

Chapter 10: Women's Coping Strategies



Summary of main findings

- Almost half (47%) of the women who experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime never told anyone about the violence. When women did tell someone, they most often told their family members, friends, or their husband's family.
- About 3 in 4 (76%) have never sought help from any agency to help deal with the violence. Among those who did seek help, most went to the police, courts, or health services.
- Two in 5 women who experienced violence (40%) had to leave home at least once due to the violence; 4% left permanently.
- When women asked for help or left home, the most common reasons given were that they couldn't take any more of the violence, or they were badly injured.
- The most common reasons for returning home, and for never leaving at all, were that she didn't want to leave the children, she loved and forgave him, and her belief in the sanctity of marriage.
- About 1 in 4 women (27%) who experienced physical violence have ever defended themselves by fighting back, and most only did so 1 or 2 times.

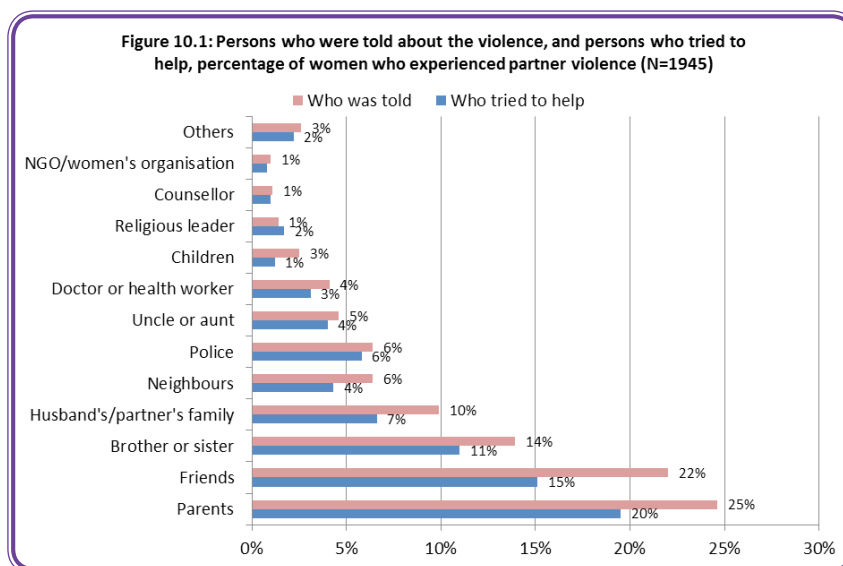
This chapter begins by presenting findings on who women tell about the violence and where they go to seek help and support, their reasons for doing so, and their reasons for not seeking help. Data is presented on the proportion of women who needed to leave home due to the violence, their reasons for leaving, and their reasons for returning to the violent relationship. Responses on whether women ever defended themselves by fighting back are also presented, along with findings on the communication patterns between women and their husbands/partners. All women who experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their husband or partner were asked questions about coping strategies (section 9 of Annex 2).

10.1 Who women told about the violence and who helped

Women were first asked who they had told about their husband's/partner's violence, and then whether anyone had ever tried to help them. Almost half of the women who experienced violence (47%) had never told anyone before the survey. Most women who did tell someone about the violence spoke to family members, including their parents (25%), brothers and sisters (14%), and aunts or uncles (5%). Very few women told their children (3%). One in 5 women (22%) told their friends, and 1 in 10 (10%) told their husband's or partner's family. Neighbours and police were told by 6% of women, compared with only 4% for doctors or other health workers, and only 1% for religious leaders such as pastors, priests or nuns, counsellors, and NGOs or women's organisations (Figure 10.1).

There are some interesting ethnic differences regarding who women told about the violence² (Table 10.1 of Annex 1):

- On the whole, i-Taukei women were less likely to tell immediate family members, including their parents, brothers and sisters, the husband's/partner's family or children. For example, only 23% of i-Taukei women told their parents and 13% told their siblings compared with 29% and 17% for Indo-Fijian women.
- However, i-Taukei women were slightly more likely to tell their aunts and uncles – 5% had done so, compared with 3% for Indo-Fijian women.
- I-Taukei women were much more likely to tell their friends (26%) compared with only 11% of Indo-Fijian women.
- Indo-Fijian were slightly more likely to tell the Police, with 8% doing so, compared with 6% of i-Taukei women.



Note: Percentages exceed 100% because multiple answers could be given. Source: Tables 10.1 and 10.2 of Annex 1.

² Slightly more Indo-Fijian women had never told anyone (50% compared with 47% of i-Taukei women); this is not statistically significant (Table 10.1 of Annex 1).



Sadly, some women received no help, despite the fact that they told these people about their husband's behaviour. Although 53% of the women had told someone, only 46% said that someone had ever tried to help them. For example, even though 25% had told their parents, only 20% of women had been helped by their parents. Similarly, 22% told their friends, but only 15% were helped by their friends (Figure 10.1 and Tables 10.1 and 10.2 of Annex 1).

Women were also asked if there was anyone who they would like to receive more help from. The majority (58% or almost 3 in 5) said they didn't want help from anyone. However, about 2 in 5 mentioned their family, and 1 in 10 (11%) mentioned that they would like help from FWCC. Sadly, 6% said they would have liked more help from their own mother, and 5% said they would like more help from the police (Table 10.3 of Annex 1).

Before women were asked about their experience of violence, questions were asked about how they feel about their communities. These questions indicate that most feel reasonably confident that community members would help people in need. For example: 94% said that neighbours know each other well; 78% believe that neighbours would do something to stop a street fight; 86% believe that most people would contribute to a community project; 84% believe that most people trust each other in matters of lending and borrowing; and 89% believe that neighbours would help each other in case of illness or accident (Tables 3.7 – 3.11 of Annex 1). Although most of these indicators were lower in urban than rural areas, they nevertheless point to a reasonable level of social capital within communities.³ Nevertheless, only 4% of neighbours tried to help women subjected to partner violence.

10.2 Agencies and authorities women asked for help

Although 53% of women who experience partner violence told someone about it, less than 1 in 4 women (24%) have ever gone to any agencies or persons in authority to ask for help to stop or deal with the violence. Among those who have sought help, most went to law and justice sector agencies including the police (15%), courts (6%), and others who provide legal advice (2%). Fourteen percent (14%) of women have asked for help from hospitals or health centres, 3.6% from religious leaders, 3.5% from social welfare services, 2.7% from FWCC or its Branches, 1.1% from shelters, and 0.5% from local leaders (Figure 10.2 and Table 10.4 of Annex 1).

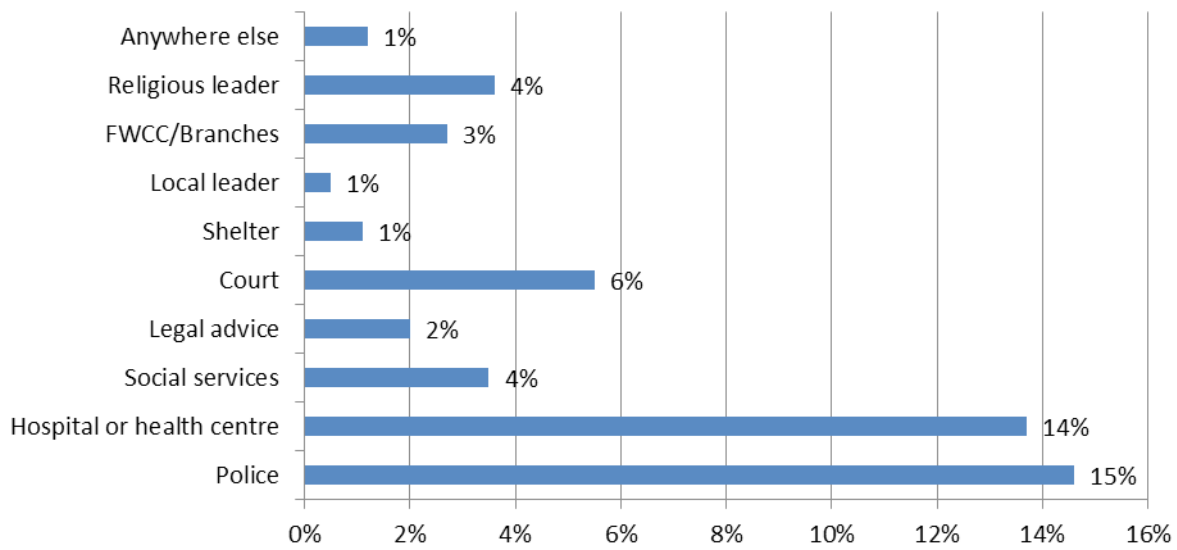


Overall, 77% of i-Taukei women have never gone to any agency for help, compared with 75% of Indo-Fijian women. Although this is not a huge difference, help-seeking behaviour does demonstrate some interesting differences by ethnicity.

³ Social capital describes social networks characterised by trust and reciprocity, which enable people to act for mutual benefit, resolve problems, and act collectively to promote well-being (Stone 2001).

Indo-Fijian women were more likely to ask for help from the police (18% compared with 13% for i-Taukei women), courts (8% compared with 2%), and to seek legal advice (9% compared with 4%). Indo-Fijian women were also more likely to access social welfare services (8% compared with 2% for i-Taukei women) and FWCC or its Branches (5.5% compared with 1.8%). In contrast, i-Taukei women were more likely to seek help from a hospital or health centre (15% compared with 11% for Indo-Fijian women), or a religious leader (4% compared with 2.4%) (Table 10.4 of Annex 1).

Figure 10.2: Agencies or persons of authority where women sought help, percentage of women who experienced partner violence (N=1945)



Note: Percentages exceed 100% because multiple answers could be given. Source: Tables 10.4 of Annex 1.

Box 10.1: Women's reasons for seeking help, or not seeking help

Women's main reasons for seeking help from agencies or authorities (N=465)

- Could not endure more violence (53%)
- Badly injured (49%)
- Encouraged by friends or family (19%)
- Fear or threats that he would kill her (13%)
- Children suffering, threatened or hit by him (9%)
- Aware of her rights (7%)
- Thrown out of home (5%)

Women's main reasons for *not* seeking help from agencies or authorities (N=1480)

- Violence was normal, not serious (48%)
- Fear and threats of more violence (27%)
- Embarrassed, ashamed, afraid she would not be believed (15%)
- Bring bad name to the family (11%)
- Afraid would end the relationship (10%)
- Afraid would lose children (8%)

Note: Percentages exceed 100% because women could give multiple reasons. Source: Tables 10.5 and 10.6 of Annex 1.



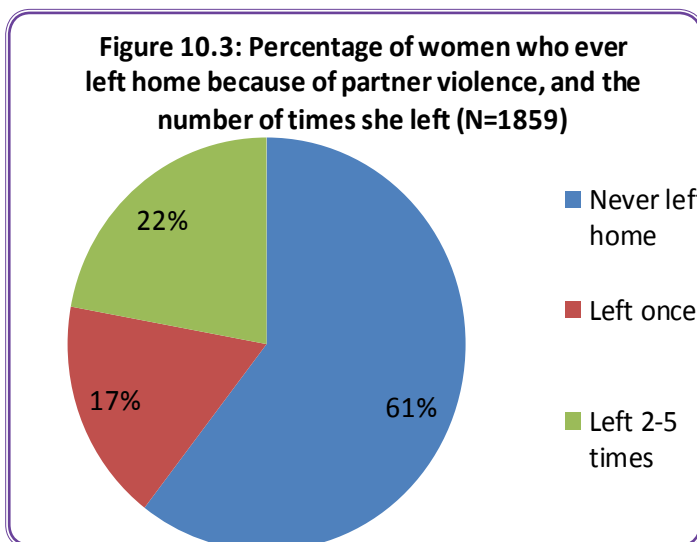
When women were asked about the reasons why they asked for help, about half said that they could not endure any more violence, and that they were badly injured. Fear that they would be killed by their husband and concern for the safety of their children were other major reasons. Almost 1 in 5 women were encouraged to seek help by family or friends (Box 10.1 and Table 10.5 of Annex 1).

Fear and threats of further violence emerged as a major reason that prevented more than 1 in 4 women from seeking help. However, the major reason mentioned by almost half of those who had not asked for help was that they thought the violence was normal or not serious. Shame, humiliation and embarrassment were major reasons that prevented women from seeking help, including the fear that they would not be believed and the fear of giving the family a bad name; these reasons combined were mentioned by about 1 in 4 women. Fear that the relationship would end and that she would lose the children were also powerful motivators that prevented women from seeking help. In 2% of cases women mentioned that either her own or her husband's family had prevented her from seeking help (Box 10.1 and Table 10.6 of Annex 1).



10.3 Leaving home

Figure 10.3: Percentage of women who ever left home because of partner violence, and the number of times she left (N=1859)

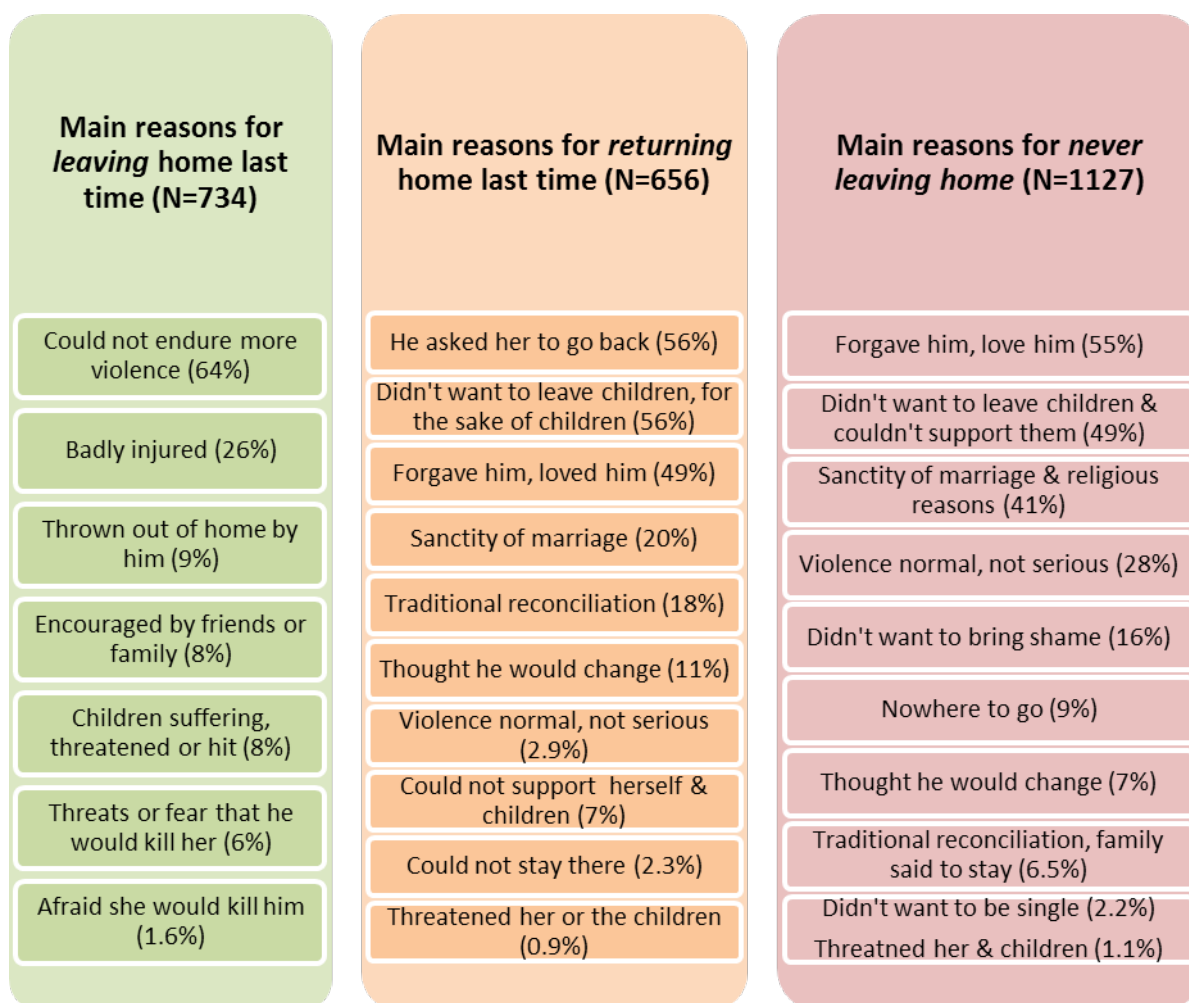


Two in 5 women (39.5%) have had to leave home due to the violence and the remaining 3 in 5 (60.5%) have never left home. About 1 in 5 (22%) have had to leave home several times, and 17% have left home once. The average time women spent away from home was 40 days. Women in urban areas spent a longer time away than those in rural areas (46 days compared with 37). Women from the Eastern Division also spent a longer period away from home, averaging 35 days, compared with 31 for women from the Northern Division (Figure 10.3 and Table 10.7 of Annex 1).

Women were asked where they stayed the last time they left home. Most stayed with her relatives (89%), but a few stayed with her husband's/partner's relatives (5.6%); 5% of those who had left home stayed in other places: most with friends, a few at a church or their children's house, or on the street. None of the women mentioned that they had stayed at a shelter (Table 10.7 of Annex 1).

Most of the 734 women who had left home had done so temporarily. However, 78 women said they had left home permanently. This amounts to 5% of women who experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.

Box 10.2: Women's reasons for leaving home, returning home, and for not leaving home at all



Note: Percentages exceed 100% because women could give multiple reasons. Source: Tables 10.8 – 10.10 of Annex 1.

When women were asked their main reasons for leaving the last time, the majority said that they could not endure any more violence. More than 1 in 4 of those who left did so because they were badly injured. Disturbingly, almost 1 in 10 was thrown out and did not make the decision themselves to leave. Some were encouraged to do so by family or friends. The fear and threat of further violence for herself, and her concerns for her children were also mentioned; and a few were afraid that they might kill their husband or partner (Box 10.2 and Table 10.8 of Annex 1).

The reasons that women gave for returning home, or for never leaving home in the first place, were quite similar. Love and forgiveness and concern for her children were reasons given by about half of the women. The sanctity of marriage was an important reason for many of those women who had never left home, and it also features for those who have left and returned, along with traditional reconciliation and a desire not bring shame to the family.



About 1 in 10 women said they went back home or never left because they believed that the husband would change. Sadly, almost 1 in 10 of those who have never left had nowhere to go; this was also a reason mentioned by some women who had returned home, as well as the inability to support herself and her family. More than 1 in 4 of those who have never left said that this was because the violence was normal, or not serious (Box 10.2 and Tables 10.9 and 10.10 of Annex 1).

10.4 Self-defence and communication patterns

10.4.1 Women's self-defence

The majority of women never fought back to defend themselves when they were being physically attacked: 73% of women who have been physically abused had never done so; 16% have physically fought back in self-defence once or twice, 7% have done so several times and only 3.1% have done this many times. Women living in rural areas are less likely to defend themselves physically: 78% from rural areas and 67% from urban areas had never fought back. When women from rural areas have fought back, they have also done so less often than those from urban areas (Table 10.11 of Annex 1).

The 500 women who have fought back in self-defence were asked what effect this had on her husband's/partner's violent behaviour. Over half said that the violence had either stopped or reduced when they defended themselves physically, and an additional 18% said that it had no effect (that is, her husband/partner neither reduced nor increased the physical violence when she fought back). However, 31% said that fighting back made the violence worse (Table 10.12 of Annex 1).

Women were also asked whether they had ever physically mistreated their husband/partner when he was not physically attacking them: 86% had never done so (section 7 of Annex 2). Among the 14% who have ever initiated physical violence against their husband/partner, the majority (74%) had only ever done so once. Women who have been subjected to physical or sexual violence by their husbands/partners were almost twice as likely to have initiated physical violence themselves: 16% of those of who experienced physical violence had done so, compared with 9.6% of women who had not experienced violence (Table 10.13 of Annex 1). Although this association is highly significant (with a P value of less than 0.001), caution is needed when interpreting these findings since they do not demonstrate causality. In other words, the data by itself does not indicate whether this small group of women were provoked to physical violence because their husbands/partners had already physically attacked them; or conversely, whether women were punished by their husbands/partners for initiating physical violence in the first place. Either of these interpretations could be true.

10.4.2 Communication patterns and quarrelling

Before questions were posed about partner violence, women were asked about communication patterns with their husbands/partners (section 7 of Annex 2). Four in 5 women (81%) described good communication patterns with their partners. This included discussing things that happened to both him and her during the day, and discussing both his and her worries and feelings. Women who have not experienced violence were more likely to be in relationships with good communication patterns (85%) compared with those who had been subjected to violence (78%, Table 10.14 of Annex 1).

When asked how often she and her husband/partner quarrelled, 1 in 3 said that they rarely did so (33%), about half (55%) said they quarrelled sometimes, and 12% said they quarrelled often. Women subjected to physical or sexual partner violence were more likely to be in relationships where there was a lot of quarrelling: 17% of women who had experienced partner violence said they quarrelled often, compared with 3% of women who had not experienced violence (Table 10.15 of Annex 1).