Confronting domestic violence in the land of happiness: Measuring violence against women and girls in Bhutan

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Country Context

Total area: 38394 sq. km

Total population: 735553 (M-349708, F-385845) as of 2017

Language: Dzongkha

GDP per capita: Nu. 223,815.18 (or USD 3438.16) in 2017

Development Philosophy: Gross National Happiness
Background on VAW

• GBV against women and girls is one of the key gender issues existing in the country
• Limited data on the prevalence of violence against women and girls
• A study on violence against women carried out in 2012 (sample size of 539)
• Efforts made to collect administrative data by various agencies
• A national level study on prevalence of VAW/G is much-needed to enable evidence planning and programming
Survey Methodology

• First nation-wide survey of this kind in Bhutan

• World Health Organization (WHO) methodology – gold standard, using quantitative and qualitative research methods

• In the survey: interview 2200 women aged 15-64, representing women in the entire country
FINDINGS - Types and patterns of intimate partner violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violence Type</th>
<th>Percentage (%) of Ever-Partnered Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical violence</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual violence</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical and/or sexual violence</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling behaviours</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional abuse</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic abuse</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any form of violence</td>
<td>44.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Lifetime
- Current (last 12 months)

Psychological violence
Overlap of different forms of partner violence

Combination of lifetime physical, sexual and/or emotional violence by husbands/partners

22.0% of ever-partnered women reported either sexual violence alone, physical violence alone, emotional violence alone or a combination of the three types of violence.
Attitudes towards gender equality

"A good wife obeys her husband even if she disagrees"  35,2  28,9
"There is gender equality in Bhutan"  65,1  61,3
"A man should show he is the boss"  14,4  17,1
"Women are 9 births lower than men"  42,7  52,8

- No partner violence
- Physical and/or sexual partner violence
Impact of partner violence

Physical Injury: More than a quarter of women experienced injury as a result of partner violence (27.2%).

Mental Health: 4.5% of women interviewed (n: 298) suffered severe distress.

“I suffered from depression. Now I have become very forgetful because he used to hit on my head. He made me black and blue and my eyes would swell. See—one of my eyes is watering even now. I am happy I divorced.”

In-depth interview with a survivor of partner violence.
Coping with violence

Women who experienced physical and/or sexual partner violence (N=298)

Tell no one 41%
Tell someone 59%

“I never told anyone. Because I thought that was a common problem in every marriage and why to air out our dirty laundry in public. I suffered from bruises all over my body and I still kept quiet”.

Key informant interview

Percentage of women who sought help from agencies/persons in authority among women who experienced physical and/or sexual partner violence, Bhutan 2017 (N=298)

Not ever gone anywhere for help
- Police: 11,0
- Hospital or health centre: 8,7
- Court: 7,7
- Local leader: 7,3
- Women's organization: 4,5
- Legal advice centre: 2,8
- Anywhere else: 2,2
- Shelter: 0,5
- Social services: 0,2
- Religious leader: 0,0
“I feel like it is my fault if the children suffer. If we talk to friends then it becomes social issue and then people start gossiping about us....

As a mother we should take full responsibility of the children because we brought them into this world.”

- Focus group discussion
Policy implications

• **Importance of understanding from the data**…
  - that violence against women is common, but that it is a hidden problem
  - … that majority of women are reluctant to seek help, and often only do so when the situation is very serious
  - … that many women even if they seek help from social services may not (easily) disclose that they are living in a situation with intimate partner violence
  - … that most women want violence to stop but not to have the partner arrested
  - … that safety of the woman seeking help should be central to any action taken

• **Improve services to women and families**
  - Expand the provision of inclusive services and facilities
  - Develop standard operating procedures, including training frontline workers in the health sector, law enforcement, education system, etc.
  - Economic support and free legal aid to give women options
  - Interventions to reduce the harmful use of alcohol
Vision

“A happy nation where children, women and men live in harmony with equality and respect in all spheres of life”
THANK YOU !