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MEAC Findings Report 3

Data Points on Gender Norms and Sexism in and Around Maiduguri

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MANAGING EXITS
FROM ARMED CONFLICT

CONTENTS

KEY FINDINGS

- One measure of the social norms around intimate partner violence may not reflect how prevalent violence against women in the home has likely become in and around Maiduguri based on other data. Only 7 per cent of male respondents in the survey agreed it was okay for a husband to hit his wife if she disobeyed him. Notably, a slightly higher percentage of female respondents (10 per cent) justified such violence, a trend that has been noticed in other contexts.

- Two measures of sexism – one more hostile and another more benevolent strain – point to a subordinate status for women in and around the area. Sexism – intertwined with gender inequality and combined with the high-pressure mix of conflict, economic hardship, food insecurity, and COVID-19-related restrictions on movement - likely combine to increase the potential for violence against women and girls (and likely boys as well).

Background

About MEAC

How and why do individuals exit armed groups, and how do they do so sustainably, without falling back into conflict cycles?

These questions are at the core of UNU-CPR's Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) initiative. MEAC is a multi-year, multi-partner collaboration that aims to develop a unified, rigorous approach to examining how and why individuals exit armed conflict and evaluating the efficacy of interventions meant to support their transition to civilian life. MEAC seeks to inform evidence-based programme design and implementation in real time to improve efficacy. At the strategic level, the cross-programme, cross-agency lessons that will emerge from the growing MEAC evidence base will support more effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. MEAC is supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland's Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Irish Aid, and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and is being run in partnership with the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO), UNICEF, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the World Bank.

About this Series

The MEAC Findings Report series seeks to put evidence about conflict transitions and related programming into the hands of policymakers and practitioners in real time. The reports present short overviews of findings (or emerging findings) across a wide range of thematic areas and include analyses on their political or practical implications for the UN and its partners.

About this Report

This report is based on data collected from December 2020 to January 2021, as part of a phone survey with a randomized sample of 3,117 community members[*] from the Maiduguri Metropolitan Council (MMC), Jere, and Konduga areas in Borno State, Nigeria.[1] The report presents the results of three specific questions on gender-related dynamics. This data was gathered to help understand the context in which girls and women are recruited into armed groups, particularly the gender norms and gender expectations in the region. Insights into the roles of women and girls in society in North East Nigeria provide an important lens through which to view gender differences in conflict experiences, including within armed groups and armed forces, and reintegration trajectories after involvement. Divorced from this purpose, however, these data points are likely of interest to a range of practitioners – and policymakers – working in Borno State. Although there are only a few survey results outlined in this report, UNU-CPR is producing this overview as part of a standalone brief in

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[*] The MEAC project has taken numerous steps to protect respondents at all stages of the research process – with special attention to children and vulnerable populations. The project's research design has been reviewed - and been approved - by United Nations University (UNU)'s Ethics Review Board (ERB). Amongst other efforts, UNU-CPR has worked with developmental psychologists and child protection practitioners in the design of the survey tools; required all enumerators to complete a professional enumerator training that includes conflict-, gender-, and child-sensitivity modules and formally commit to adhering to a child safeguarding policy; put in place a mechanism to measure the impact of surveys on respondent's anxiety and refer respondents who show or register signs of distress; and developed data management and protection protocols in line with UN partners' and the UNU ERB's standards.

order to get it into the hands of UN and NGO partners working in the region to address urgent humanitarian crises. The report ends with an examination of key policy and programmatic implications of these findings.

Norms Around GBV and Sexism

Overview

Between December 2020 and January 2021, UNU-CPR and one of its local implementing partners in Nigeria – Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) – conducted a 30-minute phone survey with 3,117 people from three local government areas - MMC, Jere, and Konduga. This brief report will highlight data on two gender-related dynamics: domestic violence and sexism.

Girls and women in Nigeria face persistent inequalities when it comes to access to education, political representation, health, and labour markets. In 2020, Nigeria was ranked 161 out of 189 countries on the UNDP Gender Inequality Index (GII), which measures differences in three aspects of human development: reproductive health, empowerment, and economic status [2] These inequalities impact the opportunities available to women and girls, but also likely contribute to violence against them.[3] By most accounts, the rates of gender-based violence (GBV) in Nigeria – particularly the North East – are extremely high and "growing astronomical[ly] with the activities of the insurgency in the North East".[4] This has likely increased as a result of COVID-19-related lockdowns[5] (trends seen in other countries).

This report does not provide a comprehensive overview of violence against women in North East Nigeria, but rather lays out a few data points on the norms around a narrow aspect of domestic or intimate partner violence (IPV)◊ – beating your spouse. Due to pandemic-related precautions, this survey was conducted by phone and certain direct questions about experiences with violence, particularly sexual violence, were deemed too sensitive for such an approach.[6] While this limits what the survey can show on such topics, the sample size involved is useful for providing a glimpse into gender roles and norms around domestic violence that contribute to GBV.[7]

◊ Several of the terms used herein are both used interchangeably but also in different ways by different actors. The United Nations states "Domestic abuse, also called "domestic violence" or "intimate partner violence", can be defined as a pattern of behaviour in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person." The United Nations, "What Is Domestic Abuse?," last accessed 8 March 2021, https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/what-is-domestic-abuse#:~:text=Domestic%20abuse%2C%20also%20called%20%22domestic,control%20over%20an%20intimate%20partner.&text=Domestic%20abuse%20can%20happen%20to,orientation%2C%20religion%2C%20or%20gender. Others use domestic violence to include family violence. UNHCR describes "Gender-Based violence refers to harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms." UNHCR, "Gender-based Violence," last accessed 8 March 2021, https://www.unhcr.org/gender-based-violence.html.

Findings

One of the norms investigated by the survey dealt with societal justifications for violence against women in intimate partnerships. Two things jump out from the data presented in Figure 1: First, the percentage of people who say no to the question "Do you think it is okay for a husband to hit his wife if she disobeys him?" is extremely high, which is somewhat surprising given long-held concerns about the impact the insurgency in the North East could have on sexual and GBV. Further research is needed to better understand how these views correlate with respondent education levels, economic wellbeing, and household composition. Researchers - and policymakers - have focused on the relationship between the two and hypothesized that the proliferation of small arms, erosion of the rule of law, breakdown of social structures and family relationships, and the normalization of violence lead to increases in interpersonal violence, particularly against women.[8]

Figure 1: Do you think it is okay for a husband to hit his wife if she disobeys him?
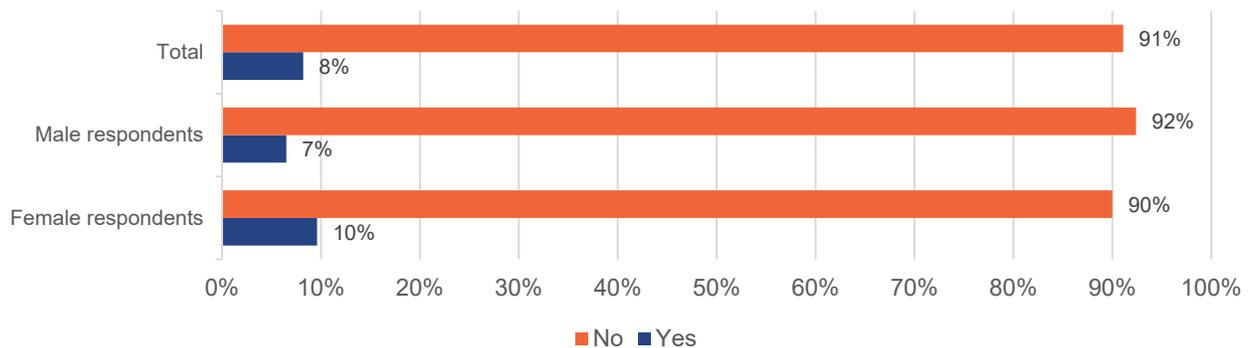
The norms around IPV captured by the survey seem incongruous with the existing data on the prevalence of IPV and GBV in Nigeria – particularly the North East. First, national-level data from the most recent Nigerian Demographic Health Survey (2013) suggests intimate partner violence is high across the country with more than 13 per cent of every partnered females reporting physical violence from an intimate partner.[9] Notably, the frequency of IPV was highest in the North East.[10] Reports from humanitarian actors on the ground suggest that rates of GBV continue to be extremely high, particularly amongst vulnerable populations like internally displaced persons (IDPs). In 2016, for example, a survey of IDPs in the region revealed that about a third of respondents had experienced sexual violence of some form (perpetrated by intimate partners, familial relations, and those outside them).[11] While some of the more comprehensive studies on the topic are a few years old, more recent data points – and impressions from humanitarians and advocates working in the region – suggest IPV and GBV continue to be a significant issue.

In thinking about some of the drivers of IPV, a 2017 report by the International Rescue Committee detailed 22 focus group discussions with girls and women around Borno State and found that "Domestic violence is of serious concern. Women suffer from verbal and physical assaults (beating) from their spouses or partners."[12] This report noted that respondents linked some domestic violence to frustrations within the household, particularly "men who have lost their livelihoods cannot provide for their families react violently if their wives ask for food or other necessities."[13] The link made between domestic violence and economic hardship is worrying, especially as recent data suggest

families in the region are struggling. Data collected as part of the same survey shows that many respondents (34 per cent) have no income-generating activities and 75 per cent of respondents are not getting sufficient food. The humanitarian crisis in the North East – bordering on famine – combined with the COVID-19 restrictions over the last year, which raised concerns around the world about contributing to higher rates of domestic violence,[14] have created a difficult environment for women (and likely children). Prior to the pandemic, conditions in Nigeria had already been characterized as amounting to a "GBV crisis, deeply rooted in harmful patriarchal social, cultural, traditional and religious norms…".[15] A number of indicators suggest that IPV and GBV have increased across the country since the pandemic broke out,[16] and a series of high-profile cases of violence perpetrated against women during the four-month lockdown sparked nationwide protests by activists both online and at in-person rallies, leading to the Governors of Nigeria's 36 states unanimously declaring a state of emergency on GBV in June 2020.[17]

Second, the percentage of female respondents who justify intimate partner violence against women is higher than men. Whereas 7 per cent of male respondents said it was okay for a husband to hit his wife if she disobeyed him, 10 per cent of female respondents agreed. This finding appears to reflect a broader trend identified in earlier research. Another study in Nigeria that drew on the most recent Nigerian Demographic Health Survey (2013) similarly found female justification of IPV to be significantly higher than male approval.[18] This difference has been found in other studies, confounding many researchers and practitioners. Why would women be more likely than men to sanction the violence so many of them were suffering? In other contexts, some have concluded that women themselves play a role in "reproducing dominant social and cultural norms that may be antithetical to their autonomy and liberty interests."[19]

It may also be the case that a direct question like this – particularly when asked over the phone - does not yield responses that accurately reflect the prevalence of norms related to justifiable violence against female partners. It is possible that respondents self-censor their answers out of fear of being judged by the enumerator[20] or would answer differently if proposed in a more intimate, face-to-face setting. Even if norms around the use of violence have shifted in the conflict-affected North East, most people know they are not supposed to admit to hostile sexism. It is possible, however, that people will admit to benevolent sexism.

Benevolent sexism promotes stereotypes of women and restricts their roles but in a positive tone,[21] rooted in "protection, idealization, and affection directed toward women" that nonetheless serves to justify women's subordinate status to men.[22] Figure 2 contrasts a more hostile measure of sexism and another that is more benevolent. Respondents were asked "Do you think men and women have the same worth and should have the same opportunities in their daily lives?" and "Do you think women should be cherished and protected by men?" Only about a quarter of those interviewed – with slight variation for women and men – believe women and men have the same worth and should be afforded the same opportunities. Levels of benevolent sexism however were extremely high (96 per cent on average, and slightly higher amongst women and girls).

Figure 2: Cherished and protected versus same worth and opportunities
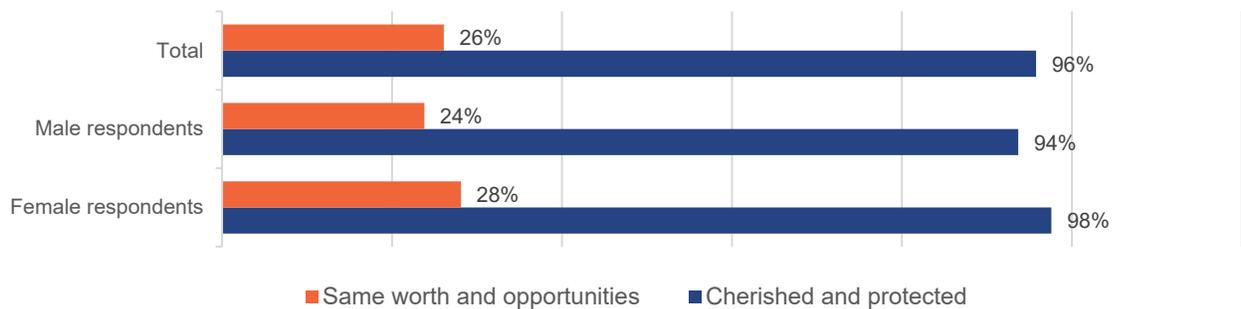
Benevolent sexism feels friendly, but it is dangerous. In 2000, a cross-nation study of 15,000 people found that those who hold benevolent sexist beliefs are also likely to hold more hostile attitudes towards women, which helps perpetuate gender inequality.[23] Research has linked gender inequality to domestic violence[24] and rape culture.[25]

Policy and Programmatic Implications

The limited data provided here is not sufficient to draw broad conclusions about how the current dynamics in the North East of Nigeria will impact policy and programming. On their own, and in combination with other data sources from humanitarians in the region and researchers, the data points included in this brief do point to the precarious situation for women in and around Maiduguri today. Impacted by conflict, pandemic lockdowns, economic challenges, and a food crisis – women (and girls, but likely children more broadly) exist in a precarious intersection of vulnerability, and one that all signs suggest could contribute to increased violence against them. The few robust data points in this brief may be useful to humanitarians, practitioners, and activists who are already working and are better placed to highlight and address these concerns with practical policy and programmatic responses.

[1] This research was conducted in partnership with several researchers, spearheaded by Dr Rebecca Littman, University of Illinois at Chicago, in partnership with Dr Zoe Marks, Harvard Kennedy School, and conducted and facilitated on the ground principally by Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), with support from Mobukar Consultancy. More information on MEAC partners and donors is available here.

[2] UNDP, "Gender Inequality Index" (Table 5), *Human Development Report 2020* (New York: UNDP, 2020), http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2020.pdf.

[3] A number of studies identify a relationship between inequality and violence against women. See, for example, Carrie Yodanis, "Gender inequality, violence against women, and fear: a cross-national test of the feminist theory of violence against women," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 19, 6 (2004).

[4] UNFPA Nigeria, "Gender Based Violence," last accessed 2 March 2021, https://nigeria.unfpa.org/en/node/6123.

[5] Data from the Lagos State domestic violence hotline suggests a marked increase in domestic violence (60 per cent), sexual violence (30 per cent), and physical child abuse (10 per cent) during the spring 2020 lockdown. See Ejiro Umukoro, "Amidst COVID-19 Lockdown, Nigeria Sees Increased Sexual and Gender Violence," *Premium Times*, 30 May 2020, https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/395296-amidst-covid-19-lockdown-nigeria-sees-increased-sexual-and-gender-violence.html.

[6] Future MEAC surveys will gather additional data on these forms of GBV, and specifically how they relate to armed group recruitment and exit trajectories. Even with certain questions removed, the surveys conducted as part of the MEAC project deal with sensitive topics. As such, all MEAC surveys employ anxiety measures before and after the survey to ensure the questions do not cause harm. There are several other measures in place to ensure no harm is caused to participants, including ascertaining (as part of the consent process) that there are adults available to child respondents should they become distressed and a referral mechanism for free psychological support services should respondents report an increase in anxiety as a result of the survey.

[7] Gender Based Violence (GBV) Sub Sector Nigeria, *Mid-Year Report: January – June 2020* (Maiduguri: GBV Sub Sector Nigeria, 2020), https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/gbvss_nigeria_midyear_2020_report_final.pdf.

[8] For example, see Rashida Manjoo and Calleigh McRaith, "Gender-Based Violence and Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Areas," *Cornell International Law Journal* 44 (2011) and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) "Women's human rights and gender-related concerns in situations of conflict and instability," last accessed 1 March 2021, https://www.ohchr.org/en/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/PeaceAndSecurity.aspx.

[9] Faith Owunari Benebo, Barbara Schumann and Masoud Vaezghasemi, "Intimate partner violence against women in Nigeria: A multilevel study investigating the effect of women's status and community norms," *BMC Women's Health* 18, 1 (2020): 8, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326950894_Intimate_partner_violence_against_women_in_Nigeria_A_multilevel_study_investigating_the_effect_of_women's_status_and_community_norms.

[10] Ibid.

[11] A survey of 4,868, women of reproductive age (18-49). UNFPA/Centre for Population and Reproductive Health (CPRH), *Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Assessment in North East Nigeria* (CIbadan: PRH, 2016), https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/assessments/gbv_swg_nigeria_sgbv_assessment_2016.pdf.

[12] International Rescue Committee, *Results from Baseline Survey on Gender Based Violence in Borno State Nigeria: A Report from Women Protection and Empowerment* (New York: IRC, 2017): 7.

[13] Ibid.

[14] See UN Women, "The Shadow Pandemic: Violence against women during COVID-19," last accessed on 1 March 2021, https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19; Julie Bosman, "Domestic Violence Calls Mount as Restrictions Linger: 'No One Can Leave,'" *New York Times*, 15 May 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/15/us/domestic-violence-coronavirus.html.

[15] UN Women with UNFPA, UNODC and UNICEF, *Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria During the COVID-19 Crisis: The Shadow Pandemic* (Abuja: United Nations Nigeria, 2020), https://nigeria.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Gender%20Based%20Violence%20in%20Nigeria%20During%20COVID%2019%20Crisis_The%20Shadow%20Pandemic.pdf.

[16] Ibid. For example, the number of reported cases in Borno State – by one measure – increased by 130 per cent from March to April 2020.

[17] VOA News, "All 36 Nigerian Governors Declare State of Emergency Over Rapes and Violence," 12 June 2020, https://www.voanews.com/africa/all-36-nigerian-governors-declare-state-emergency-over-rapes-and-violence.

[18] Leah Okenwa-Emegwa, Stephen Lawoko and Bjarne Jansson, "Attitudes toward physical intimate partner violence against women in Nigeria," *SAGE Open* (2016): 4.

[19] Monica McWilliams and Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, "There is a War Going on You Know": Addressing the Complexity of Violence Against Women in Conflicted and Post Conflict Societies," *Transitional Justice Review* 1, 2 (2014): 23.

[20] See, for example, Pamela Grimm, "Social Desirability Bias," *Wiley International Encyclopedia of Marketing* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2010), https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/9781444316568.wiem02057.

[21] Peter Glick and Susan Fiske, "The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Differentiating hostile and benevolent sexism," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 70, 3 (1996): 491.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Peter Glick et al., "Beyond prejudice as simple antipathy: Hostile and benevolent sexism across cultures," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 79, 5 (2000): 763.

[24] World Health Organization, *Promoting gender equality to prevent violence against women* (WHO: Geneva, 2009), https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/gender.pdf.

[25] See, for example, Courtney Fraser, "From 'Ladies First' to 'Asking for It': Benevolent Sexism in the Maintenance of Rape Culture," *California Law Review* 103, 1 (2015).