

Republic of the Marshall Islands National Study on Family Health and Safety



Violence against women (VAW) is one of the most concerning human rights violations and public health issues in the world today. The United Nations defines VAW as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.” (UN Resolution A/RES/48/104, 1993).

The RMI Family Health and Safety Study (FHSS) aimed to obtain reliable data on the prevalence and different types of VAW in the Marshall Islands. Among other objectives, the study also sought to document the associations between partner violence and health issues and other outcomes, and identify risks and protective factors for partner violence. The following are the main facts regarding violence against women in the Marshall Islands.

PHYSICAL PARTNER VIOLENCE

- 48% of women in the RMI have **experienced physical violence by a partner** in their lifetime.
- 16% of women **experienced physical partner violence in the 12 months prior to the interview**.
- Physical partner violence in the 12 months prior to the interview was the **highest among women aged 15-24 (38%)**.
- The **most common acts of physical partner violence** were being slapped or having something thrown at them (43%), being pushed or shoved (33%), and being hit with a fist or something else (33%).

SEXUAL PARTNER VIOLENCE

- 21% of women in the RMI have **experienced sexual violence by a partner** at least once in their lifetime.
- 6% of women **experienced sexual violence by a partner in the 12 months preceding the interview**.
- The **most common acts of sexual partner violence** were being physically forced to have sexual intercourse (19%) and having sex because she was afraid of what partner might do if she refused (13%).
- The prevalence of **lifetime sexual partner violence was the highest among women with elementary or no education (26%)**.

EMOTIONAL PARTNER VIOLENCE

- 48% of women in the RMI have **experienced emotional abuse by a partner in their lifetime**.
- 22% of women **experienced emotional violence by a partner in the 12 months preceding the interview**.
- The **most common acts of emotional abuse by partners** were being scared or intimidated (33%) and being insulted or made feel bad (32%).

ECONOMIC PARTNER VIOLENCE

- 27% of women in the RMI **have experienced at least one act of economic abuse by a partner** in their lifetime.
- 21% of women **said their husband had refused to give them money for household needs** even when there was money available for other things.
- 12% of women **had money that they earned or saved taken away by their husband/partner**.

For this study, partner violence against women is defined as the violence experienced by a woman, perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner, whether cohabiting or not, that includes acts of physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse. Non-partner violence against women is defined as the violence experienced by a woman that is perpetrated by anyone other than a partner that includes acts of physical and sexual abuse.

IMPACT OF PARTNER VIOLENCE ON HEALTH

- **22%** of women who reported experiencing physical and/or sexual partner violence **were injured** at least once as a result of partner violence.
- **28%** of ever-injured women **lost consciousness** at least once and **18% needed health care** because of the injuries.
- The **most common injuries** were scratches, abrasions, and bruises (72%) and cuts, punctures, and bites (47%).
- Women who experienced partner violence were more likely to report a **fair or poorer health** (37%) than women who never experienced partner violence (22%).
- Women who ever experienced partner violence were more likely to **attempt suicide** (6%) than women who never experienced partner violence (3%).
- Women who experienced partner violence were more likely to report most **emotional distress symptoms** (7%) than women who never experienced partner violence (2%).

VIOLENCE BY NON-PARTNERS

- **13%** of women in the RMI have experienced **sexual violence by a person other than a partner** since the age of 15.
- The **most common act of sexual non-partner violence** since age 15 was forced intercourse (10%).
- **11%** of women experienced **sexual abuse in childhood** (i.e., before the age of 15).
- The **most common perpetrators** of non-partner sexual abuse before and after the age of 15 were male family members.

OTHER IMPORTANT FACTS

- **54% of ever-abused women had not told anyone about the violence.** Those who did tell someone mostly confided in friends (20%) and parents (15%).
- **51%** of women who experienced partner violence **left home** at least once due to the violence.
- **91%** of women who experienced partner violence **did not seek help from formal services or authorities.**
- The **most common reasons for not seeking help** were: believing that the violence was normal (47%) and being afraid of more violence if they spoke out (14%).

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