



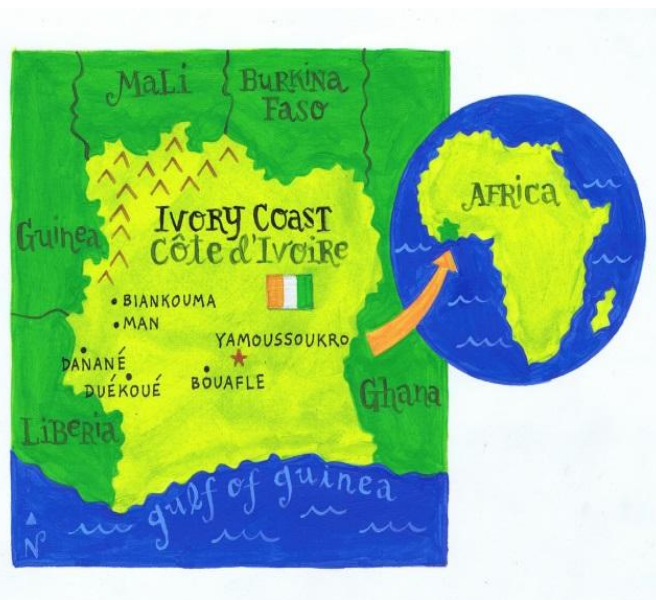
## RESEARCH BRIEF

# Violence against women in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire: An Urban Post-Crisis Environment

Nearly 60% of women living in rural villages in Cote d'Ivoire report experiencing physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence (IPV) at some point in their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> The Ivorian government, along with the broader humanitarian community, has recognized intimate partner violence as a pervasive threat to women and girls' wellbeing and as an impediment to peace-building in this conflict-affected country.<sup>2</sup>

While there is a small, but growing body of evidence that has identified the drivers and consequences of intimate partner violence in humanitarian emergencies, there is relatively minimal knowledge about such violence against women in urban settings impacted by crises. Environments like Abidjan, the most populous city in Côte d'Ivoire, are often typified by over-population, income inequality and low social capital<sup>3</sup> which may contribute to increased risks of intimate partner violence. These risks may be compounded for internally displaced women who flee from rural villages to urban settings, where they may face a lack of access to livelihoods, discrimination, and loss of protective social networks.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of intimate partner violence in Abidjan, as well as explore how IPV programming in rural areas can be adapted to urban environments to reduce intimate partner violence, the International Rescue Committee and Yale School of Public Health implemented a research study. This study used quantitative data from 80 women residing in four neighborhoods affected by political violence in Abidjan. The research team also led 10 focus group discussions with men and women who either resided in Abidjan during the widespread crises or were internally displaced from their rural village.



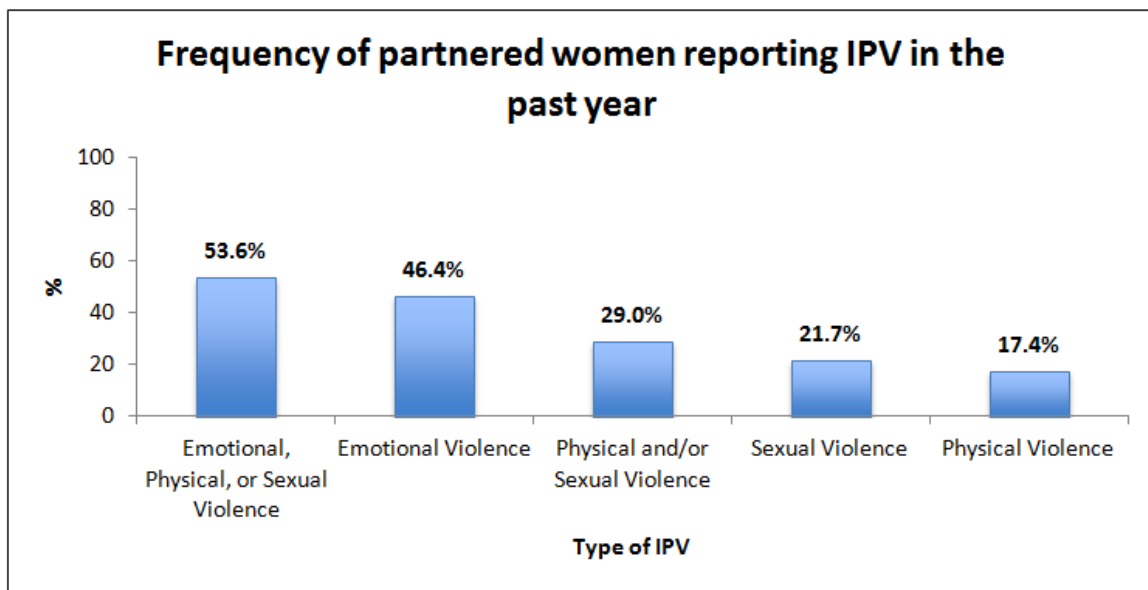
<sup>1</sup> Gupta, J., Falb, K. L., Lehmann, H., Kpebo, D., Xuan, Z., Hossain, M.,..., Annan, J. (2013). Gender norms and economic empowerment intervention to reduce intimate partner violence against women in rural Cote d'Ivoire: a randomized controlled pilot study. *BMC Int Health Hum Rights*, 13, 46. doi: 10.1186/1472-698X-13-46

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of the Family, W., and Social Affairs. (2008). *National Action Plan for Resolution 1325/2000 of the Security Council (2008-2012) Background Document*. Abidjan, Republic of Cote D'Ivoire: Republic of Cote D'Ivoire Retrieved from [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/wps/nap1325\\_cote\\_d\\_ivoire.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/wps/nap1325_cote_d_ivoire.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Grunewald, F. (2012). Aid in a city at war: the case of Mogadishu, Somalia. *Disasters*, 36 Suppl 1, S105-125. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-7717.2012.01287.x

## Key Findings

- Post-electoral violence in Côte d'Ivoire resulted in widespread economic and social hardship for residents of the Abobo neighborhood.
- The conflict also caused internal displacement. Internally displaced persons were particularly vulnerable to economic and social difficulties as a result of their displacement and reported experiencing discrimination and social exclusion.
- Nearly three out of ten women reported experiencing physical or sexual violence in the past year.



- Focus group participants discussed the physical and emotional health and social repercussions of experiencing IPV. These included salary loss, food insecurity, stress, social stigma, isolation, and shame.
- Among women experiencing IPV, approximately 27% asked for help from an informal source and 8% sought formal help. Focus group respondents highlighted a lack of resources and social support as barriers to help-seeking.
- Food insecurity, challenges to traditional gender roles, the urban environment (such as housing insecurity and costs) and discrimination (especially for IDPs) were also commonly mentioned as contributing to a conducive context for IPV and a barrier to having access to support.

## Recommendations

**It is critical to recognize the interplay between different forms of violence within intimate partner relationships;** it is highly unlikely that a woman will only experience one form, and the use of economic and emotional violence against her may be less visible than physical violence. The different forms of violence interact to shape women's lives within their intimate relationships and women may constrain their own behaviors in order to try to manage other potential types of violence. Response services and interventions need to work holistically around women's needs and experiences and be designed to address all aspects of violence.

**Programmatic interventions and design should take into account the barriers and consequences that survivors may face following disclosure to informal networks,** including the high likelihood that a survivor will be held responsible for the violence and/or be advised to return to her partner. Attention should be paid to creating an environment where women feel safe and supported to disclose, and to strengthening relationships between women to increase peer support. Confidentiality and solidarity should also be stressed.

**Programs focused on economic empowerment for women should recognize the potential for increased violence against women, including economic violence, and thus build in elements to mitigate this risk.** Economic disadvantage strongly reinforces women's dependence on men and their vulnerability to IPV, and there are critical issues of control and decision-making around money and other resources within intimate relationships. While women welcome opportunities to have more control over resources, men are more ambivalent, recognizing that their authority and control over women may be diminished. Mitigation strategies may include elements like the group discussions, for example, which support women's control over resources without inadvertently colluding with inequitable gendered dynamics.

**Economic programming should not be designed as a stand-alone intervention;** all programs intending to increase women's access to and control over resources should be linked to quality response services in recognition first that it is likely that women participating will have experiences of violence in their intimate relationships; second that changes in women's economic status can be a factor in raising the risks of violence against them; and third, that when women are together in groups and building relationships, there is an increased likelihood of disclosure.