

# The burden of physical gender based violence in Uganda

## Executive Statement

*This brief uses the 2016 UDHS survey to shed light on factors that perpetuate physical gender based violence (GBV). Results of the survey reveal that much of the physical violence is predominantly perpetuated by intimate partners. Women with low education and income are more vulnerable to physical violence in intimate relationships. At the same time, the presence of dependents within the household increases the likelihood of physical violence. We recommend economic empowerment for women through education and skill training in order to address the impacts of physical violence.*

## Introduction

There are many forms of Gender-based violence (GBV), including emotional, sexual and physical violence. The most dominant form of GBV in Uganda is physical violence (PV). According to 2016 Uganda Demographic and Health survey (UDHS) half of the women and women age 15–49 have ever experienced some form of physical violence since the age of 15.<sup>1</sup> Physical violence is said to have occurred if someone suffers bodily harm as a result of the application of unlawful physical force. It also involves denial of physical needs or threat of physical abuse. It includes actions like beating, hitting, slapping, kicking, pinching, pushing, burning, strangling or punching. At its extreme end, physical violence can lead to fatal injuries or even death. Whereas both males and females can experience PV, girls and women are more vulnerable. This vulnerability arises if one category of people are attributed an unequal status in relation to other categories of people. In the family setting for instance, men are attributed a higher status than their spouses, which makes the former to exhibit a controlling behavior over the latter. This controlling behavior experienced by women explains why married women experience physical violence more than those who are not.

PV is not only costly to the victim but also to the family, community and the country at large. To an individual, PV is associated with a range of long-term health problems including broken bones, eye defects, gynecological problems, etc. In the family context, PV affects the relationship between the abuser and the non-abusing parent and children. The effect is worse on children as it can affect their development, which eventually affects their education and ability to relate with others. It is also reported that some habits like bed-wetting are attributed to PV in homes.<sup>2</sup> Often, women have had to leave their homes as a way of protecting children from the effects of violence. Children who feel physically abused flee their homes to streets, hence being a burden to the community.

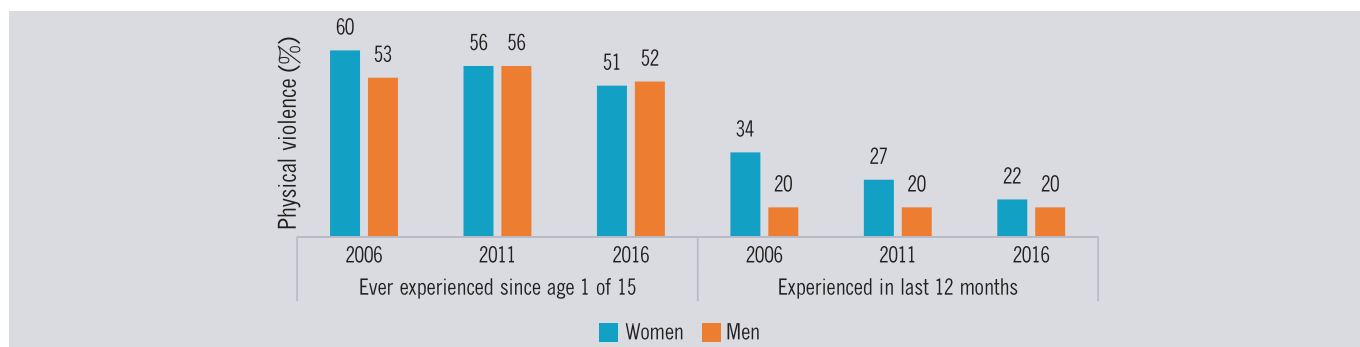
The cost of PV to a nation is in terms of social responsibility of having to look after children who fled their homes due to abuse. Government also incurs a cost of having to treat the injuries suffered by victims of PV. In some countries, the violence is estimated to cost 3.7% of their gross domestic product (GDP) - more than double what most governments spend on education (WHO, 2014). By and large, PV has both short- and long-term negative effects that merit special attention. In this brief, we explore the factors that drive/facilitate/perpetuate PV and recommend possible solutions to eradicate PV. This is important as it will enable policy makers to know areas where interventions can be directed.

This brief is based on the findings of UDHS 2016 and syntheses on physical violence undertaken by gender experts. It's an expansion of the presentation made during the first Annual Gender Statistics Forum held in 2017 at the Imperial Royale Hotel, Kampala by Ms. Tina Musuya, the Executive Director for the Center for Domestic Violence Prevention (CEDOVIP).

## Trend in experience of physical violence by gender

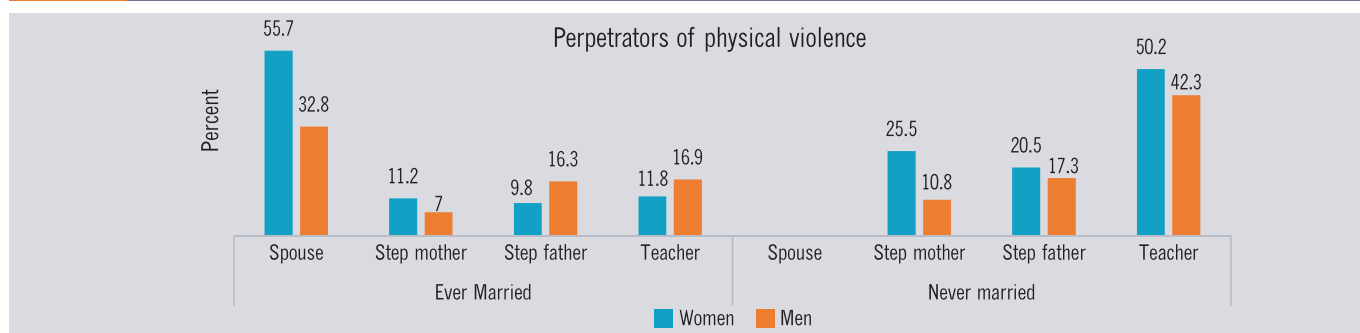
According to 2016 UDHS results, about 51% of women and 52% of men have experienced physical violence since the age of 15 years (Figure 1). About 22% of women and 20% of men experienced physical violence in the 12 months preceding the 2016 UDHS. The figure also shows that the proportion of women who ever experienced physical violence since the age of 15 years has declined from 60% in 2006 to the current 51%. For men, the proportion has been fluctuating in the same period between 56% and 52%. Regarding PV in the 12 months preceding the survey, there was a declining trend for women from 34% in 2007 to 22% in 2016, while the trend for men has not changed for over 10 years. These figures show that the battle of dealing with gender-based violence (GBV) especially among women is on course. However, the percentages are still alarming compared to the global average of 35% (WHO, 2014).<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1** Trend of physical violence experienced by men and women



Source: UDHS 2016

**Figure 2** Perpetrators of physical violence



### Who perpetrates physical violence?

Most cases of PV are a result of infliction by either spouses or teachers (for the non-marrieds). Figure 2 shows that nearly 60% of the ever married women have experienced PV. This is not different from World Bank’s findings that much of the PV that women experience is intimate partner violence. A substantial proportion of men (32.8%) also reported having experienced spousal violence. For those who never or not yet married, physical violence is perpetrated mostly by teachers, implying that schools expose learners to PV. About 50% and 42% of unmarried women and men respectively reported having ever experienced PV from their teachers.

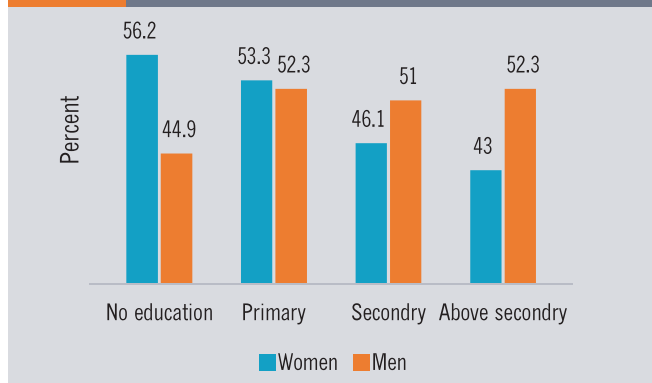
PV among married partners (spousal violence) arises due to unequal levels of education, high dependence (having many children) and poverty.

### Low education attainment and large gaps in couple’s level of education

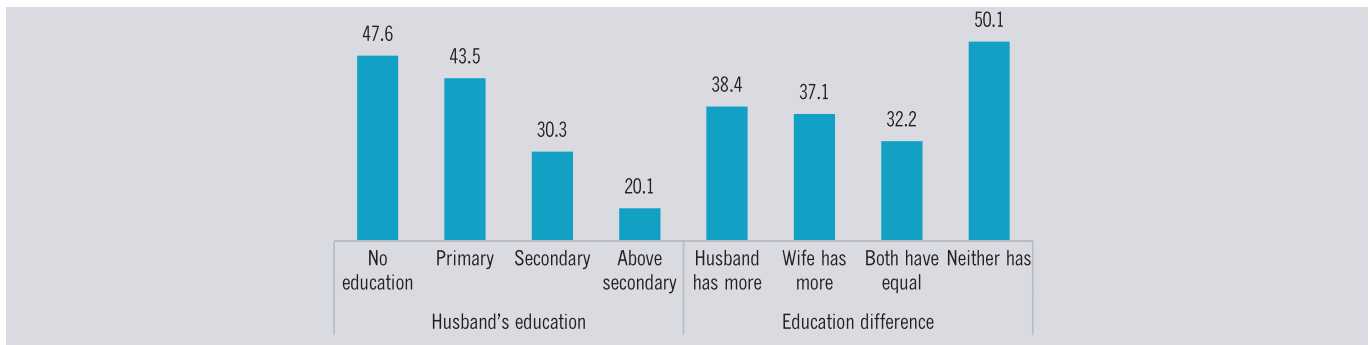
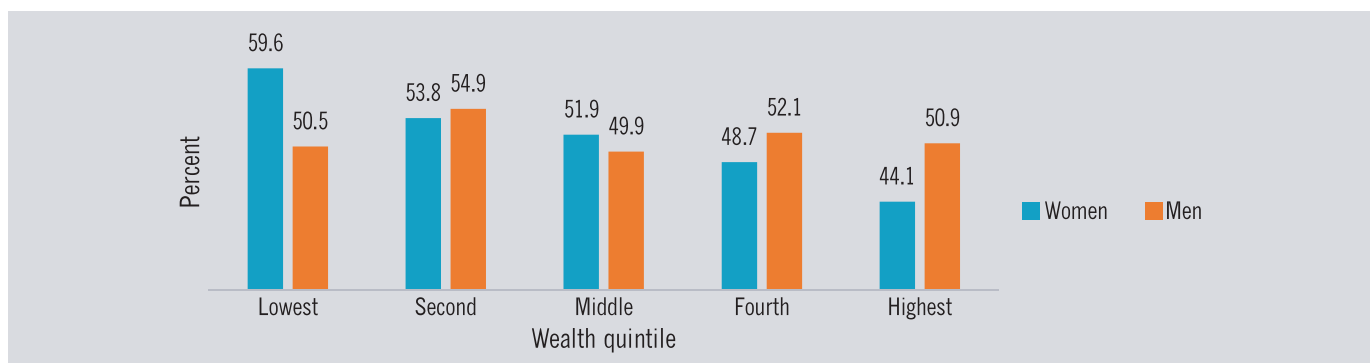
Level of education is a critical influencer of the extent of PV experienced by an individual. For women, PV reduces with increase in the level of education (Figure 3). However, as already mentioned, teachers are one of the top perpetrators of PV. This implies that teachers might frustrate efforts to reduce PV through attaining education, hence perpetuating violence.

Among married partners, more cases of PV are likely to arise if there is an inequality in the level of education. For instance, results

**Figure 3** Figure 3: Education influence on physical violence



in Figure 4 show that about 38% of the women experienced PV because their husbands were more educated. A slightly lower percentage of women (37.1%) still experienced PV when they are the ones who are more educated. A higher percentage of women reported violence from husbands with no (47.6%) or low (43.5%) level of education. This is consistent with WHO findings that men are more likely to perpetuate violence if they have low education. WHO also found out that women of low education are more likely to experience violence from their partners/husbands. These figures show that the education level of a male partner is critical factor as far as extent of violence experienced by a female partner is concerned. Putting inequality in education aside, PV is even more pronounced

**Figure 4** Husbands' education influence on physical violence**Figure 5** Physical violence by wealth quintile

Source: UDHS 2016

when both partners have no education. About 50% of the women experienced PV because neither they nor their partners had attained any formal education (Figure 4). But when both partners have the equal education, cases of PV among women are much lower (32%). This is plausible because education empowers women to be part of decision making in homes, and this reduces on men's controlling behavior, subsequently reducing PV.

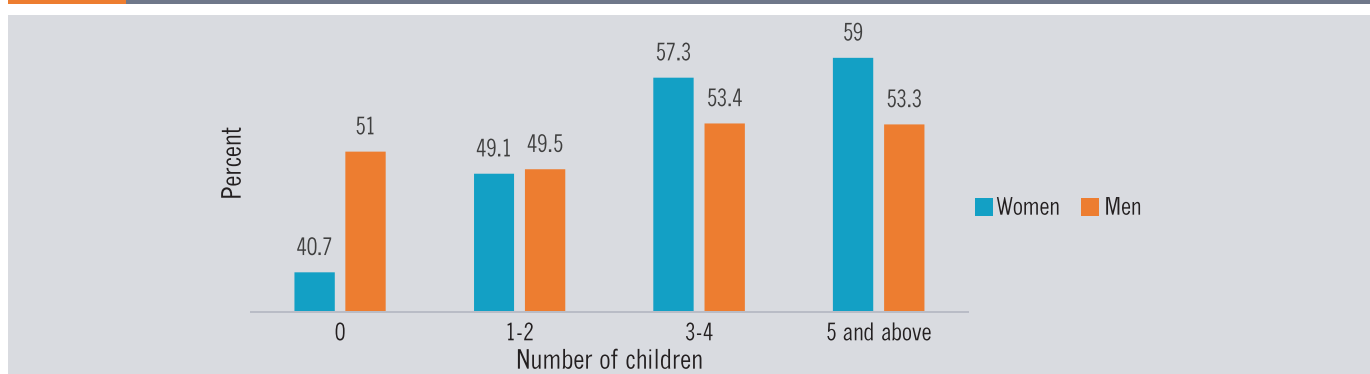
### Low household income

Poverty is also an important influencer of PV. Figure 5 reveals that PV experienced by women reduces as the level of wealth increases. About 60% women in the lowest wealth quintile experienced PV

while only 44.1 in the highest quintile experienced the same. Just like education, wealth also increases women empowerment, thereby reducing vulnerability arising from the unequal status in relation to men. For men, there is no definite pattern. PV keeps on fluctuating with level of wealth.

### Presence of dependants

PV was also found to be varying with number of children in a household. Households with more children experienced PV more than those with fewer children (Figure 6). For instance, 59% of women from families with over five (5) children experienced PV compared to only 49% women from families with only 1-2 children. Similarly,

**Figure 6** Number of living children

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53% of men from families with over three (3) children experienced PV than men in families of 1-2 children. These findings reveal that dwelling in a household with many dependents increases chances of physical violence. The reason could be that such households become financially constrained and in so doing, the partners inflict PV on each other.

## Conclusion and policy recommendation

Much as physical violence in Uganda has reduced overtime, it is still far above the global average. Much of the physical violence experienced by women is perpetuated by their intimate partners. It is women of low education and low wealth that are more likely to experience physical violence. Also men of low education tend to perpetuate violence. Furthermore, spousal violence experienced by either men or women increases with number of children. Schools are also a big arena for perpetuating physical violence. From these conclusions, it is recommended that women be empowered economically through education and skills enhancement to increase their participation in income generating activities. Men’s education is also critical in addressing physical violence. Promoting education requires that physical violence perpetuated by teachers be checked, otherwise efforts of improving education would be frustrated.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and ICF. 2018. Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2016. Kampala, Uganda and Rockville, Maryland, USA: UBOS and ICF.
- 2 <http://www.healthtalk.org/peoples-experiences/domestic-violence-abuse/womens-experiences-domestic-violence-and-abuse/impact-domestic-violence-and-abuse-children#ixzz622ND0iyS>
- 3 WHO (2014). Global status report on violence prevention

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