

The Nabilan Health and Life Experiences Study

FACT SHEET 3. WOMEN AND MEN'S EXPERIENCES OF CHILD ABUSE AND TRAUMA IN TIMOR-LESTE

Updated March 2016

Child abuse and violence against women are both global and endemic public health and human rights issues. In Asia and the Pacific, population-based data show that violence against women and child abuse are pervasive¹, although robust statistical data on child abuse across the region is weak and under-prioritized. The Nabilan Health and Life Experiences Study aimed to produce national data on the prevalence, and consequences, of different forms of violence against women, as well as data on child abuse and neglect. The data will inform programs and policies, and enable monitoring of progress towards the elimination of violence against women and children in Timor-Leste.

The nationally-representative women's survey was conducted with 1,426 randomly selected women. The men's perpetration survey was carried out with a total of 839 randomly selected men in two district-representative samples. For more details on the methodology see Fact Sheet 1.

As all respondents were adults, rates of childhood trauma were measured by asking respondents a series of behavior-specific questions about experiences they may have had before the age of 18 years. These questions related to acts that constitute physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse or neglect, and hardship (see Box 1 for definitions of the different forms of child abuse and trauma).

KEY FINDINGS

Childhood physical and sexual abuse are significant issues in Timor-Leste

- Approximately 3 in 4 women and men surveyed (72% of all women and 77-78% of men) reported that they experienced some form of physical or sexual abuse as a child.
- Approximately 7 in 10 (78% of all women and 71% of all men surveyed) reported that they experienced emotional abuse or neglect as a child.
- Approximately 2 in 3 women (67%) and men (59-62%) surveyed said that they did not have enough food to eat during their childhood.

Box 1: Definitions of child abuse and trauma

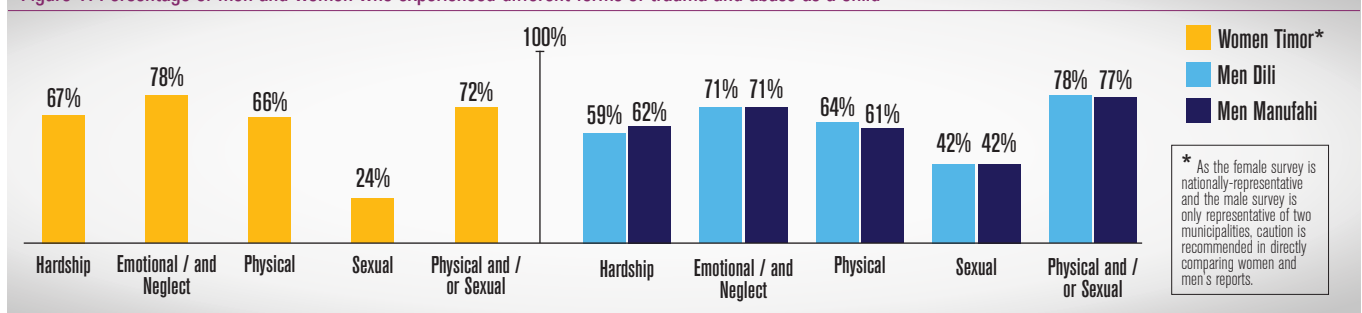
Physical abuse means that before the age of 18, the individual had been beaten at home with something hard such as a belt or stick, or was beaten at home so hard that it left a bruise or mark.

Sexual abuse means that before the age of 18, the individual had been sexually touched when they did not want it, or had sexual intercourse with someone because they were threatened or frightened or forced to do so. Given the particular taboos and shame around child sexual abuse, respondents were also asked using an anonymous reporting method if someone had ever touched them sexually, or made them do something sexual that they didn't want to.

Emotional abuse and neglect means that before the age of 18, the individual lived in multiple households; their parents were too drunk or drugged to take care of them; they spent time away from home when no adults knew where they were; or they were insulted, humiliated, or told they were lazy or stupid.

Hardship means that before the age of 18, the respondent did not have enough food to eat.

Figure 1: Percentage of men and women who experienced different forms of trauma and abuse as a child



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¹ Fulu et al., 2013. Why do some men use violence and how can we prevent it? Bangkok: UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women, UNV.

Child abuse has serious implications for women and men in Timor-Leste

Figure 2: Implications of childhood experiences of abuse for women and men



1 in 2 women and **1 in 3** men reported that, as children, they witnessed their mother being abused.

Men who experienced physical or sexual abuse as a child were nearly **3 times** more likely to have used drugs in the past 12 months.

Child abuse and mental health

- Child abuse and neglect has a significant impact on health and wellbeing, with the effects appearing to last late into adulthood.
- Women who experienced physical or sexual abuse as a child were nearly twice as likely to have current depression, and nearly 5 times more likely to have had thoughts of suicide in their lifetime, compared with women who had not experienced such child abuse.
- Men who experienced physical or sexual abuse as a child were more than twice as likely have current depression, and more than 3 times as likely to have had suicidal thoughts.

Child abuse and men's substance abuse

- Men who experienced physical or sexual abuse as a child were nearly 3 times more likely to have used drugs in the past 12 months compared with men who had not experienced such child abuse.

Child abuse and other experiences of violence

- Experiencing physical or sexual abuse as a child has serious consequences for women and men's experiences of violence later in life.
- Overall, 1 in 2 (49%) women and 1 in 3 (36%) men witnessed their mother being abused during childhood. Women and men who witnessed their mother being abused or experienced child abuse themselves were significantly more likely to experience or perpetrate intimate partner violence in adulthood.
- Men who experienced physical or sexual abuse as a child were significantly more likely to have been involved in violence outside the home, specifically in fights with weapons and involved with gangs.

Moving forward: The Nabilan Program and preventing violence against women

The findings of the *Nabilan* Health and Life Experiences Baseline Study show that rates of child abuse and neglect are extremely high in Timor-Leste, with significant long term consequences for individual men and women's health and social problems. The high rates of physical abuse suggest that physical discipline of children is highly normalized in Timorese society. The fact that men's experiences of child abuse are associated with use of violence outside the home and violence against a female intimate partner suggest that violence is, in part, socially learned. Work to shift such social norms is vital, and the results of this study on the long-term impacts of child abuse highlight the need for concerted and coordinated efforts in Timor-Leste to end violence against children.

The association between violence against women and violence against children suggests that they should be addressed in an integrated way, as much as possible. In particular, the data points to a cycle of abuse, with child abuse contributing to violence against women. We need to break the cycle at multiple points – by ending both child abuse and violence against women, while also improving positive parenting and non-violent teaching practices. An issue of this scale needs to be addressed by all sectors of society. Together, we can stop violence before it starts.

For more information on the *Nabilan* program or the Study methodologies, please contact:

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