



Fast Facts of the Women's Wellbeing Survey 2019

Sri Lanka National Survey on Violence Against Women

The survey is the first ever dedicated survey on the prevalence of violence against women and girls conducted in all 25 districts. The Survey was conducted on all women above 15 years of age with a focus on intimate partner violence (IPV). IPV is defined as physical, sexual, economic, emotional or other forms of harm perpetrated by a current or former partner or spouse.

“ I didn't think I'd survive. After all that I had been through, and what he was doing to me, I didn't see the light at the end of the tunnel. I didn't think there was any light left at all.



1 in 5 (20.4%) ever-partnered women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime.

The overlap of violence indicates that most women who have experienced physical violence has also experienced sexual violence.



2 in 5 (39.8%) women have experienced physical, sexual, emotional, and/or economic violence and/or controlling behaviours by a partner in their lifetime.

The most common form of reported violence is controlling behaviour (19.1%)

which reflects the lack of agency women have to take decisions regarding their lives.



Physical violence is the second most common form of violence (18.9%)

women experienced within their lifetime of which, the estate sector indicated the highest proportion of violence at 1 in 3 women (37.9%)

1 in 5 (18.1%)

women have experienced economic abuse by a partner in their lifetime.

Measurements were based on the partner taking her earnings; refusing to provide money for household expenditure even when he had the money; prohibiting her from income generating activities.

The survey reveals that women in Sri Lanka are

more than twice

as likely to have experienced physical violence by a partner (17.4% of all women experienced this in their lifetime) than by a non-partner.

1 in 4 (24.9%)

have experienced physical and/or sexual violence since age 15 by a partner or non-partner.

Women do not like to disclose violence in fear of social pressure, stigma and not wanting to disrupt the family / home relationships. They find ways to cope to protect their children and try to resolve the issue among themselves before reaching formal services of help.

The survey indicated the women who sought help did so as they could no longer endure the violence.



Due to COVID-19, I have seen a rapid rise in the number of gender-based violence cases. The most common complaint is of sexual abuse by intimate partners, as most women couldn't escape from the four walls of their home due to curfew/lockdown measures. If a woman resisted the sexual abuse, she also had to endure physical violence, transforming the safe haven of her own home into their personal hell.

- Counsellor

Close to half (49.3%) of the women who experienced sexual violence by a partner did not seek formal help anywhere.

From the women who sought help from formal services

just over one third (37.3%)



went to the police and around one fifth (21.6%) sought help from hospitals and health care centres.

Most women did not seek help as they did not know of available services,

and feared they would not be believed; be blamed for the violence; shamed and embarrassed; and most importantly be told that it is normal and not a grave violation.



1 in 5 (21.4%)

women who experienced sexual violence by a partner told no one about it before being interviewed in this survey indicating the shame they feel within themselves to disclose violence.

More than half the women who faced violence 52.3% stated the

main reason for not leaving home was they did not want to leave their children.



I met a woman once who had been married for 10 years, and within those years, she had faced it all. She had been raped by her husband, she had been thrown into a well, she had been forced to abort against her own will, twice! She wasn't allowed to interact with any friends or family, and she even had to look after another woman her husband had impregnated during his many affairs. Despite all of this, this 35-year-old woman, had suffered in silence for an entire decade.

- Counsellor



Violence against women and girls are driven by societal norms and attitudes that inhibit women from disclosure.

“

I received a call from a woman who, in a moment of vulnerability, admitted that her husband had burnt her. But, once I reached the hospital to check on her, she had already been pressured to say that she had accidentally got burnt while doing a 'puja' (prayer), and she returned home – back to her place of abuse.

- Services Coordinator

When these beliefs are not disrupted they nurture harmful behaviour patterns within societies making it acceptable for men and boys to abuse their partners.

Almost half of all women interviewed agree that

“a man should show he is the boss”
(47.5%)

and almost half agree that

“a good wife obeys her husband even if she disagrees”
(46.5%)

2 in 5 (39.5%)
women agree with the statement that

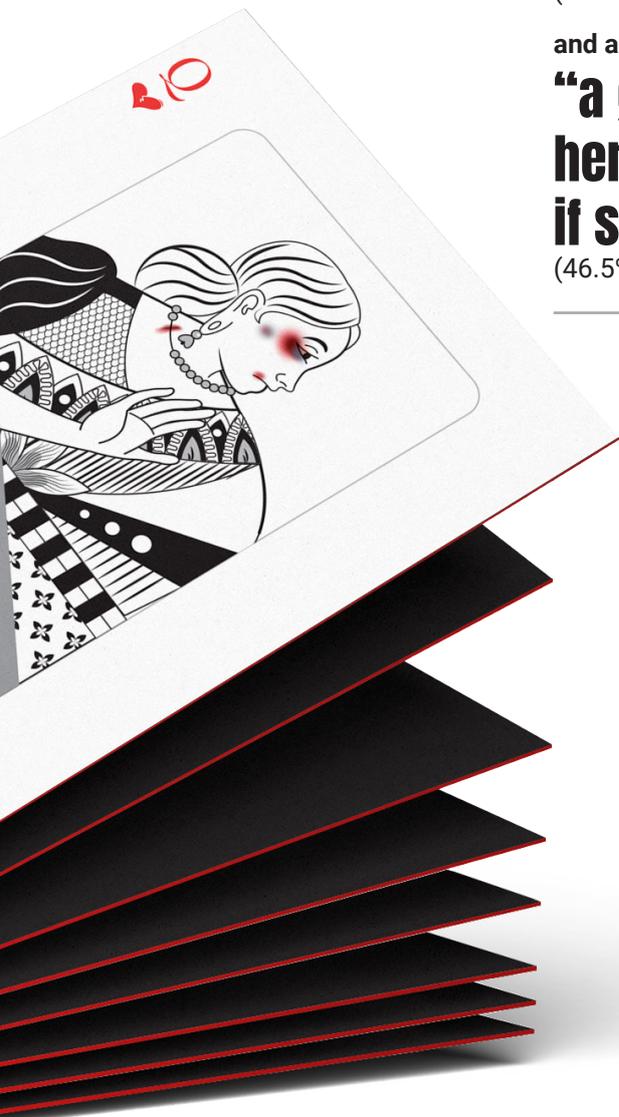
“women are obliged to have sex with their husbands when she does not feel like it.”

Attitudes varied significantly with age and the level of educational attainment

with younger women and women with higher education being far less likely to agree with all three statements compared to older and less educated women.

Over one third

(35.3%) of women agreed that men can have a good reason to hit their wife while 60.4% did not agree.



The consequences of violence towards women and girls have long term impacts both physically and mentally.

It affects their wellbeing and productivity especially with regards to their mental health and personal development.



One woman who had suffered physical and sexual violence at the hands of her husband for a decade finally made the call once the curfew lifted. She visited me at the Anuradhaura branch and was later moved to a secure location while the case against her husband was ongoing. I still remember the fear in her voice over her husband's death threats, which had led to her assuming that her only escape was suicide. She is now recovering and more importantly, safe.

- Counsellor

More than one third

(35.7%)



of women who experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a partner

had thoughts of committing suicide

compared to 6.8% of women who never experienced it.

Impacts on mental health are high with emotional distress

reported at much higher rates by women who experienced violence compared with women who did not.



Nearly

1 in 10

(9.2%) reported they were unable to concentrate at work, and 6.9% reported they were unable to work at all.

A quarter

(25.4%)

of women

who had experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a partner

have had an unwanted pregnancy

(or wanted the pregnancy later) compared to 10.7% of women who have never experienced violence

Women who had to take time off work reported

taking an average of 18 days off



Partner violence can have negative implications on children.

Violence is a learned behaviour and children in households where there is violence will believe it is inevitable and normalize the behaviour and take it to their future relationships.



One case brought to my attention by the child rights protection officer was a close call. He had heard the screams for help from a 14-year-old boy witnessing his mother preparing to hang herself. I even counseled 6 families where abuse was a daily practice. There is a need to communicate with children so they in turn don't resort to violence.

- Out Patient Doctor



More women with school age children and experiences of a violent partner reported **their child(ren) had nightmares** (21.2%) than women who never experienced violence.



Women who experienced partner violence were also **more likely to have a child drop out of school** (4.5%) compared with women who never experienced violence.

More than 60% of women who experienced partner physical violence and with school age children said that their

children witnessed or overheard the violence.

More than a quarter

(27.4%) of women with a violent partner had a mother who was hit by her husband compared to 14.5% of women who have not had a violent partner.

A higher percentage

of women who experienced partner violence reported that **their partner's mother was hit** (23.0%) and that **their partner was hit as a child** (14.7%) when compared to women who have not experienced partner violence.

If you or anyone you know is facing any form of violence please don't be in denial.



The national helpline: 1938
Women in Need hotline: 077 5 67 65 55



To access the full survey visit:
<https://bit.ly/WWS-19>



