

PART 1 : UNDERSTANDING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE



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According to the UN Women 2020 Women World's report, intimate partner violence is the most common form of violence experienced by women globally. In Cameroon, the high prevalence of gender-based violence is raising concern. Statistics from the Demographic and Health 2011 survey showed that 45 % of women had experienced emotional violence and 68 % had experienced physical or sexual violence from their intimate partner. This pamphlet aims to raise awareness on the issue while giving to survivors the tools to find safety.

What is intimate partner violence?

Intimate partner violence is a pattern of abusive behavior used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over the other. It can take many forms -physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, economic deprivation, and/ or threats of violence.



In most cases, it is experienced by women and is perpetrated by men. Any woman can experience intimate partner violence regardless of race, ethnic or religious group, sexuality, class, or disability, but some women who experience other forms of oppression and discrimination such as poverty, disability or refugee status women may face further barriers to disclosing abuse and finding help.

Intimate partner violence can result in physical injury, psychological trauma, and in severe cases, even death. The frequency and severity of the abuse can vary; however, the one constant component of intimate partner violence is one partner's consistent efforts to retain control over the other. The devastating physical, emotional, and psychological consequences of intimate partner violence can cross generations and last a lifetime.

Intimate partner violence can include, but is not limited to, the following:

- **PHYSICAL OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE:** Using forces, forcing or coercing unwanted sexual acts, refusing to practice safer sex, treating a partner like a sex object.
- **EMOTIONAL ABUSE / INTIMIDATION:** Name calling, shifting

blame, threatening to harm others/ self, using threatening actions or gestures, including online and digital abuse.

- **PROPERTY / ECONOMIC ABUSE:** Destroying/ stealing property, denying money for basic needs such as food or medical care, interfering with a partner's work or education
- **STALKING:** Monitoring activities, phone calls or emails, following a partner. This may be done without the victim's knowledge.

What causes intimate partner violence?

Although there are no complete explanations, research has shown that most abusers grew up witnessing domestic abuse and violence. Many abusers have grown up viewing physical and emotional violence as a valid way to express anger and cope with their fears and self-perception issues. Growing up in an abusive household impacts the child's ability to trust others and his or her ability to control emotion. This undermines the child's ability to develop and maintain healthy relationships. This is why it is critical to breaking this cycle of violence as early as possible through laws and prevention programs.

It has been shown that child marriage and polygamy are linked to higher risks of exposure to intimate partner violence especially in the northern parts of Cameroon and needs to be addressed. In addition, the ongoing socio-economic turmoil resulting in poverty, unemployment, and social marginalization coupled with harmful traditional practices have worsened the prevalence of violence against women.

The impact of intimate partner violence

Intimate partner violence often leads to serious short- and long-term physical, mental, sexual and reproductive health problems for women. They also have a detrimental effect on children's health and wellbeing. This violence leads to high social and economic costs for women, their families and societies. Abuse can result in the inability to work, loss of wages, isolation and limited ability to care for themselves and their children. The harm caused by such violence can last a lifetime and span generations.

In an abusive relationship, violence is part of daily life, the chronic exposure of the trauma of intimate partner violence leads to chronic and pervasive post-traumatic stress disorder (or PTSD). Because the perpetrator of the violence and abuse is someone who is supposed to be loving and trustworthy, intimate partner violence is particularly damaging to someone's self-worth and self-esteem. The symptoms of PTSD are often complex and layered and can include : intrusive thoughts and flashbacks, anxiety or emotional numbing, dissociative symptoms, shame or guilt, depression and suicidal ideation and substance use.

If you experience any of these symptoms, know that they are not personal weaknesses but natural responses to trauma. It is important to draw on social support networks or professional help.

How to recognize intimate partner violence ?

Different opinions are normal and completely acceptable in healthy relationships. Abuse is not a disagreement – it is the use of physical, sexual, emotional or psychological violence or threats to govern and control another person's thinking, opinions, emotions and behaviour.



The answers to the following questions may help you recognize intimate partner violence:

1. Has your partner tried to keep you from seeing your friends or family or made it hard for you to continue or start studying, or from going to work?
2. Does your partner constantly refuse you any privacy, follow you or prevent you from leaving the house?
3. Does your partner constantly belittle or humiliate you, or regularly criticise or insult you?
4. Are you ever scared of your partner?
5. Have you ever had to change your behaviour because you are afraid of how your partner might react?
6. Has your partner ever destroyed your possessions deliberately?
7. Has your partner ever hurt or threatened you or your children?
8. Has your partner ever threatened you to withhold money so you are unable to buy food and other necessary items for yourself and your children?
9. Has your partner ever forced you to do something that you really did not want to do?
10. Has your partner ever tried to prevent you from taking necessary medication, or seeking medical help when you felt you needed it?
11. Has your partner ever forced or harassed you to have sex with him or with other people? Has he made you participate in sexual activities that you were uncomfortable with?
12. Does your partner blame his use of alcohol or drugs, mental health condition or family history for his behaviour? Does your partner control your use of alcohol or drugs (for example, by forcing your intake or by withholding substances)?

If you answer yes to any of these questions, then you are surely facing intimate partner violence.



How can you keep yourself safe ?

Here is what you can do if you find yourself in a situation of intimate partner violence:

Get support :

Deciding to leave a situation where you feel unsafe might seem scary and difficult. You never have to do this alone. If possible, talk to someone you trust, such as a friend, counsellor or youth worker. Send a “Hi” or “Hello” on Whatsapp to 6 97 82 09 96 and get access to medical, legal and psychological aid.

Go to a refuge or Stay with family or a friend:

It's very important to protect yourself from harm if you feel that you're being abused. Ask a trusted family member or friend if you can stay with them while you work out what to do next.

Talk to emergency services or the police:

If you've been injured or sexually assaulted, visit your nearest hospital emergency department. If you feel unsafe, talk to the police. You can also call support lines to talk about the risks you face.

Know that is not your fault:

If someone is hurting you, or threatening to hurt you, it can be hard to maintain your self-confidence or feelings of self-worth. Remember that it's never okay for someone to hurt you or threaten to hurt you.

How to help someone who is experiencing intimate partner violence ?

If you're worried a friend is being abused, let them know you've noticed something is wrong. If someone confides in you that they're suffering intimate partner violence:

- LISTEN, do not blame them. It takes strength to talk to someone about experiencing abuse.
- EMPATHIZE : acknowledge they're in a frightening and difficult situation and remind them that nobody deserves to be threatened or beaten, despite what the abuser has said.
- SUPPORT : if they have suffered physical harm, offer to go with them to a hospital and help them report the assault to the police if they choose to
- INFORM : provide information about organisations that offer help for people experiencing intimate partner violence.

To know more on how to support survivors, Send a “Hi” or “Hello” on Whatsapp to 6 97 82 09 96

Challenging the myths.

To better respond to intimate partner violence, you should remember that :

- **Alcohol and drugs do not make a man violent.**

Alcohol and drugs can make existing abuse worse but they do not cause intimate partner violence. The perpetrator alone is responsible for his actions. Many people use alcohol or drugs and do not abuse their partner.

Alcohol and drugs are never an excuse for abuse.

- **Women sometimes have no way of leaving abusive relationships.**

Women stay in abusive relationships for many reasons : she may be frightened for her life or the safety of her children if she leaves; she may have nowhere to go; she may have no financial independence. Many abusers isolate their partners from family and friends to control them, making it even more difficult for an abused woman to exit the relationship.

You should never judge a woman for staying in an abusive relationship. Women in abusive relationships need support and understanding.

- **Intimate partner violence does not always involve physical violence.**

Intimate partner violence does not always include physical violence. it can include coercive control; psychological and/or emotional abuse; physical abuse; sexual abuse; financial abuse; harassment; stalking; and/or online or digital abuse. Emotional abuse can be as damaging as physical abuse and intimate partner violence doesn't have to be life-threatening to cause PTSD.

- **Abuse or violence of any kind is never the victim's fault.**

The responsibility lies with the perpetrator alone. The myth that women provoke men is deeply rooted in the belief that the man is the head of the family, and that his role is to punish his partner or children if they act in a way he doesn't approve of. The myth is dangerous because it means that we are blaming the victim and relieving the abuser of responsibility for his actions.

- **Intimate partner violence is not only a private family matter it is a social issue.**

Intimate partner violence exists as part of violence against women and girls; which also includes different forms of family violence such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation and so-called "honour crimes". It is a gendered crime deeply

rooted in the societal inequality between women and men. Victim blaming and the lack of serious consequences for abusers perpetuate violence against women and others.

- **Women do not lie about being abused.**

This myth is extremely damaging because the fear of being called a liar can and does deter women.

- **Intimate partner violence is not a ‘crime of passion’, or a loss of control.**

Abusive men want to maintain control over their partner, they rarely act spontaneously when angry. They consciously choose when to abuse their partner: when they are alone, and when there are no witnesses.



PART 1 : PREVENTING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE



Hold perpetrators accountable

The trauma that victims experience from intimate partner violence can make them reluctant to engage with the criminal justice system because of fear of being re-traumatized, or not believed. Yet, this lack of trust in the justice systems further endangers victims. Intimate partner violence is still not recognised as a specific crime in Cameroon and victims have to rely on the general law of assaults. To combat violence against women, we need effective crime prevention and criminal justice that focuses on empowering survivors and hold perpetrators accountable. It is urgent to adopt a law on violence against women and ensure that intimate partner violence is criminalized.

Empowering women and improving their status in society :

To prevent future intimate partner violence, we need to challenge unequal gender power relationships. According to a report by the Gender Standby Capacity Project, fifty percent of women in Cameroon live below the poverty line, compared to fifteen percent of men. Only three percent of Cameroonian women own a home. Boys have better access to education resulting in better prospects for economic independence. In addition, the teenage pregnancy rate is alarmingly high in Cameroon: by the age of 19, 10% of the girls have already given birth.

Child marriage is exposing young girls to heightened risks of violence. Before the COVID pandemic, we estimated at one-third of girls forced into marriage, with a higher rate of child marriage in conflict-affected regions. As a result of the pandemic and the economic downturn, parents might push their daughters to get married at a younger age to secure their position and reduce their financial burden. NGOs are mobilizing to fight against this phenomenon that seriously impacts the lives of young girls.

How can we prevent intimate partner violence before it starts?

Intimate partner violence is preventable by promoting more healthy, respectful, and nonviolent relationships. Programs teaching young people healthy relationship skills such as communication, effectively managing feelings, and problem-solving are key to preventing violence in relationships.

- **Teach safe and healthy relationship skills from a young age:** Intimate partner violence is often sustained by the differential socialization of boys and girls.
- **Engage men in the conversation:** Most perpetrators of abuse are men. It's important to engage men and boys to sensitize them to intervene and speak out against abuse and support women who disclose abuse.
- **Create protective environments:** Victims of intimate partner violence should never feel ashamed to seek help. The more open we are about it, the more empowered someone feels to get the help they need.
- **Strengthen economic support for families:** The loss of employment and income due to COVID 19 and the ongoing conflict, may increase the risk of intimate partner violence. Intimate partner violence may also put survivors in financial distress and entrap them in poverty and abusive relationships.

Join the effort to end intimate partner violence

To end intimate partner violence, we all need to work together.

The following are some easy steps you can take to help.

- **Support local organisations:** Most hot-lines, advocacy and shelters organisations could benefit from our time, financial support or other donation. Call them to find out how to help.
- **Speak up against abuse:** Let abusers know their behavior is wrong and encourage them to get help. If you see someone being abused, call for help.
- **Educate yourself and others:** Schedule discussion for your workplace, community group or church. Encourage schools to include abuse prevention as part of their curricula.
- **Set an example:** Commit to work for equality and ending violence in all its forms. Model nonviolent and respectful behavior in your everyday actions.

