

Domestic Violence

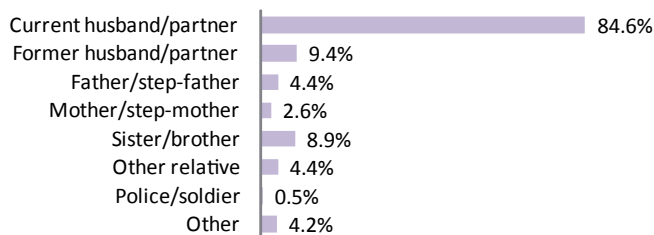


Violence against women in general and domestic violence in particular, has become a growing concern worldwide in recent years. Not only has domestic violence against women been acknowledged worldwide as a violation of basic human rights, but an increasing amount of research highlights the health burdens, intergenerational effects, and demographic consequences of such violence. Throughout the Pacific, including Tuvalu, many women are brought up to accept, tolerate, and even rationalize domestic violence and to remain silent about such experiences.

Forty seven per cent, or just under 1 in 2 Tuvalu women, reported having experienced some type of physical or sexual violence in their life: one in four (25.4%) reported having been subjected to physical violence, 1 in 10 (9.3%) reported having been subjected to sexual violence, and a further 1 in ten (11.9%) reported exposure to both forms of violence. Of those women, around half had experienced physical violence in the previous 12 months.

Persons committing physical violence

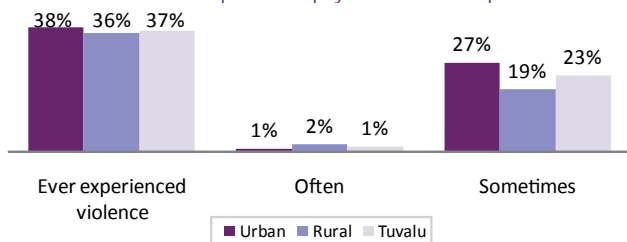
women 15-49 who have experienced physical violence since age 15



By far the most common perpetrator of violence is a woman's current husband or partner. The survey results indicate that almost all violence is committed by a person the woman knows.

Frequency of physical violence

women 15-49 who experienced physical violence in past 12 months



Looking at the distribution of reported physical violence across women's background characteristics shows this incidence is reflected right across Tuvalu: there are no variations in the incidence between Funafuti and the outer islands, by educational or employment status, by marital status or the women's number of children. The only noticeable contrasts emerge in age and with the socio-economic status of women. Younger women reported higher incidence of such violence in the past, with 47% of all 25-29 year old women, and 41% of all 20-24

year olds reporting such experiences, compared to women in their thirties (31%) and forties (35%). And the incidence of such violence is highest in the two lowest wealth quintiles (45%), and lowest in the fourth (27%) and fifth (29%) quintile.

Physical consequences of spousal abuse

Women who had experienced spousal abuse were most likely to report having received cuts, bruises or aches from their partner. Twelve per cent of women who had ever experienced sexual abuse by their partner reported suffering deep wounds, broken bones, broken teeth or other serious injuries.

Physical violence during pregnancy

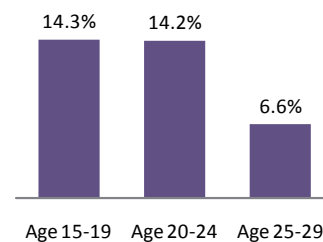
Nearly one in ten Tuvaluan women experience physical violence while pregnant. Younger women (aged 20-29) are far more likely to experience violence while pregnant than women aged 30-49.

Physical or sexual violence

Around one in seven women reported that their first sexual experience happened against their will. This forced sexual experience was most likely to have happened prior to marriage or living with a partner in a de facto relationship.

Forced first sexual intercourse

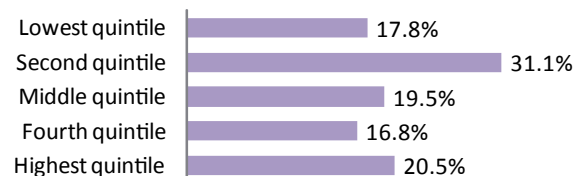
women whose first sexual intercourse was against their will



One in five women reported to have been exposed to sexual violence. This incidence is manifested right across society, with similar incidences reported across age-groups, education levels, employment status, Funafuti and the outer islands; it is also reflected in four out of 5 wealth quintiles, with only the 2nd quintile reporting a higher incidence (31%). Also, a slightly higher proportion of divorced, separated or widowed women (31%) reported such violence compared to married women or those living in de facto relationships.

Experience of sexual violence by wealth quintile

women who have experienced sexual violence by wealth quintile





Forms of spousal abuse

Women living with their partners and who reported having experienced some type of physical violence were most likely to have been slapped (one in four of women) or pushed, shaken or had something thrown at them (one in six women). The likelihood of experiencing violence increases if a woman has been divorced.

Women whose own father had beaten their mother were almost twice as likely to be involved in some form of violence with their partner, as those who had not been exposed to a violent environment.

Spousal violence and excessive alcohol consumption are often associated. Wives who experience violence committed by their husband or partner and whose husband or partner drinks excessively are far more likely (72%) to experience physical, emotional or sexual violence than those whose partner does not drink (27%).

Violence tends to occur in the first few years of a marriage. Amongst the 37% of ever-married women who reported having experienced some form of spousal abuse, 13% reported that the abuse occurred in the first year, 12% in the following year and these numbers steadily decreased as marriages progressed.

Violence by women against their spouse

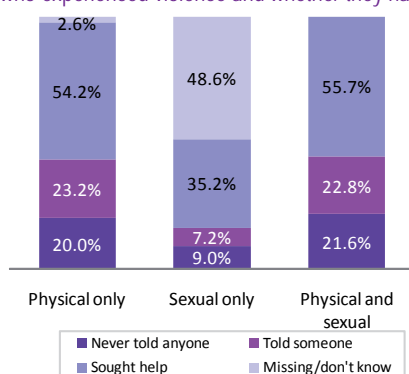
Overall, one in ten ever-married women reported having initiated violence against their current or most recent husband. Women who reported having experienced physical violence committed by their husband or partner were more likely to have initiated violence against their partner than women who never experienced physical violence by their husband (20% compared with 5%).

Seeking help

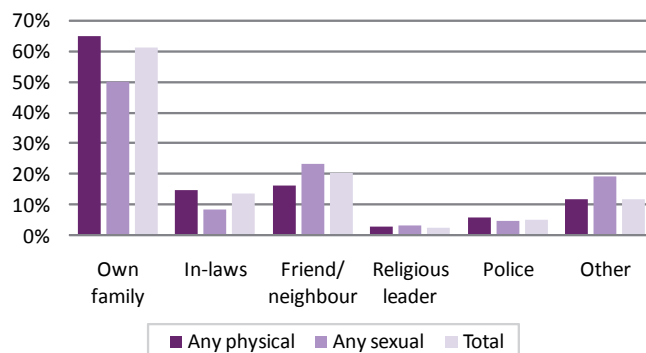
More than half of the women who experienced violence sought help; however women who "only" experienced sexual violence were less likely to seek help. Around one in five women who had experienced physical, or physical and sexual violence did not tell anyone what had happened to them. Most women who sought help went to their family for assistance.

Seeking help to stop violence

women 15-49 who experienced violence and whether they have sought help



Sources where help was sought by type of violence women aged 15-49 who have sought help and where help sought



Policy note:

Given the growing concern of violence against women world-wide, Governments have a legal duty under international law to take appropriate steps to eliminate all forms of violence including domestic violence, by passing appropriate laws, community education, and providing a framework of appropriate social and health services. While governments need to provide leadership and recognize the existence of this problem, concerted efforts need to be undertaken to involve community representation in the planning and implementation of strategies and programs counteracting such behavior.

The DHS reported that 4 in 10 Tuvalu women have been subjected to some type of physical violence, with their current husbands or partners the main perpetrators. About half of all reported acts of physical violence were reported by women aged 25-29. One in five women reported to have been exposed to sexual violence, with one in seven young women (15-24) reported having been forced into their first sexual experience. The incidence of such violence is manifest right across Tuvalu society, which underlines the importance of strong Government leadership and whole-of-community involvement to tackle this problem effectively. The fact that only a minority of women seek help outside their family shows this problem is still seen more as an internal family matter, than for what it really is: a human rights abuse and contravention of law.

*For more information on domestic violence see chapter 14 in the Tuvalu 2007 DHS report

