Transforming households, reducing the incidence of violence in emergencies: A study of CÔteaux, Haiti

CPC Learning Network at Columbia University and UNICEF

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Introduction

Interpersonal violence affecting women and children is increasingly recognized as a public health priority in humanitarian emergencies. Research has broadly demonstrated the harmful effects of violence on women’s physical and mental health throughout their lives, in the form of injuries, sexually transmitted infections, chronic stress and lack of control over reproductive choices (box 1). Similarly, children who are exposed to violence face long-term impacts on their physical, emotional and social development.

Although the effects of interpersonal violence in humanitarian settings, particularly against women and children, has been confirmed in several recent reviews, the evidence base has lagged behind the momentum for prevention and response.

This gap can be attributed to several factors. First, many studies have focused on wartime violence, such as rape and sexual abuse by armed groups, while other forms of violence, such as domestic violence, have been largely invisible. Violence between family members has remained understudied since the home is generally viewed as a private sphere. Second, when household violence in humanitarian emergencies does receive attention, it has typically 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.

In reality, violence against women and girls (VAWG) and violence against children (VAC) often co-exist within households, suggesting that these forms of violence are interrelated. A recent review of 33 peer-reviewed studies from humanitarian contexts identified multiple risk factors that are common to violence against both women and children, including conflict exposure, alcohol and drug use, income/economic status, mental health/coping strategies and lack of social support (box 2). Humanitarian emergencies 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 violence against women and against children can be beneficial, such as for the development of legislation, advocacy and programming, there are many compelling reasons to jointly address them in prevention and response efforts. These include better use of resources, more efficient coordination and potentially synergistic impact.
Studies have not typically inquired about the co-occurrence and intersections among multiple forms of violence, except in research on adolescent females, where research questions on violence against women and against children align. To address this gap in evidence, Columbia University and UNICEF collaborated on a project titled ‘Transforming Households: Reducing Incidence of Violence in Emergencies’ (THRIVE). It sought to investigate the drivers of violence against both women and children during humanitarian emergencies. The project is a collaboration between the CPC Learning Network at Columbia University, UNICEF and the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, with funding provided by the United States Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and Global Affairs Canada.

Recognizing the need for interventions to be grounded in the cultural and political realities of a specific context, THRIVE began formative work with emergency-affected populations in two settings, Colombia and Haiti, in 2017. This report presents the methods and findings from formative qualitative data collected in Haiti, which were analysed in partnership with the UNICEF Haiti country office. The purpose of the formative study was to gain deeper insights into how families in Haiti have been affected by household violence and conflict and how these realities might inform an intervention to reduce violence against women and children. In addition to building upon the existing frameworks and evidence base, the findings will be used to design and evaluate a violence prevention intervention that takes into account the specific needs and concerns of the target population(s), as expressed during this formative stage.

Box 2. Predictors of household violence in humanitarian settings

Before beginning the formative work in Haiti and Colombia, the THRIVE team conducted a literature review to identify predictors of violence against women and children in humanitarian emergencies globally. The authors found 33 studies that met inclusion criteria.* Several factors were associated with both types of violence, including conflict exposure, alcohol and drug use, income/economic status, mental health/coping strategies and lack of social support. These findings confirmed the intersection of predictors across violence against women and violence against children, as well as the potential for integrated interventions. Lessons from this review can be applied to improve violence prevention and response programming and to offer recommendations for further research. The review suggests that increased use of longitudinal studies and experimental designs can better establish temporality between exposures and household violence outcomes, control for confounding and inform practice.

The Haitian context

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 areas: Centreville, 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. It lags in indicators such as life expectancy (63 years), percentage of the population living below the national poverty line (58.5 per cent), maternal mortality (359 deaths per 100,000 live births) and literacy (49 per cent). In Haiti, at least two thirds of children and nearly a third of women have experienced violence in the home. A complex combination of structural, institutional and geopolitical factors have also led to high rates of non-partner community violence, which is also likely to be influential in understanding violence within the home. Further, Haiti has been subject to repeated natural disasters that have weakened social protection mechanisms, aggravated daily stressors and changed family dynamics, increasing the likelihood of violence.

Over the past decade, Haiti has been affected by numerous natural disasters, especially tropical storms and earthquakes, with devastating consequences. In 2010, a magnitude 7 earthquake destroyed much of Port-au-Prince, with far-reaching harmful consequences for the entire country. In 2016, one year prior to the formative study, Côteaux and the surrounding region was severely affected by Hurricane Matthew, with widespread devastation to property, livestock and livelihoods. This area was already one of the least developed parts of the country, and the hurricane exacerbated existing vulnerabilities.

According to official government statistics, Hurricane Matthew affected more than two million Haitians, causing at least 546 deaths, 439 injuries and the displacement of 175,000 residents. The hurricane also disrupted education for 317,000 students, and schools in affected areas remain damaged. Water, sanitation, food security and health care 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

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Box 3: Interventions addressing household violence in humanitarian settings

The THRIVE team conducted a landscaping review to examine interventions that have been used in humanitarian contexts and that may have applicability to primary prevention of violence against women, violence against children or both. The authors identified 43 interventions, only 6 of which explicitly focused on prevention of violence against both women and children. Among these six programmes, two were rigorously evaluated, and they demonstrated statistically significant reductions in violence. This finding suggests that existing programming may be missing opportunities to address the intersecting vulnerabilities of women and children in the home. It also suggests that lack of evaluations (or access to them) limits understanding of what is in place and precludes the opportunity to contribute to learning. In particular, the review recommended giving more attention to understanding how interventions affect different subgroups in households, such as fathers and adolescents. Continued funding is needed to develop, document and evaluate innovative violence prevention interventions.

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departments, conducted more than six months after the disaster, found that 93 per cent of the people still did not have a suitable place to live and 77 per cent lacked access to safe water.\textsuperscript{20}

**Research questions**

In order to gain deeper insights into how families in Haiti have been affected by household violence and conflict and how these realities might inform an intervention to reduce violence against women and children, three research questions were developed to guide the study design.

1. What are the local drivers and social norms affecting household violence?
2. How has Hurricane Matthew affected those drivers and social norms?
3. What strategies would be effective for reducing violence and strengthening families within a post-disaster context?

**Methodology**

**Study design**

All data were collected through a photo elicitation approach, implemented over the course of three individual interview sessions. Photo elicitation is a participatory, qualitative method that uses photography as a tool for facilitating discussions on sensitive topics, such as violence against women and children.\textsuperscript{21} 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 representing various family relationships, experiences of safety and well-being, and changes to family dynamics due to Hurricane Matthew and its aftermath. The second and third sessions then involved discussions about the images. Discussion was guided by an open-ended script meant 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 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.

**Research team**

The field team included six Haitian interviewers (four males, two females), one Haitian field coordinator and three field oversight staff from outside of Haiti. The interviewers had diverse
academic backgrounds and levels of qualitative research experience. All interviewers were fluent in French and Haitian Creole.

Prior to data collection, the interviewers participated in two weeks of classroom training and one week of supervised pilot interviews. Training topics included the qualitative research method being employed, effective probing techniques, ethics and confidentiality, appropriate referral processes, conceptions of violence and reflexivity exercises. The classroom training was conducted in French and led by a researcher from Columbia University. The practice interviews were conducted in Haitian Creole, with debriefing in French from the Columbia University researcher. Parts of the training and piloting were assisted by UNICEF staff.

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 and four adolescent males. Individuals were considered eligible to participate in the study if they resided in Côteaux in a household with other family members (i.e. no one could live alone), but only one participant per family could be selected for the study. The interviewers then randomly selected two names from each age and gender group and invited these individuals to participate in the study. The remaining names were used as alternates 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: 18 adolescents (age 13-17) and 18 adults (age 25-66). There were 8 adult females, 10 adult males, 8 adolescent females and 10 adolescent males (table 1). The average age of adolescents was 15.2 years and the average age of adults was 50.1 years. Slightly more participants were male (53.2 per cent) than female (46.8 per cent).

Table 1. Participant demographics (n=36)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adolescents</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average age</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adolescents</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>53.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>46.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethical procedures
Before training or data collection 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.

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 programmes. 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 how to keep the cameras safe, ensure verbal consent before taking pictures of people and avoid bringing the camera to places that might be dangerous or insecure.

A referral pathway for urgent action cases was established prior to starting the research. 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 mapping and ensuring the quality of referral services, which THRIVE helped to 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.

Research process

The study was conducted in October and November 2017. Each of the 36 individuals selected to participate in the photo elicitation exercise sat for three interviews, of approximately 1.5 hours in length, over the course of the project, resulting in 108 transcribed transcripts in Haitian Creole that were translated to French and then to English. Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyse the data using English translations of the transcripts. Two staff from Columbia University participated in transcript review and codebook development where open codes were first identified 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 (SocioCultural 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, once collated, provided the foundation for the formation of eight central themes encompassing 55 axial codes (figure 1).
Figure 1. Qualitative Coding Structure

Drivers of interpersonal violence in a post-hurricane setting

- Post-hurricane experiences
  - Depression/sadness
  - Household crowding
  - Economic insecurity
  - Familial conflict
  - Family separation
  - Community conflict
  - Food insecurity
  - Infrastructure problems
  - Increased religiosity
  - Insufficient shelter
  - Job insecurity
  - Lack of safe water
  - School leaving

- Gender
  - Division of labour
  - Community gender attitudes
  - Influence of religion
  - Womanhood
  - Manhood
  - Girlhood
  - Boyhood

- Community norms
  - Conflict
  - Gossip
  - Humanitarian assistance
  - Importance of education
  - Mobilizing for change
  - Mutual assistance

- Family relationships
  - Parent/child relationships
  - Intimate relationships
  - Sibling relationships
  - Family strengthening
  - Decision-making

- Community violence
  - Mediation
  - Rationale
  - Socioeconomic status
  - Substance use
  - Vigilantism
  - Violence reduction strategies

- Intimate partner violence
  - Children as mediators
  - Conflict prevention
  - Community mediation
  - Disclosure/reporting
  - Effect on children
  - Influence of religion
  - Rationale for interpersonal violence
  - Substance use
  - Violence reduction strategies

- Violence against children
  - Disclosure/reporting
  - Effectiveness in behaviour change
  - Normalization of violence
Analytic framework

The socioecological model is a framework recommended by public health organizations (among others) for its use in understanding and preventing interpersonal violence. Slightly adapted from its original conceptualizations, current versions of the model consist of four nested layers — individual, relational, community and societal — with each layer retaining an array of risk factors for violence against women and against children 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. 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. Relational variables consist of decision-making power and relationship quality while alcohol use, HIV status and experience of violence as a child represent various individual factors. This framework was applied to the data analysis to examine the various levels at which drivers of violence may occur and intersect.

Limitations

In the 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 an attempt to mitigate this possibility, multiple community leaders were engaged from different geographical areas and professions, and a random sub-set of participants was selected from their lists of suggestions.

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 were lost.

Finally, in reviewing the transcripts, we found that on average girls provided far fewer responses in the qualitative interviews than boys within their peer group. This may be linked to broader inequities in gender norms that discourage adolescent opinion and participation, especially by females. While several respondents indicated these norms are changing in Haiti, particularly among those with more education, the residual effects of these hierarchical structures may have influenced girls’ willingness to communicate.

Findings of the study
Research question #1: What are the local drivers and social norms affecting household violence?

THRIVE Haiti identified multiple and converging drivers of violence by examining respondent observations of violence against women, against children and non-partner community violence. The accumulation of daily stressors, loss of power/control, learned behaviour/intergenerational cycle of abuse and gender norms were all identified as drivers that influenced violent behaviour in both personal and public spheres. Building upon the work of THRIVE Colombia, these themes are labeled with respect to their positioning within a socioecological framework (table 2) and discussed in detail below.

Table 2. Socioecological drivers of violence against women, against children and community violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drivers of violence</th>
<th>Violence against women</th>
<th>Violence against children</th>
<th>Community violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accumulation of daily stressors (I/R/C)*</td>
<td>Families facing economic, job and food insecurity. Female requests male to improve the economic stability of the household, provoking physical conflict. Men may use physical violence to assert control and dominance in contrast with the loss of control they may feel over their inability to provide economically for the household</td>
<td>Families facing economic, job and food insecurity, compounding the existing stressors of parenting. Parents use physical violence to punish children who are perceived to be non-compliant, disrespectful or otherwise behaving in a way that is aggravating to the parent/caregiver</td>
<td>Conflicts over property and resources (particularly livestock) escalate to physical altercations; lack of potable water also drives fights between adolescents tasked to collect water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of power/control (R/C/S)</td>
<td>Violence against women initiated when partner feels a loss of control over their inability to provide financially, their partner’s fidelity or their partner’s behaviour</td>
<td>Physical punishment used more often when adult or older sibling feels aggrieved, disrespected or unable to control child’s behaviour</td>
<td>Hurricane devastation reduced ability to control economic future; conflicts over scarce resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learned behaviour/cycle of abuse (I/R/C)</td>
<td>Intimate partners who physically harm or intimidate one another have learned behaviour from observing the behaviour of their parents/caregivers</td>
<td>Parents/caregivers who use physical punishment to discipline their children have learned behaviour from observing or experiencing the behaviour of their own parents/caregivers</td>
<td>Physical altercations become normalized as a means to address disputes within the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for behaviour regulation (R/S)</td>
<td>Physical violence used to modify behaviour of an intimate partner including real or imagined infidelity and perceived disrespect</td>
<td>Physical punishment used to correct behaviour, including hitting siblings due to poor grades, not doing homework, not doing chores, showing disrespect</td>
<td>Physical violence used to intimidate others from trespassing on property or stealing; and to retaliate for perceived injustices (i.e. vigilantism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender norms (S)</td>
<td>Societal gender norms about masculine power and control driving violence against women</td>
<td>Societal gender norms that reinforce hierarchies give children little to no agency; physical violence used against children not conforming to prescribed norms</td>
<td>Societal prescriptions of masculine behaviour driving fights after sporting matches and/or alcohol consumption, escalating disputes to violent confrontations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Accumulation of daily stressors

When examining the key drivers of violence against women and children, the predominant post-hurricane themes noted by respondents were 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 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.”

The accumulation of daily stressors was found to drive 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 had 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, and the inability to fulfill that expectation was associated with physical violence.

“There is a neighbour that beat up his wife 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 expectations resulting from rigid gender roles combined with economic and job insecurity created a scenario in which the male partner reacted with physical violence. This same combination of economic stressors and gender roles also influenced women to avoid formally reporting or disclosing the abuse because of the potential consequences. 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 the fact that, where women feel economically dependent upon their male partner and economic resources are scarce, they are more likely to accept the physical abuse than to risk the loss of their partner’s income.

Regarding violence against children, interviews highlighted situations where the frustration resulting from the accumulation of daily stressors led to physical punishment of children. 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 and her siblings shared a home with their grandmother where the roof leaked whenever it rained. While used with the aim of modifying behaviour, physical punishment also appeared to be an outgrowth of anger and frustration with children, particularly in households faced with multiple stressors and
among family members who had not received training or exposure to positive parenting or conflict resolution techniques.

The convergence of daily stressors appeared to negatively affect parent-child communication for some families. A 13-year-old female respondent spoke of being rebuffed when trying to engage her mother in conversation: “I tell her something about myself and she walks away... telling me to leave her [alone].” The adolescent female acknowledged that this made her feel bad and that she was upset with her mother’s response. This quote reflects similar observations by other residents in the post-hurricane environment of Côteaux, where multiple interconnected stressors can leave some parents feeling they have little time or patience to communicate with their children.

In communities, these daily stressors sometimes led to physical altercations among neighbours linked to disputes over land and property.

“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)

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.

**Loss of power/control**

Another driver of violence was perceived loss of power and control. In terms of violence against women, men were most often found using violence to respond to either their loss of agency or inability to provide economically for their households and 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 obliged to fight with her.” This quote illustrates that the respondent felt it was obligatory to respond to infidelity (real or imagined) with physical violence.

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.”

Loss of power and control was also evidenced in the community, particularly when it came to vigilantism. When the community perceived that a perpetrator would not be brought to justice by the law enforcement and judicial structures, vigilantism was seen as a mechanism for achieving that justice. This led people to enact physical punishment upon a perpetrator for behaviour 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 neighbourhood...that is why they were ready to beat her up. She hurt someone.” (Male, age 16)

While the data do not provide further background on the young woman’s history or rationale for her behaviour, they do provide a glimpse into the concept of vigilante justice. Residents may have been seeking to reduce violence in their community yet by doing so perpetuated it further.

**Learned behaviour/cycle of abuse**

Several participants identified learned behaviour as a key driver of violence within the home, aimed at both an intimate partner and at children. A 46-year-old female spoke of an aunt who was brutally abused by her husband and a nephew who “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 physically punish younger siblings for perceived bad behaviour. Participants reported that older children used the same disciplinary methods on their younger siblings that their parents had used on them, such as slapping, whipping and spanking. This cycle is 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.” This quote illustrates the normalization of physical punishment within a household based on years of exposure.

In general, education was perceived to be a deterrent to violence, with some respondents associating use 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 speaking about physical discipline rendered within the neighbourhood, a 17-year-old female stated, “Some educated parents don't like the fact that you spank their children.” This quote illustrates the divergence in viewpoints on the acceptability of physical punishment between parents with more or less 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 behaviour 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 in which animals that escaped from their owner and were found in a neighbour’s garden were killed by that neighbour. These types of situations were described as bringing “so many heated quarrels”, including physical altercations, between residents. They were also reported to be observed by children, thus potentially perpetuating violent reactions to community conflict among the next generation.

**Behaviour modification**

The use of physical violence as a form of punishment for children, specifically for the purposes of modifying their behaviour, was one of the key concepts passed down through generational observation and custom. Participants reported the practices of whipping with sticks or tree branches, spanking, beating/hitting and slapping in response to undesirable behaviour. 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 use of physical punishment for behaviour 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 behaviour. 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 behaviour modification and the accumulation of daily stressors, can intersect for parents trying to respond to their child’s perceived misbehaviour.

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)

The use of physical punishment to deter romantic relationships within the context of broader societal and gender norms highlights 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. Some parents used physical violence to deter romantic relationships, particularly among adolescent girls, viewing such relationships as jeopardizing 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 behaviour. 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 behaviour did not improve.” This quote illustrates one parent's frustration with the 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 more egalitarian decision-making within the household and who were more open to 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 insights 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.

**Gender norms**

While both males and females were perpetrators of violence in Côteaux, respondents offered insight into gender dynamics that may drive violence among men in the region. First, non-partner violence in the community was thought to be largely driven by male aggression, and it was seen as fueled by substance use and occurring during emotionally charged events such as wakes (pre-funeral vigils held outside the home of someone who has died) 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 simply a distraction from the 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 multidimensional, their association with male-perpetrated, non-partner community violence was evidenced through numerous quotes.

In addition, men’s gender-prescribed role as provider and head of household, which has roots in traditional norms and religious practices, had a reportedly nuanced link to violence. Several men who identified as strong believers in Christianity noted their role as household head. For example, a 63-year-old male respondent described his role in the home as follows: “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, and one 51-year-old woman stated 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 dominant position. A 25-year-old female discussed a case in which 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 violence against women.

Yet others who also identified as Christians 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 (research question #3). However, despite this divergence, there appears to be an overarching sense that men’s primary role is breadwinner while for females it is 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 their 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]." Such sentiments capture the pressures felt by men to provide economically, a chronic stressor in the post-disaster context of Côteaux and a noted driver of physical conflicts between intimate partners.

**Substance use**

Another driver of violence that was reported to be gendered was substance use, particularly alcohol consumption and its association with non-partner community violence. Adolescent boys frequently mentioned drunken altercations at neighbourhood wakes. Substance use was also associated with unemployment; respondents described groups of unemployed men who 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.”
Substance use was also associated with violence against women. It was common for participants, particularly females, to report male intoxication as a precursor 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 between substance use, gender norms and violence as men struggle to meet the economic needs of their families in post-disaster Côteaux. Interestingly, respondents did not mention substance use in relation to violence against children, making it the only driver identified in 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. 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)

For male residents in particular, the economic challenges resulting from Hurricane Matthew also appear to be a potential precursor to substance use.

**Research question #2: How has Hurricane Matthew contributed to or changed those drivers and social norms?**

The second aim of this study was to understand how Hurricane Matthew affected family dynamics and structures, and in turn influenced exposure to violence in the home and community.

When respondents were asked whether violence and conflict had increased after the hurricane, the data were very mixed. About one third believed the levels of violence were static, one third that violence had increased due to the stressors listed below, and the final third that violence had decreased. The latter group named a variety of potential reasons for the decline of violence, including post-disaster hopelessness and apathy, increased religiosity, increased need/desire to care for one another, and the ability to see the bigger picture (i.e. not be bothered by small disputes).

Regardless of the mixed views on the frequency of violence that followed the storm, there was broad consensus about the effects of Hurricane Matthew on families in Côteaux. Predominant themes included displacement-induced family separation and household crowding; intensification of economic insecurity, food insecurity and unemployment; insufficient shelter, safe water and infrastructure; school leaving; and hopelessness.
Displacement

Family separation

Respondents spoke frequently of family separation in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew. They 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."

Similarly, a 16-year-old female respondent noted that her sisters were sent to Port-au-Prince because her mother couldn’t help them. She said, “My aunt told my mother to send them to her so she could help them.” Family separation was spoken about as a pragmatic choice but was also a source of sadness for parents and siblings. The inability to financially provide for all household members reinforces the concept of lost personal agency.

Household crowding

Household crowding was another familiar experience, as most respondents noted that grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles had come to live in their home following the hurricane:

Interviewer: "So if there are nine people in the house, how do you manage to sleep in the house after the hurricane?"
Participant: "We sleep on mats on the floor."
Interviewer: Do you still sleep on the floor?
Participant: "Yes…”
Interviewer: "Does everybody sleep in one room or elsewhere?"
Participant: "We sleep in one room." (Male, age 13)

Respondents did not explicitly cite household crowding as a driver of conflict, yet the economic stress associated with providing for a large household was evident. Interestingly, respondents noted that physical violence as a result of economic stress was not unique to males; some females also vented their frustrations in this manner.

“Things became worse after the hurricane. People lost everything they had. They live in misery. They don’t have anybody to turn to or a place to go. Life is not easy. Everything is expensive and the woman can’t support this misery so she chooses to fight or she gives up.” (Male, age 32)
Intensification of economic adversity, food insecurity and unemployment

The predominant post-hurricane challenges noted by respondents were the intersecting experiences of economic adversity, food insecurity and unemployment. Nearly all adult male and female respondents indicated that these structural insecurities were detrimental to the well-being of their family and their community.

“These people are always thinking because they don’t have any resources to live off. There’s a woman who has not been able to pay the tuition of her kids since last year and she doesn’t have any money to pay her debt.” (Female, age 47)

Similarly, a 62-year-old male respondent noted, "The people have no money. They have no animals to sell to make the money. They have no jobs. If they found some kind of help, it would be better." These post-disaster challenges are widespread, and respondent feedback indicates they are seemingly without solutions in the foreseeable future. This daily stress caused some adults to feel despondent and hopeless. Others noted their resilience 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 buy anything. There is nowhere to go. You can’t buy food to eat. You cannot do anything but just let go of it.” Similarly, a male respondent noted:

“Before the storm, even when we couldn't make any money, we used to farm the land so we never ran out of food. But now, we can't grow anything. The little support that we received after the storm lasted only six months. As Haitians, we are resilient but things aren't good at all.” (Male, age 63)

Economic insecurity experienced as a result of the hurricane has also increased school leaving as families were unable to pay school fees and other education-related costs. Multiple respondents identified children in their own families or among their neighbours who had to withdraw from school.

“This family is in a bad situation. It does not have anyone... Only a teenager who went to school after [Hurricane] Matthew but had to stop. And I guess that he was in second [grade] when he stopped. That means that the family might need some help.” (Male, age 40)

School leaving was viewed as a particularly difficult circumstance given the importance the community has placed on education. Many of the adult respondents had not received formal education, so doing well in and completing school was perceived to be critical for success. Thus, as that opportunity is taken away due to inability to pay school fees, it is likely to have a profound impact on the family.

Insufficient shelter, safe water and infrastructure

Hurricane Matthew also devastated infrastructure in Côteaux, rendering people homeless and limiting access to safe water, which 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 [the community of] Quentin keeps it all. But us here in Damassin, we don't get it. That's a problem.”

Insufficient shelter was also widely acknowledged as a stressor for families, as rebuilding remained unfinished. Moreover, the community’s commitment to mutual assistance and support to their neighbours was seen by some as challenged in the post-disaster context. With fewer resources at their disposal, traditional support structures in Côteaux were strained and families were unable to provide for their basic needs.

“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 hurricane had destroyed walkways and roadways, which was 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 remember how this zone looked like. Now I can't imagine that there's almost nothing, no roads, not even a pedestrian path for the population.” (Female, age 46)

While respondents mentioned that Catholic Relief Services had helped them after the hurricane, including by providing supplies to repair homes, respondents perceived the work to be largely unfinished, and they were vocal about their need for further infrastructure repair. The daily stress of residing in a home with a faulty roof or determining how to trade goods at the market without accessible walkways and roadways may compound other routine relational stressors to trigger violence.

**Hopelessness**

The post-hurricane challenges faced by communities within Côteaux were noted to have taken a toll on residents’ mental health. 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 were candid about their struggles to regain hope.

Participant: “Their houses have been destroyed. Everything that they had went into the sea.”
Interviewer: “How did you see them?”
Participant: “They are hopeless.” (Female, age 17)

For some, this sense of hopelessness was associated with apathy for physical confrontation, one of the reasons given to explain why some residents believed violence had abated after the hurricane.
Interviewer: "But how do you see things going in your community, in your neighbourhood – do people fight after the hurricane?"
Participant: "No they do not fight often the way they used to before Hurricane Matthew."
Interviewer: “According to you, why is that?”
Participant: Maybe it is because the hurricane passed through here and now they don't fight. The bad weather made them think and then made them stop fighting. Before the hurricane, they never really thought much and just got into fights. After the hurricane, they are thinking more about what they lost. They are not into fights."
(Male, age 14)

Again, the viewpoints were mixed as to whether the hurricane increased or decreased the incidence of violence in Côteaux. Regardless of this variety in experience, the data did make clear that families were suffering, and many were unable to meet their basic needs. These stressors may trigger violence, either in the community or within the home, so it is important to understand which strategies might be most effective to mitigate violence in a post-disaster context.

**Research question #3: What strategies would be effective for reducing violence and strengthening families in a post-disaster context?**

The qualitative interviews with residents of Côteaux provided useful insight into existing resiliencies and the types of interventions that may be most effective for addressing violence in a post-disaster context. From religion to mutual assistance to the reverence for education, communities in Côteaux identified community characteristics that can be built upon for reducing violence both within and beyond the household.

**Religion**

Religion was an integral part of the sampled communities, with respondents indicating various degrees of religiosity. It was apparent from the interviews that Christianity largely served as a deterrent to violence, particularly interpersonal violence. When speaking of her parents, a 38-year-old female respondent noted, "Sometimes when talking together alone, they say to themselves that they don't have any more reasons to fight. 'Look our children are now grownups and moreover, we are Christians'."

Based on our small qualitative sample, a person’s level of devoutness appeared to influence their attitudes on violence against women more so than on violence against children; physical punishment was still seen by many as beneficial for children, including in Christian families. Given the relatively strong identification with Christianity in Côteaux, there is an opportunity to work with churches to develop messages of non-violence, both within and beyond the home, that can be integrated into weekly sermons.

**Collectivism and mutual assistance**
While the sense of collectivism and mutual assistance was strained after the hurricane, the large majority of respondents indicated mutual assistance to be a key component of the community. People are expected to provide for their immediate and extended families while also helping the less fortunate, offering a portion of what they have to others. This sense of sharing is deeply engrained in community norms and reinforced by religion.

“When you are in a community, you should love your community and participate in what is happening. It is just like when you are eating, your neighbour should be eating too… In the community, we live like family. We are like two people who live in one house. If there is just one banana, we share it. We always love the people in our neighbourhood... Anytime someone is blessed by God’s will, I should not be the only one benefiting from that blessing.” (Male, age 59)

“You have to solve the issue and know how to treat each other. When we are family, we are responsible for each other. If this family member goes somewhere or is in trouble, you have to go pick them up. It’s about helping each other. Just like a nation in difficulty, another one comes to help. Like I said, family is there to save each other from every situation.” (Male, age 63)

Respondents reiterated this sense of obligation to their neighbours through sharing resources, caring for children and even stepping in to de-escalate conflict. While meddling and gossip was frowned upon, well-intentioned intervention was viewed as appropriate and helpful, whether carried out by appointed community elders, benevolent strangers or respected family members. There may be opportunities to build upon existing informal structures to promote healthy communication within relationships or positive parenting practices, further mitigating household and community violence (box 3).

“It happened once in my neighbourhood. A man had a conflict with his wife. He took a stick to beat his wife. We intervened to tell him that he was not supposed to do this. He listened to us and calmed down.” (Male, age 54)

“When two people are not acting the right way and then a neighbour can show up to help put things in order and then everyone can calm down and they are in harmony and things get better.” (Male, age 59)

Community members also felt they had a right to the healthy development of all children. To some, this meant rendering physical discipline to children who were perceived to be misbehaving. For others, particularly those who had received some form of training or education on child-rearing practices, this meant monitoring children’s safety within their homes. For instance, one female respondent noted her perceived right as a member of the community to remove a child who was being abused.

“The other day, I saw someone beat his child… I talked to him and told him I didn’t like it, while some others told me that if I try to stop them from beating their children, they will debase me. I replied that the neighbourhood is here for that. If you martyr your child, I can take her from you.” (Female, age 38)
In addition to illustrating the resident’s sense of duty to remove a child from a harmful situation, this quote indicates there may be space to strengthen community-led committees that monitor child protection concerns. In doing so, it may be helpful not only to strengthen formal referral processes, where feasible and appropriate, but also to create a network of people willing to provide social support and training in effective parenting techniques. Considering the commitment to mutual assistance, it may be reasonable to develop some form of social referral network to help families that are struggling to stop the use of physical punishment to access social support and training on non-violent techniques and alternative forms of parenting.

**Education**

Another characteristic of the community and an aspect of resilience is the broad respect for education and its importance in the lives of all community residents – children and adults. This desire for learning and training offers a platform for sensitizing people on positive parenting techniques and relationship skills to reduce violence.

“There is this Chinese proverb that says: ‘Instead of giving someone a fish every day you should teach the person how to fish.’ So I cannot teach her how to fish really but I wanted to take one of her children to send to school, so that could help her in a way. That means if the child goes to school in the future the child can learn a profession, become a successful person and that would be better for the mother; instead of giving her money I did something else.” (Female, age 47)

Another female respondent, age 38, noted, “I like exchanging information. I like being informed.” Indeed, several respondents suggested that some form of training on communication skills and self-regulation would be beneficial to improve intimate partner relations and parenting methods.

“I feel there is a little formal training that can be done in Aux Côteaux community that will help revive us. Many people would know the true meaning of family. A lot of people live in a family and don’t understand what is a family. This is the reason they tear each other apart... I would be happy, even if it were the government, to teach people about where your rights begin and where they end.” (Male, age 60)

“I mean, if you don’t learn to think things over and filter your thoughts when bad and good things are coming into your mind, you may end up doing something wrong as a result of your lack of understanding.” (Male, age 63)

While violence was normalized in many households, we found that those who had been taught the concept of learned behaviour were far less likely to report engaging in physical altercations, particularly with an intimate partner, fearing their children would 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)

Overall, respondents exhibited a great desire for knowledge and learning, seeing it as the key to a successful future. For those who had learned key psychological concepts, such as learned behaviour, it was evident that it had influenced their practices within the home. This suggests that offering workshops to improve relational/communication skills would be welcomed, particularly if they are based on evidence and touted as a way to improve outcomes for their children. There also appears to be a desire to share these messages of non-violence with others in the community, which bodes well for a larger sensitization campaign.

Openness to gender-fluid roles

Acceptance of gender fluidity in roles within the family is a characteristic that can be leveraged to reduce violence in Côteaux, particularly with respect to household chores and payment for labour outside of the home. 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, there was greater mutual decision-making by males and females. Intimate partners were 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, age 47, 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 the parent’s 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.” This fluidity of gender roles offers an opportunity to engage in conversation about gender equality across multiple domains as a strategy for violence reduction.

Fulfilment of basic needs

Provision of basic needs was emphasized as a way to reduce the stress that plagued respondents in their post-disaster setting. Indeed, while nearly half of respondents indicated that training on topics such as relationships and parenting would be of great benefit to the community, nearly all were quick to acknowledge the need to address employment and basic structural deficiencies, such as efforts to improve agricultural production.

Prior to the hurricane, residents were reliant on subsistence farming. In devastating crops and killing livestock, the hurricane caused significant food insecurity. The damaged infrastructure hampered access into and out of the community, contributing to unemployment, a driver of violence. It also limited access to safe water, reported as a direct cause of physical conflicts. Thus, in addition to increasing opportunities for employment, a large majority of respondents suggested the most pressing community needs were repairs to infrastructure (including clearing the remaining debris from the hurricane), access to potable water and increased food security.
Summary

This study examines the converging drivers of violence against girls and against women and non-partner community violence in the post-disaster context of Côteaux, Haiti. The 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 designing interventions in humanitarian settings. It illuminates cross-cutting drivers that, when addressed holistically, may have broad implications for violence reduction in households and communities. Specifically, four overarching themes emerged from the data.

1. Intersecting drivers of violence have roots in hierarchical gender norms

Findings revealed common drivers of violence against women and children 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 their families 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 stress of failed expectations, particularly where that behaviour had been learned at home or among peers. Consistent with prior research, substance use was found to be connected with violence, including against women, particularly where men’s role as economic provider and gatekeeper of his wife’s fidelity resulted in stress when these expectations were not met.

While observations on intimate partner violence suggested mutual perpetration of physical violence between males and females, analysis of varied data sets have consistently shown that even where mutual violence occurs, women are much more likely to experience physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner and at a higher level of severity than experienced by men. Social norms that promote violence or power as characteristic of masculinity may promote acceptance of non-specific family violence, aimed at either a partner or a child or both. Indeed, hierarchical gender norms that give children little if any autonomy were also a key component in the use of violence for behaviour 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 violence against women or children. 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. This may then spill over to a reduction of violence in the community. It is feasible that these relaxed gender roles reduce the pressure on male partners to be the primary breadwinner, which was linked 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 stereotypes that push men to exhibit power and control, another driver of violence. It is possible that programmes seeking to strengthen women’s roles in the household (such as targeted cash disbursements to females) that do not also address norms change related to masculinity may exacerbate factors that contribute to violence against women. Such programming should therefore include components to address gender norms.35

2. 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 safe water, insufficient shelter and damaged infrastructure. However, given the chronically high rates of 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.36 Rather, an emergency is often an ‘acute on chronic’ trauma exposure, requiring a more comprehensive set of interventions.

The study’s 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 behaviour to create scenarios in which individuals may be more prone to employ violence. In addition, humanitarian emergencies can stress the rule of law, particularly where law enforcement and judicial structures were weak before a disaster. Where the government response to allegations of violence is insufficient and there is impunity for perpetrators, residents may be more likely to engage in self-policing mechanisms, perpetuating a cycle of violence.

3. Interventions should build on 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 violence against women, offering an opportunity to engage religious leaders in the promotion of non-violence, both within and beyond the home.

Another mediator was education. While low levels of formal education have been associated with violence perpetration in Haiti,37 the desire for adult learning was apparent, suggesting that trainings on positive parenting and relationship skill-building could be well-received, particularly if they include evidence on how such techniques would improve outcomes for children. Indeed, a recent nationally representative survey found that just under 30 per cent 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.38 This study provides qualitative context to that survey, illustrating how interpersonal violence can continue out of habit, even if the perpetrator does not feel it is particularly effective.

Research showing that physical punishment leads to increased child aggression and violence against women later in life39 as well as lower academic achievement40 may be particularly compelling to communities, particularly when delivered by a trusted community partner, adapted to the local context and implemented in tandem with programmes designed to meet the basic needs of
community residents. Lastly, efforts to achieve gender equality may find receptive audiences when such ideas are packaged as a way to strengthen partnerships and efficiencies within the home.

4. Multisectoral interventions are needed to reduce violence in a humanitarian context

Given the material deprivations and lack of employment opportunities in Côteaux after the disaster, suggestions for social intervention and family strengthening should be linked to efforts to address the community’s basic needs and improve structures for sustainable livelihood development. Creating opportunities for employment would help adults provide for their families, eliminating one of the major stressors identified 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 and partial reliance on humanitarian aid. Given the finding that violence is linked to attempts to assert power and control, employment and income-generating opportunities would allow individuals to regain a sense of personal agency. In isolation, this may not be sufficient for reducing violence, but in combination with community trainings and non-violence sensitization campaigns (including through churches) it may prove effective.

Similarly, efforts to strengthen economic autonomy among women could potentially contribute to increased reporting and care-seeking with respect to violence against women. However, given the finding that greater female financial decision-making tends to be associated with violence against women in Haiti, such economic empowerment efforts should be implemented in conjunction with services for survivors, and gender transformative work to encourage role reflection and egalitarian relationship practices.

Lastly, violence prevention efforts should take an integrated approach, involving community members, civil society, the government and the private sector in a way that encourages ownership of the initiative among each sector, working across various levels of the ecological model. Such integrated approaches would offer an alternative to current approaches in Haiti, which are often highly centralized.

Conclusion

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


intimate partner violence and child maltreatment in low and middle income countries: a scoping review', *Psychology, health & medicine* 22(sup1):135-65.


30 Mootz et al., forthcoming.


37 Gage 2005, op. cit.

38 République d’Haiti 2012, op. cit.


41 Gage 2005 op. cit.