Converging drivers of interpersonal violence: Findings from a qualitative study in post-hurricane Haiti

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Interpersonal violence affecting women and children is increasingly recognized as a public health priority in humanitarian emergencies. Yet, research and intervention efforts have been fragmented across gender-based violence and child protection sectors. Using data from the Transforming Households: Reducing Incidence of Violence in Emergencies (THRIVE) project, this study sought to qualitatively investigate the intersecting drivers of multiple forms of violence in Côteaux, Haiti, while obtaining insight on how these drivers may be influenced by a humanitarian emergency.

Methods: This analysis used transcripts obtained using a photo elicitation approach over the course of three sessions per person. Thirty-six individuals participated in the study: eight adult females, ten adult males, eight adolescent females, ten adolescent males. Participants were given cameras to capture images related to family relationships, family safety, and changes to family dynamics due to Hurricane Matthew and its aftermath. In subsequent sessions, these photographs were used as prompts for qualitative interviews.

Results: Multiple and converging drivers of interpersonal violence were identified including the accumulation of daily stressors, loss of power/control, learned behavior (intergenerational cycle of abuse), and inequitable gender norms, all of which were influenced by the humanitarian context caused by Hurricane Matthew.

Conclusions: Our findings suggest multiple and converging drivers of violence may be exacerbated in times of crises, requiring interdisciplinary responses. In order to comprehensively...
address the drivers of violence, practitioners and policy makers should consider the needs of individuals and their families holistically, integrating community-led, gender transformative efforts and positive parenting with basic needs provision.

1. Introduction

Interpersonal violence affecting women and children is increasingly recognized as a public health priority in humanitarian emergencies (Marsh, Purdin, & Navani, 2006; Stark & Ager, 2011; Stark & Landis, 2016). Research has widely demonstrated the harmful effects of violence against women (VAW) on women’s physical and mental health throughout the life course, including injury, sexually-transmitted infections, chronic stress, and control over reproductive choices (Campbell, 2002; García-Moreno et al., 2015; Matzopoulos, Bowman, Butchart, & Mercy, 2008). Similarly, children who are exposed to violence, whether directly or indirectly, face long-term impacts on their physical, emotional, and social development (Chai et al., 2016; Gilbert et al., 2009; Reza et al., 2009). Several recent reviews demonstrating the high rate of interpersonal violence in humanitarian settings have both built upon and expanded international agencies’ commitment to address violence in these contexts (Stark & Ager, 2011; Stark & Landis, 2016; Vu et al., 2014).

However, the evidence base has lagged behind the momentum for violence prevention and response in humanitarian emergencies. This gap can be attributed to several factors. First, many violence studies have focused on forms of wartime violence, such as rape and sexual abuse by armed groups (Amowitz et al., 2002; Baaz & Stern, 2009). However, other forms of violence – namely, violence against women and children in their own households – have been largely invisible (Catani, 2010; Stark, Warner, Lehmann, Boothby, & Ager, 2013). Violence between family members has remained understudied since the home is generally considered a private sphere (García-Moreno et al., 2015; Kohli et al., 2015). Second, the attention that household violence in humanitarian emergencies does receive has typically been divided. Research and intervention efforts have been fragmented across the gender-based violence and child protection sectors, each with its own theoretical basis, funding streams, lead agencies, strategies, terminologies, rights treaties and bodies of research (Guedes, Bott, García-Moreno, & Colombini, 2016).

In reality, VAW and violence against children (VAC) often co-exist within households, suggesting interrelated drivers (Gracia, Rodriguez, Martin-Fernández, & Lila, 2017; Guedes et al., 2016). A recent literature review of 33 peer-reviewed studies from humanitarian contexts identified multiple risk factors that are common across violence against women and children, including conflict-exposure, alcohol and drug use, income/economic status, mental health/coping strategies, and limited social support (Rubenstein, Lu, MacFarlane, & Stark, 2017). Humanitarian settings are likely to intensify these risk factors due to increases in stress, breakdown of family and community support networks, loss of employment, and engagement in harmful coping mechanisms such as substance use. While distinctions between VAW and VAC can be beneficial, such as for the development of legislation, advocacy, and programming, there are many compelling reasons for prevention and response efforts to jointly address both types of violence in the home, including better use of resources, more efficient coordination and potentially synergistic impact (Bacchus et al., 2017).

To address this gap in evidence, [Columbia University and UNICEF] collaborated on the Transforming Households: Reducing Incidence of Violence in Emergencies (THRIVE) project which sought to investigate the drivers of both VAW and VAC during humanitarian emergencies. This paper presents the findings of the formative study undertaken in Haiti, where at least two-thirds of children have experienced physical violence within the home (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014; République d’Haïti, 2012). VAW has affected nearly a third of Haitian women (Cayemittes et al., 2013), and sexual violence is reported to be higher among female youth displaced by natural disasters (Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2014). A complex combination of structural, institutional, and geopolitical factors has also led Haiti to be characterized by high rates of non-partner community violence (James, 2010), exposure to which is also likely to be influential when understanding violence within the home (Côté, 2014; Marcelin et al., 2015). Further, over the past decade, Haiti has been affected by numerous natural disasters, including tropical storms and earthquakes, that may increase the likelihood of violence as they can result in the weakening of social protection mechanisms, aggravated daily stressors, and changing family dynamics (Horton, 2012; Rubenstein & Stark, 2017; Weitzman & Behrman, 2016).

With the exception of research on adolescent females, where VAW and VAC research questions align, studies have not typically inquired on the co-occurrence and intersections between multiple forms of violence. Independent inquiries of VAW, VAC, and non-partner community violence in Haiti have identified similar or seemingly interconnected drivers of perpetration, such as low levels of education attainment (Flynn-O’Brien, Rivara, Marcelin, Lea, & Mercy, 2015; Gage, 2005), past exposure to family violence (Gage, 2005; Gage, Honoré, & Deleon, 2016; Willman & Marcelin, 2010), and poor relationship quality (Gage, 2005; Gage & Suzuki, 2006), though no study has explicitly analyzed the relationships among these drivers. This qualitative analysis specifically investigates the intersecting drivers of multiple forms of violence in Côteaux, Haiti, while simultaneously obtaining insight on how these drivers may be influenced by a humanitarian emergency.

1.1. Analytical framework

The socioecological model is a framework recommended by public health organizations (among others) for its use in understanding and preventing interpersonal violence (Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2014; WHO, 2018a, 2018b)). Slightly adapted from its original conceptualizations (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), current versions of the socioecological model consist of four nested layers: individual, relational, community, and societal (Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2014; WHO,
2018a, 2018b), with each layer retaining an array of risk factors for VAW, VAC, and community violence. At the societal level, for instance, feminist researchers have theorized the relationships between patriarchal gender norms and violence against women and children (Grabe, Grose, & Dutt, 2015; Namy et al., 2017). At the community level, exposure to armed conflict and the inability of law enforcement and judicial procedures to enforce and uphold laws are indicated as drivers of violence (Testa, Young, & Mullins, 2017). Relational variables consist of decision-making power and relationship quality (Heise, 1998) while alcohol use, HIV status, and experiencing violence as a child, represent various individual factors (Birkley & Eckhardt, 2015; Namy et al., 2017). We applied this framework to our data analysis to examine the various levels at which drivers of violence may occur and intersect.

2. Methods

This qualitative analysis used transcripts from in-depth interviews conducted in October and November 2017 as part of the THRIVE Haiti project.

2.1. Setting

The formative study took place in the commune of Côteaux in the Sud Department in southwestern Haiti. Côteaux is a small, coastal community with a population of approximately 20,000 people living across four geographic sections: Centre-ville, Quentin, Despas, and Chevalier. Despite progress over the past several decades, Haiti has consistently recorded poor health and development indicators when compared to other countries in the Americas, including life expectancy (63 years), percentage of the population living below the national poverty line (58.5%), maternal mortality (359 deaths per 100,000 live births), and literacy (49%) (United Nations International Children’s Fund (UNICEF, 2018; World Bank, 2018; WHO, 2018a, 2018b).

Over the past decade, Haiti has been affected by numerous natural disasters, including tropical storms and earthquakes, with devastating consequences. In 2010, a magnitude 7 earthquake destroyed much of Port-au-Prince, creating far-reaching negative implications for the entire country (World Bank, 2018). One year prior to the formative study, Côteaux and the surrounding region were hit by Hurricane Matthew, affecting more than two million Haitians, including at least 546 deaths, 439 injuries and the displacement of 175,000 residents (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2016). Following the hurricane, 317,000 students in Haiti experienced disruption in their educations and schools in affected areas remain damaged (UN OCHA, 2017). Water, sanitation, food security and healthcare were also impacted. Despite some reconstruction efforts, Côteaux and other coastal communes continue to struggle with recovery. A survey employing stratified cluster sampling of 984 residents across the Grand-Anse and Sud departments, conducted more than six months after the disaster, found that 93% still did not have a suitable place to live and 77% lacked access to potable water (Marcelin & Cela, 2017).

2.2. Participants

In order to purposively sample participants from different areas of the commune, community leaders from each section were asked to provide the research team with names and contact information for 16 people in their section, including four adult females, four adult males, four adolescent females (13–17 years), and four adolescent males (13–17 years). The researchers asked the community leaders to nominate individuals that generally represented the condition of their sections, rather than individuals facing extreme circumstances, such as being heavily impacted by Hurricane Matthew. The researchers further clarified that respondents would not get paid or receive any material benefit for their participation in the study. Individuals were considered eligible to participate in the study if they resided within Côteaux in a household with other family members, but only one participant per family could be selected for the study. The interviewers then randomly selected two names from each age and gender stratum and invited these individuals to participate in the study. The remaining names were used as alternatives in case the first two individuals were not available or did not consent to participate in the research. A total of 36 individuals participated in the study: eight adult females, ten adult males, eight adolescent females, ten adolescent males. The adolescent participants ranged from 13 to 17 years of age while the

| Table 1 |
|Participant Demographics (n = 36).|
|-------|---|---|
|Age group| n | % |
|Adolescents| 18 | 50.0 |
|Adults| 18 | 50.0 |
|Average age| M | SD |
|Adolescents| 15.2 | 1.7 |
|Adults| 50.1 | 11.3 |
|Sex| n | % |
|Male| 20 | 53.2 |
|Female| 16 | 46.8 |
adults were between 25 and 66 years old (Table 1).

2.3. Data collection

All data were collected through a photo elicitation approach, implemented over the course of three individual interview sessions, each lasting under 1.5 h. Photo elicitation is a participatory, qualitative method that uses photography as a tool for facilitating discussions on sensitive topics, such as VAW and VAC (Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, & Baruchel, 2006). During the first session, interviewers introduced the study to participants and sought their consent or assent to proceed with the research. Participants who agreed to proceed were given cameras to use for the duration of the study. Before the next two sessions, interviewers asked participants to take photos related to specific prompts about family relationships, family safety, and well-being, and changes to family dynamics due to Hurricane Matthew and its aftermath. The second and third sessions then involved discussion about the photos taken in response to these prompts. Discussion was guided by a semi-structured interview guide mean to explore key themes relevant to the research questions, including gender roles and decision-making within the family and community, sources of stress and disagreement, conflict resolution tactics, and ideas for interventions to strengthen the family and community. The guide consisted of a general prompt, followed by probes related to these key themes. Illustrative prompts included, “This week I’d like you to think about the meaning of family” or “This week I’d like you to show me what a healthy, happy family means to you”.

The purpose of using a participatory approach like photo elicitation was to provide participants with the ability to share stories and to drive the conversation on their own terms. This technique was intended to mitigate barriers related to power differentials that can arise in traditional interview structures, especially with adolescents and when discussing sensitive topics. By carrying out the interviews over three individual sessions, the interviewers were able to build trust and rapport with participants over time and gradually initiate discussions about more delicate issues in later sessions. The interview prompts were deliberately ordered to allow for this progression.

The field team included six Haitian interviewers (two females, four males), one Haitian field coordinator, and three field oversight staff from outside of Haiti. A team of researchers from Columbia University and UNICEF Haiti staff recruited and screened the interviewers in order to assemble a team with diverse academic backgrounds and levels of qualitative research experience. Four of the interviewers lived in Port-aux-Prince and two lived in the Sud Department. All interviewers were fluent in French and Haitian Creole.

2.4. Ethical procedures

Before any training or data collection procedures began, [UNICEF] Haiti held a group meeting to introduce the study to local child protection leaders. In addition, the interviewers, field coordinator, and oversight staff visited each of the four geographic sections in Côteaux to introduce the study to community leaders, seek the leaders’ permission to proceed, and engage them in participant sampling. The study was described as a way to better understand the challenges faced by families in Côteaux, as well as what helps improve family well-being.

Prior to data collection, the interviewers participated in two weeks of classroom training and one week of supervised pilot interviews. Training topics included qualitative research methodology, ethics and confidentiality, appropriate referral processes, conceptions of violence, and reflexivity exercises. Trainings and pilot exercises were led by [Columbia] University researchers with assistance from [UNICEF] staff. At the first interview session, consent was collected from all participants aged 18 years and over while parental consent and adolescent assent were collected for those 17 years and younger. Researchers reiterated that participation was entirely voluntary and would have no effect on access to benefits of current or future programs. Prospective participants and their parents/guardians were told they were free to withdraw from the study at any time and were assured that all efforts would be made to ensure the confidentiality of responses. Individuals were not paid for their participation. Consent/assent forms were translated into Haitian Creole and read aloud, given the low literacy rates in the area. Participants then indicated their consent/assent with their signature. During the consent process, information was provided on (a) how to keep the cameras safe, (b) not to take pictures of people without their verbal consent, and (c) not to bring the camera to places that may be insecure.

Suspected cases of child abuse were recorded by the international team leader who then contacted the focal point of UNICEF's local partner in Coteaux to ensure the case was referred to appropriate services. A referral pathway for urgent action cases was also established prior to starting the research. Urgent action cases were characterized as those when a child’s life was in danger if immediate action was not taken and differed from the formal referral processes in that it was not bound to participants in the study. Urgent action cases were quite rare but would include a child who was living in a home without an adult present or a child in need of immediate medical attention. Over the course of data collection, five cases were referred to an international NGO and followed up by the research team and [UNICEF] Haiti to ensure beneficiaries could access the services needed. At the time of the study, the NGO was in the process of conducting a mapping and quality assurance of existing referral services that THRIVE helped reinforce and strengthen. The study protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the [Columbia] University Medical Center (AAAR4386) and the Haitian Ministry of Health.

2.5. Analysis

Each of the 36 individuals selected to participate in the photo elicitation exercise sat for three audio-recorded interviews over the course of the project. The bilingual Haitian team leader randomly selected recordings of interviews to ensure that the enumerators were conducting the interviews in a consistent manner and in accordance to the research questions. The 108 sessions were then
transcribed into Haitian Creole and translated into English by a team of external translators. Inductive thematic analysis (Thomas, 2006) was used to analyze data using English translations of the transcripts. Two staff from [Blinded for Review] University participated in transcript review and codebook development. The analysis team developed open codes through review of one adult and one adolescent transcript, continuing to add and revise codes in an iterative process. All transcripts were coded using Dedoose 8.0.33 (Socio Cultural Research Consultants, Los Angeles, CA). Nine transcripts were reviewed by both members of the analysis team to further refine the conceptualization of the codebook. The analysis team communicated weekly about the emergent themes and codebook development. These reflections were collated and provided the foundation for the formation of eight central themes encompassing 55 axial codes (Fig. 1).

3. Results

When examining respondent observations of VAW, VAC, and non-partner community violence, we identified multiple and converging drivers. The accumulation of daily stressors, loss of power/control, learned behavior/intergenerational cycle of abuse, and gender norms were all identified as drivers that influenced violent behavior in both personal and public spheres. Building upon the work of THRIVE Colombia (Mootz et al., forthcoming), these themes are labeled with respect to their positioning within a socioecological framework (Table 2) and discussed in detail below.

3.1. Accumulation of daily stressors

When examining key drivers of violence against women and children, the predominant post-hurricane themes noted by respondents were the intersecting experiences of economic adversity, food insecurity, and unemployment. Nearly all adult male and female respondents indicated these structural insecurities as detrimental to the well-being of their family and their community. This
sentiment was reflected in a quote by a 62-year-old male respondent, “The people have no money. They have no animals to sell to make the money. They have no jobs.”

These post-disaster challenges are widespread and based on respondent feedback, seemingly without solutions in the foreseeable future. This daily stress caused some adults to feel despondent and hopeless in the face of these difficult circumstances. Others noted their resiliency as a people who have faced numerous hardships but felt this particular situation was beyond their capacity to cope. For instance, in describing her community, a 45-year-old female respondent said, “Things have changed. You don't have money to make the money. They have no jobs.”

Hurricane Matthew also devastated infrastructure in Côteaux, rendering people homeless and negatively impacting resident access to potable water, access that was already tenuous prior to the disaster. The lack of access to a needed resource was often cited as an instigator of physical violence, particularly among adolescents (both males and females) tasked with collecting water for their households. A 60-year-old male respondent noted, “We need potable water. There are still fights over getting water. It used to come down here but Quentin keeps it all…We don't get it. That's a problem.”

The community’s commitment to mutual assistance and support to their fellow neighbor, was seen by some as challenged within the post-disaster context. With fewer resources at their disposal, traditional support structures in Côteaux were strained and families unable to provide for the basic needs of those within the community.

There is a strong level of stress in the zone… their houses are devastated. Moreover, they are wondering how they would rebuild their houses. They have already built a small room, until now they are living in tents, and there are some others who are lying down on the ground. They do not have someone in their family to help them because they all have their own problems. - Male, Age 40

In addition to personal residences, respondents noted the effect of the hurricane on walkways and roadways, destruction that was ultimately affecting their ability to engage in commerce.

As you can see, these little paths, during Matthew the water came and broke down houses in the zone and took them away, and that's why these paths are inaccessible. The people who lived this zone don't even have another place to live in or build. I
The accumulation of daily stressors was a key factor for respondents as they discussed violence within the home and the community. The post-disaster context in Haiti exacerbated economic and food insecurities, compounding the routine stress of providing for one’s family and raising children. This stress, while felt by both men and women, appeared to have more severe implications for men who were husbands and fathers. Traditional gender roles dictate that Haitian men are to be the primary financial provider for the household, a norm that was associated with physical violence when men were called out for their inability to fulfill that expectation.

There is a neighbor that beat up his wife once, because she asked him for money but he didn’t have any. The woman told him to look for a job instead of going outside but each time she tells him that, he beats her up. - Female, Age 51

In this and similar cases, the rigidity of gender roles intersected with the daily stressors of economic and job insecurity to create a scenario where the male partner reacted with physical violence. At the same time, these economic stressors and gender roles also appeared to intersect to influence women’s decisions to formally report or disclose abuse. A 32-year-old male respondent suggested, “I think this is the reason why women think twice before [reporting]. They see that they sentence the man for 10 years. Who is going to feed the house? Therefore, they don’t make any complaints.” This quote illuminates that, where women feel economically dependent upon their male partner and economic resources are scarce, losing a viable income earner was considered to be a less desirable choice than sustaining physical abuse within the home.

When examining experiences of violence against children, interviews highlighted situations where the accumulation of daily stressors was taken out on children in the form of physical punishment. For instance, a 57-year-old male who had previously described his loss of cattle due to Hurricane Matthew and his inability to pay his children’s tuition also noted that when his children continually disobeyed, he would be angered to the point of whipping them in order to make them listen. Similarly, a 17-year-old girl disclosed that she whipped her younger siblings with belts when they refused to obey her. She also noted that her mother had died, her father worked in Port-au-Prince, and that she shared a home with her grandmother and younger siblings where the roof was insufficient and therefore they got wet whenever it rained. While used with the aim of modifying behavior, physical punishment was discussed by participants as an outgrowth of anger and frustration and co-occurring with stress, particularly in households faced with multiple stressors and among family members who had not received prior training on or exposure to positive parenting or conflict resolution techniques.

In communities, daily stressors also manifested as physical altercations among neighbors as disputes over land and property escalated.

These ladies usually quarrel with the man in this photo. One day, the man declared a banana tree that was between his garden and their garden to be his. This created a big quarrel between them. There is another man whose son had a hen and some roosters. These ladies have three children that the man accused of killing one of the roosters. The ladies say it was [name erased] who killed the rooster and this provoked a big quarrel. - Male, Age 17

Taken together, there are indications that daily relational stressors intersect with community-level stressors—including job insecurity, lack of sufficient shelter, and economic concerns—and that such stressors may accumulate and drive violence within and outside the home.

3.2. Loss of power/control

Another driver of violence was the perceived loss of power and control. When examining VAW, we found men most often using violence to respond to 1) their loss of agency or inability to provide economically for their households and 2) the alleged infidelity of their partner. In describing a physical confrontation between a husband and wife, a 32-year-old male respondent said, “His wife was being unfaithful to him. He was obligated to fight with her.” This quote illustrates what the respondent sees as the obligatory nature of physical violence in response to infidelity (real or imagined). At the same time, women were also reported to initiate physical altercations with their husbands over perceived infidelity. A 17-year-old male respondent described his aunt in the following terms: “She is so jealous. If she sees my uncle talking with someone, she’d say that uncle is cheating on her...If my aunt gets nervous, she would throw everything in the house at him.” In both examples, partners used aggression and physical violence to express their displeasure and assert power in a situation where they may have felt they had lost control.

The tension between parental desire for control and children’s desire for independence was also evident as a driver of violence against children. Broadly speaking, children’s agency was viewed by some respondents as unacceptable. Adults feared that children with control over their decision-making processes would make poor decisions, leading to delinquency and early pregnancy. Thus, adults who parented within this framework viewed self-control or agency to be problematic, as evidenced in a quote from a 50-year-old female, “Sometimes there are some children who control themselves. They can do whatever they want but we don’t accept that in our family.”

Within a humanitarian context, we find this sense of lost personal agency exacerbated by the consequences of the disaster. Respondents reported family separation as normative, with children being sent to live with other family members or in child care institutions when their predominant caregivers were no longer able to sufficiently provide for them. A 59-year old man discussed his
rationale for taking one of his children to an orphanage:

Interviewer: 'But why exactly did you take that child to an orphanage?' Participant: 'The reason is because we do not have a house: when you have shelter you can live, cook, and eat but when you do not have a home we cannot do much. The reason why all of this happened is because we no longer have a house and the mother died...During the post-hurricane times I also became sick and lost a lot of weight. I could not do anything at all and that is why my child is not currently with me.'

Family separation was spoken about as a pragmatic choice but was also acknowledged as a source of sadness for parents and siblings. The post-hurricane struggles to financially provide for all household members reinforce the concept of lost personal agency.

Loss of power and control was also evidenced in the community, particularly when it came to vigilantism. When the collective perception was that a perpetrator would not be brought to justice by the existing law enforcement and judicial structures, vigilantism was seen as a mechanism for achieving that justice, allowing people within communities to enact physical punishment upon a perpetrator for behavior that is deemed unacceptable within the society.

'She left because she fought her brother in the house and then she came here to stay with her grandmother but she continued in the same path here. She came to do worse. The people wanted to beat her up but her family said no and protected her...[The community] wanted to say that things like that don't happen here. That an outsider came here and brought all this trouble to the neighborhood...that is why they were ready to beat her up. She hurt someone.' - Male, Age 16

While the data does not provide further background on the young woman's history or rationale for her behavior, it does provide a glimpse into the concept of vigilante justice whereby residents may have been seeking to reduce violence within their community yet by doing so simultaneously perpetuated it further.

3.3. Learned behavior/intergenerational cycle of abuse

Several participants identified learned behavior as a key driver of violence within the home, including that which is aimed at an intimate partner or a child. A 46-year-old female spoke of an aunt who was brutally abused by her husband and a nephew that “keeps doing the same things his father used to do to his mother. It’s like he cannot change his attitude, it becomes natural.” Another female respondent reiterated the power and longevity of children’s observations.

"The problem is not with the people’s disagreements...it is when they start insulting and cursing each other. This isn't good for the education of the children around 'cause you know that kids are like cassettes, they record everything they hear...You may say something good, they do not pay attention, while they may keep the bad things." - Female, Age 60

Indeed, older siblings, who often co-parent younger siblings, were frequently reported to enact physical punishment upon younger siblings for perceived bad behavior. Participants reported that older children used the same disciplinary methods on their younger siblings that they received from their parents (e.g. slapping, whipping, spanking). This cycle was then ingrained from an early age, with children internalizing physical violence as ordinary and a routine experience within the family. One 13-year-old adolescent male considered his household to be free of conflicts, even though his parents regularly whipped him. He stated that his family lives well together and when asked if his parents whipping him was a conflict, he said, “No, it isn't. I hold nothing against them.”

While violence was normalized in many households, we found that those who had been taught the concept of learned behavior were far less likely to report engaging in physical altercations, particular with an intimate partner, fearing their children will then adopt those same practices as they age.

"Sometimes it happens that I feel like slapping my wife. But as I am a family father, I am raising children, so I always try to avoid that - because of my children. They are intelligent. It is said the child's brain is selective so he will never forget that one day you have slapped your wife or wife has slapped you...So, if you slap your wife before your children, it is a lesson you are teaching them and they will do the same in the future. So we are obliged to avoid that." - Male, Age 40

In general, education was perceived to be a deterrent to multiple forms of violence, with some respondents associating patterns of violence with a lack of education. In describing a section of his community prone to violence, a 60-year-old male respondent stated, “They don't go to school, they have no education, and they fight over any stupidity. There's always an argument around here. Any ugly comments can change things into a fight.”

In the same respect, respondents noted physical punishment to be associated with a lack of formal education. For instance, in speaking about physical discipline rendered within the neighborhood, a 17-year-old female stated, "Some educated parents don't like the fact that you spank their children." This quote illustrates a recurring theme, specifically a divergence in viewpoints on the acceptability of physical punishment between “educated” parents and those who have not completed formal schooling, at least in terms of what actions they will condone by others. It also exemplifies a scenario where the use of physical discipline is done in public, by non-family members, tying what happens in the household to what happens in the community.

Learned behavior was evidenced elsewhere in the community where disputes over livestock and property were reported to turn violent. A 40-year-old male was one of many respondents to describe scenarios where animals escaped from their owner, were found in a neighbor’s garden, and were killed by that neighbor. These types of situations were described as bringing “so many heated quarrels,” including physical altercations, between residents and were reported to be observed by children within the community, thus potentially perpetuating violent reactions to community conflict among the next generation.
3.3.1. Need for behavior modification

The use of physical punishment to modify children’s behavior was one of the key concepts passed down through generational observation and custom. Participants reported common techniques of whipping with sticks or tree branches, spanking, beating/hitting, and slapping as a negative consequence for undesirable behavior. Failure to study or take education seriously, getting into fights with siblings, refusing to listen, refusing to do chores, and engaging in romantic relationships were the primary reasons children were reported to receive physical punishment. Parents demonstrated an earnest fear that failure to physically reprimand their children would result in delinquency, early pregnancy, and school drop-out. A 63-year-old male respondent recited the Haitian saying, “Better to see the kids cry than the parents cry,” which was used to reiterate the purpose of physical punishment as a tool for behavior modification and to justify his own use of physical violence to reprimand his children.

Yet, respondents also noted that physical punishment can come from a place of anger and frustration, demonstrating a lack of alternative parenting techniques to modify a child’s behavior. For instance, a 57-year-old male respondent noted, “If you talk to the child several times and he chooses not to act right, sometimes, this will make you angry to the point where you use a whip to make him listen.” This quote illustrates how multiple drivers of violence, including intergenerational norms around behavior modification and the accumulation of daily stressors, can intersect for parents trying to respond to their child’s perceived misbehavior.

In addition, an oft-cited reason for physical punishment included adolescent engagement in romantic relationships. An adult male participant explained:

"At a certain age, the body is changing and the child feels the sexual need. Their parents can't accept this idea but they never try to talk to their children to teach them how life is. They never try to explain to them the danger that exists when they have sex too early. What they do as soon as they know their children have a relationship with a person, they beat them. They don't let them out. They think that beating them will change them but they are wrong." - Male, Age 32

When examining the use of physical punishment to deter romantic relationships within the context of broader gender norms, we see the desire for parents to retain power and control over children, more often adolescent girls, in respect to their sexual autonomy. At the same time, in the post-disaster context of Côteaux, education was revered and viewed as extremely important for children to create a better life for themselves and their future families. Many parents had not been formally educated and they viewed the education of their children as the predominant way to alleviate their suffering. Thus, early pregnancy and the discontinuation of school were to be avoided at all costs, with some parents using physical violence to deter romantic relationships, particularly among adolescent girls, considering such relationships to jeopardize the child’s future.

Despite the common use of physical punishment, there was some question as to whether or not it was actually effective at correcting behavior. When asked about his daughter’s reaction to being hit, the father stated that there was, “Not really a big reaction. Whether you hit her or not, her behavior did not improve.” This quote illustrates one parent’s frustration with the existing disciplinary techniques at his disposal, finding them to be ineffective in changing his daughter’s conduct.

In contrast, we found that parents who believed in a more egalitarian decision-making system within their household and that were more inclusive of children’s opinions and ideas, were less likely to report whipping or hitting their children. One 38-year-old female reiterated that she gave her daughter a voice in decision making, stating, “She has freedom of expression. She has the right to give her opinion.” In a subsequent interview, the same respondent recognized that her style of parenting was still fairly uncommon in her community, noting, “There aren’t many [parents] that would just reprimand [children]. Most would beat them.” Echoing this sentiment, a 25-year-old female respondent noted:

"I always talk to them [my children]. Some parents think whenever the child does something bad, they have to beat him to correct him. But sometimes, you need to talk to the child to explain to him that what he did was not good." - Female, Age 25

While the insight provided by these respondents underscore the normality of harsh discipline in Côteaux, they also point to the association between greater decision-making power for all family members (including children), improved communication techniques, and a reduction of violence against children in the home.

3.4. Gender roles

While both males and females were perpetrators of violence within Côteaux, respondents offered insight into gender dynamics that may drive violence among men in the region. First, non-partner violence within the community was thought to be largely driven by male aggression fueled by substance use and occurring during emotionally charged events such as wakes or sporting events. Participants frequently mentioned soccer games as an instigator of violence when the losing team and its fans felt an injustice had occurred.

"There were several conflicts that were caused by soccer games. There was a championship in which a team was playing against the team in our community. So our team scored a goal which they refused us. And that led to a fight...They fought with bats." - Male, Age 13

As the men struggled with their role as economic providers in a post-disaster context characterized by job and food insecurity, soccer games may have served as an outlet to release that tension or as simply a distraction from the multitude of daily stressors. A 46-year-old female respondent stated, “Well sometimes, we see that, if there is a soccer match, more and more adults are interested in watching it. I don’t know if it’s because they don’t have jobs or if they are looking for distraction.” While the lure of sporting events may be multi-dimensional, their association with male-perpetrated, non-partner community violence was evidenced through
In addition, men’s gender-prescribed role as provider and head of household, one that has roots in traditional norms as well as religious practices, had a reportedly nuanced relationship with violence. Several men who identified as strong believers in the Christian religion noted their role as household head. For example, a 63-year-old male respondent described his role in the home, “Well, as the man, you have the leadership of the household. After God, the man is the chief. You are at the right side.” This norm was also embraced by some women in the community with one 51-year-old woman stating that the role of men was to “take care of their wife and children.” When these norms were defied in public, some men felt the need to use physical violence to assert their dominating position. A 25-year-old female discussed a case in her community where a woman was injured by her spouse, stating, “he wasn’t supposed to hurt her but he got nervous because she insulted him in front of other people...he was ashamed. That is why he hurt her.” Such hierarchies of power and control were often aligned with acceptance of VAW. Yet, others who also identified as Christian followers touted religion as the reason they no longer engaged in physical disputes and discussed equal partnerships with their female spouses, from decision-making to household chores. Indeed, over one third of residents, typically those with higher levels of education, expressed their comfort with shared household responsibilities, considering it to be for the good of the family. Where this kind of gender role fluidity was present, we found greater mutual decision making between male and females with intimate partners described as teammates, working together to overcome obstacles. A 47-year-old female noted, “All jobs are shared. It is not a question of [who is the] boss.” Similarly, a 63-year-old male respondent described the partnership with his wife as “a strong point” in his family and that together they “hustle to feed the house and provide them with clothes.” Another male respondent, 47 years of age, noted that if his wife is busy “I can do everything she can do in the house...I can wash the dishes or mop the floor...I cooked before coming here.” Male participation in household duties was seen as a product of his parents’ upbringing. A 50-year-old female reiterated, “Yes, there are men who usually help their wife with chores. They don’t let their wife do everything alone in the home because the parents of those men taught them how to manage their own home.” These quotes show that a certain fluidity around gender norms does exist in Côtaux, often for the sake of efficiency in meeting the needs of household members. However, despite this fluidity, there does appear to be an overarching sense that men’s primary role is as breadwinner while the primary role of females is as caregiver, even if males assist with some household duties and women assist with income generation. Indeed, men frequently noted that women were under less pressure because they could “find a man” to address economic needs. A 32-year-old male respondent stated, “It’s easier for the woman to help her parents no matter what the situation because she can always find a man to help her, no matter her level [of education].” The sentiments above capture the singular pressures felt by men to provide economically, a chronic stressor within the post-disaster context of Côtaux, and a noted driver of physical conflicts between intimate partners.

3.4.1. Substance use

Another driver of violence that was reported to be gendered was that of substance use, particularly alcohol consumption and its association with non-partner community violence in multiple respects. Adolescent boys frequently mentioned drunken altercations at neighborhood wakes (pre-funeral vigils held outside the home of someone who has died). Substance use was also associated with unemployment, with respondents narrating scenes within their communities where groups of unemployed men drank during the day and were prone to violence. In describing her community, a 46-year-old female stated, “You’d see the jobless guys sitting all day playing, drinking and whenever you might be passing by you’d hear them shout insults at one another. And if you interfere, there might be fight.”

In addition to community violence, respondents mentioned associations between substance use and violence against women. It was common for participants, particularly females, to report male intoxication as a pre-cursor to violence. In the majority of these reported scenarios, women expressed their disapproval of the man’s drinking habits and inquired about needed financial resources for the household. This angered the male partner who then lashed out physically. A 51-year-old female provided one of many quotes in this regard, “The biggest problem is when the man is drunk... When he comes home drunk the woman tells him he doesn't even have money to pay the rent, but he has to drink alcohol.” This quote illustrates the intersections that exist between substance use, gender norms, and violence as men struggle to meet the economic needs of their families in post-disaster Côtaux. Interestingly, respondents did not mention substance use in relation to VAC, making it the only driver identified within the study that was not identified across all three forms of violence.

Respondents did not provide a rationale for substance use in their communities. However, numerous respondents reiterated the toll that Hurricane Matthew had taken on residents’ mental health, factors that can be co-morbid with substance use. Males and females alike commented on the “sadness” and “hopelessness” they felt and that was common within their community. Often referred to as “thinking too much,” respondents of all ages were candid about their struggles to regain hope. “It touches us very hard, because we know how we used to be. Sometimes we put our hand in our face, we sit, sometimes a person may pass and say, ‘take off your hand from your face’ and I may say I’m thinking deeper. Sometimes we are touched when we remember how our life was and now the way we are, that gives us sadness.” – Female, Age 50

4. Discussion

This study examines the converging drivers of VAC, VAW, and non-partner community violence in the post-disaster context of Côtaux, Haiti. Our findings suggest that drivers of violence are largely interconnected across public and private domains and that these drivers are intensified in a humanitarian context. This qualitative work offers important considerations for practitioners when...
designing interventions in humanitarian settings, illuminating cross-cutting drivers that, when addressed holistically, may have broad implications for violence reduction in households and within communities. Specifically, four overarching themes emerged from the data.

Intersecting drivers of violence have roots in hierarchical gender norms

Findings revealed common drivers of VAW, VAC, and non-partner community violence, many of which were rooted in adherence to, or failure to meet, the expectations of traditional gender norms. The daily stress felt by men to provide economically for a family was a critical concept that can be understood within the frame of power dynamics. A loss of power and control over one’s life and household, aggravated by the economic situation after Hurricane Matthew, was viewed as a driver of violence. Similarly, substance use may have offered men an outlet to numb the boredom of unemployment and the stressor of failed expectations, particularly where that behavior had been learned at home or among peers (Gage & Suzuki, 2006). Aligned with prior research, substance use was then found to be interconnected with violence, including intimate partner violence, particularly where men’s role as economic provider and gatekeeper of his wife’s fidelity resulted in stress when these expectations were not met (Gage, 2005). In addition, social norms that promote violence or power as characteristic of masculinity may promote an acceptance of non-specific family violence, that is violence aimed at either a partner or a child, or both (Gracia et al., 2017). Indeed, hierarchical gender norms that gave little to no autonomy to children were also a key component in the use of violence for behavior regulation. Such norms gave ultimate authority to adults and supported the use of physical punishment as opposed to the use of more positive parenting techniques and more egalitarian decision-making within the household.

In contrast, across study strata, respondents whose families adhered to more relaxed gender norms and followed more egalitarian decision-making processes, were less likely to report VAW or VAC. This pattern, while not generalizable due to the small sample size and qualitative nature of the methodology, still offers a promising indication that gender transformative programming can play an indirect role in reducing violence within the home, which may then spillover to a reduction of violence within the community. It is feasible that these relaxed gender roles reduce the amount of pressure on male partners to be the primary breadwinner, a pressure that was tied to hopelessness, substance use, and violence in this post-disaster context. More equitable gender norms may also relieve men of the societal pressure to embrace traditional masculine stereotypes that push men to exhibit power and control, another driver of violence. It also suggests that programs that seek to strengthen women’s roles in the household, such as targeted cash disbursements to females, without also addressing norms change related to masculinity, can plausibly exacerbate factors that contribute to VAW (Gupta et al., 2013).

Humanitarian emergencies intensify existing drivers of violence

Hurricane Matthew devastated the residents of Côteaux, who continued to experience its detrimental effects one year after it occurred. These effects include significant economic, food, and employment insecurity, as well as a lack of potable water, insufficient shelter, and infrastructure in need of repair. Given the chronically high rates of VAC, VAW, and structural violence, a disaster in Haiti is not likely to be the first or only major traumatic event in the lives of many children and women. Rather, an emergency is often an “acute on chronic” trauma exposure, which may result in greater complexities with respect to well-being (Gabrielli, Gill, Koester, & Borntrager, 2014). Our findings underscore two predominant themes associated with the post-hurricane setting, namely loss of power/control and accumulation of daily stressors. These drivers of violence were intensified by the hurricane and appeared to directly intersect with other drivers, such as inequitable gender norms, and learned patterns of harmful behavior, to create scenarios where individuals may be more prone to employ violence. In addition, humanitarian emergencies can stress the rule of law, particularly in settings with weak law enforcement and judicial structures prior to a disaster. In contexts where there is an insufficient government response to allegations of violence and impunity for perpetrators, residents may be more likely to engage in self-policing mechanisms, perpetuating a cyclical pattern of violence as residents inflict physical harm on perpetrators.

Interventions should build upon potential mediators of violence

In addition to identifying drivers of violence that converged across multiple domains, the study also observed potential mediators. Religiosity was found to influence respondents’ views on VAW, offering an opportunity to engage religious leaders in the promotion of non-violence, both within and beyond the home. Next, complementing the global literature on violence perpetration (Abramsky et al., 2011; Gass, Stein, Williams, & Seedat, 2011; Schumacher et al., 2010), we found education to mitigate drivers of violence. While low levels of formal education have formerly been associated with violence perpetration in Haiti (Gage, 2005), the desire for adult learning was apparent, suggesting that trainings on positive parenting and relationship skill-building could be well-received, particularly if presenting evidence on how such techniques would improve outcomes for children. Indeed, a recent nationally representative survey found that just under 30% of adults found physical punishment effective in child rearing despite the vast majority of children reporting they had experienced violence as a form of discipline within the home (République d’Haiti, 2012). Our qualitative work aligns with this study, illustrating how interpersonal violence can be carried on of habit, even if the perpetrator does not feel it is particularly effective. Sharing research that shows physical punishment leading to increased child aggression and VAW later in life (Durrant & Ensom, 2012) as well as lower academic achievement (Boden, Horwood, & Ferguson, 2007) may be particularly compelling, particularly when delivered by a trusted community partner, adapted to the local context, and implemented in tandem with programs designed to meet the basic needs of community residents. Lastly, efforts at gender equality may find receptive audiences when such ideas are packaged as a way to strengthen partnerships and efficiencies within the home.

Multi-sectoral interventions are needed to reduce violence in a humanitarian context

The post-disaster context in Côteaux is characterized by severe material deprivations and lack of employment opportunities. Thus, the above areas for social intervention and family strengthening cannot be divorced from efforts to address the basic needs of community residents and improve structures for sustainable livelihood development. Creating opportunities for employment would help adults provide for their families, one of the most predominant stressors listed by respondents. Job creation would also increase
feelings of self-efficacy and personal agency, sentiments that appeared to be in short supply in the post-hurricane setting due to hopelessness as well as some reliance on humanitarian aid. Given that we found violence to be an attempt to assert power and control, often in response to a feeling that one’s control over a situation was somehow thwarted, employment and income generating opportunities allow individuals to regain a sense of personal agency. In isolation, this may not be sufficient for reducing violence, however, in combination with community trainings and non-violence sensitization campaigns (including through churches), the combined effort may prove effective. Similarly, efforts to strengthen economic autonomy among women could potentially contribute to increased reporting and care-seeking with respect to VAW. However, given that past research in Haiti has found greater female financial decision-making to be associated with VAW (Gage, 2005), such economic empowerment efforts should be implemented in conjunction with gender transformative work to encourage role reflection and egalitarian relationship practices. Lastly, violence prevention efforts should take an integrated approach, involving local community members, civil society, government, and the private sector in a way that each sector feels a sense of ownership over the initiative, working across various levels of the ecological model. Such integrated approaches offer an alternative to current structures in Haiti that are often highly centralized (Marcelin, Cela, & Shultz, 2016).

5. Limitations

In absence of a population registry, the research team worked with local leaders to identify individuals with a diversity of socioeconomic circumstances and experiences with the hurricane, repeatedly informing the leaders that participants would not receive any tangible benefit for their participation. Nevertheless, there was the possibility that local leaders nominated participants out of personal interest. In attempt to mitigate this possibility, we chose to engage multiple community leaders from different geographical areas and professions and to only select a random sub-set of participants within their lists.

Interviews were conducted in Haitian Creole, a rich descriptive language that requires a high degree of cultural competency to fully understand the references and inferences of the words and phrases used. Transcripts were translated into French and English, without back translation, thus it is probable that some cultural information and nuance was lost.

Further, given the small sample size of this study, the hypothesized relationships linking personal and household factors with higher or lower rates of violence remain speculative. Therefore, additional study is required to understand if causal links between the drivers identified in this thematic analysis are causal or merely co-occurring. Similarly, more research is needed to quantitatively examine 1) changes in rates of violence pre- and post- natural disaster and 2) the mediating role of the drivers identified in this manuscript in the relationship between a natural disaster and increased rates of VAW or VAC.

Lastly, in reviewing the transcripts, we found that girls, on average, provided far fewer responses within the qualitative interviews, as compared to boys within their peer group. This observation within the data collection process may be linked to broader inequitable gender norms that discourage adolescent opinion and participation, especially that of female adolescents. While several respondents have indicated these norms are changing and becoming more progressive within Haiti, particularly among those with higher levels of education, the residual effects of these hierarchical structures may have influenced girls' willingness to communicate within the context of this study.

6. Conclusion

This qualitative study provides insight on the converging drivers of VAC, VAW, and community violence in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew. Our findings suggest multiple and converging drivers of violence may be exacerbated in times of crises, requiring interdisciplinary responses. In order to comprehensively address the drivers of violence, practitioners and policy makers should consider the needs of individuals and their families holistically, integrating community-led, gender transformative efforts and positive parenting with basic needs provision, where feasible.

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