of VAWG.

The evidence indicates the burden that violence places on women employees, and indirectly on businesses, thus highlighting the importance of prevention efforts. Employers and business associations should integrate evidence-based prevention models, such as those evaluated through the What Works to Prevent Violence programme.



4 Stakeholders should strengthen internal systems to ensure provision of support to those experiencing VAWG

All institutions, including academic, religious, non-governmental, governmental, and the private sector, in both the Global North and Global South, have a role to play in combating VAWG. A key recommendation is that institutional policies are reviewed to ensure that adequate recognition of the impact of VAWG on employees is given within these policies. This may include, but is not limited to, revisions to leave policies for those who experience VAWG. Institutions should provide internal supports as well as connecting survivors to community services as recommended by the ILO Convention 190 on Eliminating Violence and Harassment in the World of Work.

VAWG is preventable

Violence against women and girls devastates lives, societies and economies. The good news is that evidence shows it can be prevented within programmatic timeframes. Interventions funded by the What Works to Prevent Violence programme have shown that it is possible to reduce VAWG by up to 50%. The programme has identified cost effective interventions, which will require adaptation in different contexts. While further work is necessary to prove that these interventions can work at scale, the evidence is there to begin eliminating VAWG. The necessary information of specific interventions and evaluations outcomes are available at www.whatworks.co.za and provide the basis for targeting investment to eliminate VAWG.

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<https://whatworks.co.za/>

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