



COMBAT: A rural response to preventing violence against women and girls



■ EVIDENCE BRIEF

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Globally, one in three women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime.¹ In Ghana, violence against women and girls (VAWG) is prevalent; data from UN Women and other studies recorded a prevalence of 45% and incidence of 28% of at least one type of violence in the past 12 months.^{2,3}

The Community Based Action Teams (COMBAT) intervention aims to: reduce the incidence of VAWG in rural communities in Ghana; protect women's rights via state and community structures; and, raise public awareness about the causes and consequences of VAWG.

This evidence brief is intended for ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs); like-minded local NGOs for women and children, and leaders in the broader community working to prevent violence against women and girls. It is intended to highlight the magnitude of VAWG, the need to prevent it, and lead to a commitment by relevant stakeholders to provide resources and associated response services to address the drivers of VAWG.

Background

Violence against women and girls is a global human rights violation and public health issue with significant negative health and social consequences. In Ghana, recent estimates of the prevalence and incidence of VAWG indicate that 28% of women report at least one form of violence in the past year and 45% report prevalence of lifetime violence.⁴

Baseline research conducted within this VAWG prevention study found that 34% of respondents had experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) in the past year, with 21.4% reporting sexual and/or physical forms of IPV. Prevalence of past-year experience of emotional and economic IPV were 24.6% and 7.4% respectively.⁵

The passage of the Domestic Violence Act (732) in 2007 has had limited impact on the lived experiences of rural populations in Ghana. The COMBAT strategy was developed to address the limited public awareness of the magnitude of the problem, and its causes and consequences. In addition, COMBAT seeks to provide support to rural women to access response services. Previous research indicates that communities with lower socio-economic status and educational levels hold stronger and more patriarchal attitudes, which enable VAWG.

Communities are thus important targets for VAWG prevention programming.⁶ Furthermore, recent research indicates that community-led programmes enable ownership of the programme, address context-specific needs, and build trust.⁷

Description of the intervention

COMBAT is a rural response strategy that aims to reduce the incidence of VAWG in Ghana, particularly in rural communities, and protect women's rights through state and community-based structures. The intervention is implemented by men and women from the community who are selected and trained on types, causes and impact of VAWG, family laws, conflict resolution, advocacy counselling and support with referrals to relevant social services (police, social welfare, health and health, commission on human rights). The intervention is currently being evaluated through an impact evaluation led by the School of Public Health at the University of Ghana, Legon.



A COMBAT member sensitizing community members on violence. Photo: Obed Acquah Quansah



Key messages

- Violence against women and girls is a leading preventable cause of morbidity and mortality in Ghana.
- Violence against women and girls is driven by multiple factors including low education and economic status, patriarchal gender norms, unemployment, harmful use of alcohol or illicit drugs, poor communication, childhood exposure to violence and low knowledge of applicable laws.
- Community-led evidence-based interventions supported by local actors (e.g. traditional and religious leaders) are uniquely placed to support prevention of, and response to VAWG.
- A consistent and coordinated response is required to bridge the gap between community members, the police and other state agencies to ensure effective prevention and response to VAWG in Ghana.

Because of the sensitisation of the COMBATs in the community, we are now enlightened. We know the laws and so the violence, cheating and marital conflicts have reduced.

30-year-old male participant during a community review meeting

How?

Community-based Action Teams (COMBATs) use participatory methods, role plays, drama and dialogue, to educate and sensitise community members to the impact of VAWG and family laws pertaining to violence and human rights. They also provide counselling services and support survivors to access justice and other social services where necessary. In addition, they serve as the bridge between the community and other state agencies to ensure a consistent and coordinated response.

Where?

Approximately 63% of Ghana's Central region is rural, with an estimated population size of 2,413,050. The COMBAT intervention is delivered in more than 20 communities in two districts in the Central region, namely, Komenda, Edina, Eguafo Abirem (KEEA) and Agona. Intervention activities are carried out in public spaces, which include churches and mosques, and at gatherings such as traditional festivals, associations or group meetings. These activities are supplemented by radio broadcasts, public announcements and home visits.

Before becoming a COMBAT member, I thought some household chores were only for women. But now I know that there is nothing wrong in cooking or helping my wife to take care of the children, in fact it has improved our marriage.

Testimony of a COMBAT member

Who?

Study sites for the intervention were randomly selected based on clusters in the Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (DHS). The intervention is delivered to community members (men and women over the age of 18) and traditional and religious leaders in the identified and surrounding communities. In the 18 months since COMBAT operations started it has reached over 25,000 community members through community sensitisation and awareness-raising activities.

What?

The intervention uses COMBAT members to influence change in the community attitudes, norms and behaviours that drive gender inequality and perpetuate VAWG. These include: awareness-raising about VAWG and its criminal nature, its types and consequences; shifts in attitude toward patriarchal norms; education on available response services and referrals to state structures to respond to VAWG. Furthermore, the intervention seeks to ensure a coordinated response between available social service institutions in their response to VAWG at the community level.

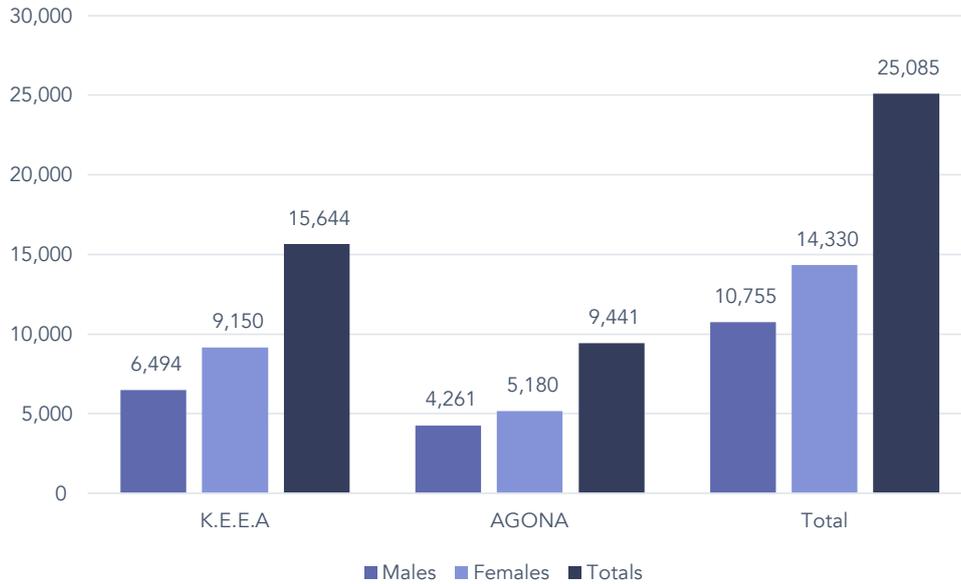
The COMBATs are doing a good work in my community, they have been able to educate the people on domestic violence and other laws of Ghana, like the Interstate Succession law, Wills Act and Marriage Laws. Prior to their sensitisation activities, there were so many things we were doing that we didn't know were abuses, now we know. I am ready to give them land to put up an office and continue their good work

Chief of a COMBAT project community

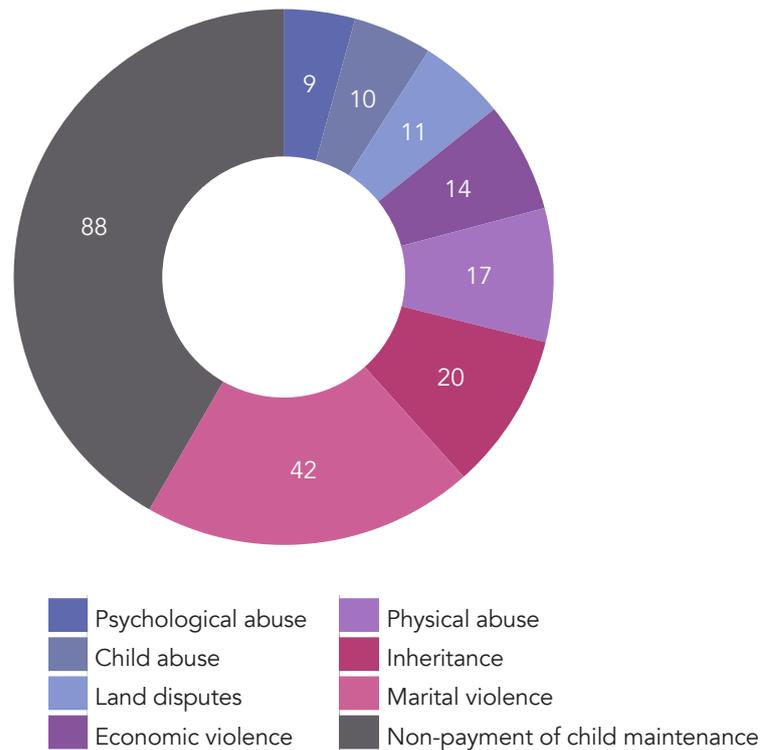
FINDINGS FROM THE COMBAT INTERVENTION

From June 2016 to November 2017, 220 cases were reported to the COMBATs for settlement. Most cases reported were about non-maintenance (40%) followed by marital issues (19%) as detailed in the charts below.

Number of people reached through COMBAT sensitization



Cases reported to COMBAT by community members



Conclusion

- The work of COMBAT has shown the magnitude of the problem of VAWG in Ghana and the importance of finding evidence-based and scalable interventions to prevent VAWG within rural communities.
- The COMBATs also reveal the need to engage multiple stakeholders (community members, religious and traditional leaders, state agencies and donors) in preventive efforts.
- Initial findings show commitment from and support of COMBATs by some traditional and religious leaders who have provided space for COMBAT activities (See above quote from the traditional leader). This demonstrates the potential sustainability of the intervention and the potential to positively influence some of the cultural practices that drive VAWG.
- The limited awareness of the drivers and consequences of VAWG in Ghana, especially in rural communities, calls for continued efforts to raise awareness and educate on types, drivers and consequences of VAWG, alongside the legal rights of survivors and responsibilities of first responders.

Implications

If the negative health and social impacts of violence against women and girls are not addressed through evidence-based interventions, they will result in far-reaching consequences not only for the individual, but also for the family, community and society as a whole. If violence against women and girls is not addressed, the negative social and economic cost could result in severe consequences for socioeconomic development in Ghana, notwithstanding the emotional and health effects on the survivors

References

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The What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls Programme is a flagship programme from the UK Department for International Development, which is investing an unprecedented £25 million over five years to the prevention of violence against women and girls. It supports primary prevention efforts across Africa and Asia that seek to understand and address the underlying causes of violence, and to stop it from occurring. Through three complementary components, the programme focuses on generating

evidence from rigorous primary research and evaluations of existing interventions to understanding what works to prevent violence against women and girls generally, and in fragile and conflict areas. Additionally the programme estimates social and economic costs of violence against women and girls, developing the economic case for investing in prevention.

Recommendations

- Once effectiveness of the COMBAT programme has been established, resources will be required from relevant state institutions, development partners as well as corporate bodies to support the programme as a viable VAWG prevention option
- Resources and support are required from ministries to recognise the programme and resource it as a viable VAWG prevention option.
- To sustain the operations of COMBAT traditional and religious bodies and community-based organisations need to provide human, financial and material resources within communities.
- The skills, agency and knowledge that the community and its individual members bring to the intervention should be recognised and harnessed.

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Violence Against Women and Girls