

Incidence of Violence against Women and Girls in Liberia: A Quantitative Study using the “Neighborhood Method”

**A Joint Research Initiative by the
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Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	1
I. INTRODUCTION.....	2
II. OBJECTIVES.....	3
III. TRAINING AND PREPARATION.....	3
IV. METHODOLOGY.....	4-6
Overview	4
Sampling.....	4
Interview	5
V. FINDINGS	6-17
Information on Sample Population	6
Frequency of Violence.....	6
Perpetrators.....	10
Reporting and Disclosure.....	13
VI. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS.....	18-21
Validity of Method.....	18
Inter-Rater Reliability.....	19
Other Challenges and Limitations.....	20
VII.RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION.....	21-22
APPENDICES.....	23-29
Appendix A: Interviewer Guide.....	23-27
Appendix B: Data Collection Sheet.....	28-29

Executive Summary

From June 4 through August 3, 2007, the IRC Liberia and Columbia University's Program on Forced Migration and Health undertook a population survey to quantify the magnitude of violence against women and girls in IRC's operational areas. Over two months, a research team comprised of six interviewers and one coordinator collected data through 600 one-on-one household interviews in IRC's operational areas in Montserrado and Nimba Counties.

The study focused on three "types" of physical violence: non-sexual domestic abuse, marital rape, and rape outside of marriage. Findings from the research show that violence is widespread in IRC's operational areas in both Montserrado and Nimba Counties. Well over half of the population had survived at least one act of physical violence during the previous 18 months. When disaggregated by age, one-quarter of minors in Montserrado County and one-fifth of minors in Nimba County had experienced an act of physical violence in the previous 18 months. More than 75 percent of adults had survived an act of physical violence.¹ Domestic violence, which includes non-sexual acts of physical violence perpetrated by family or other household members, had affected around 55 percent of the study population in both Nimba and Montserrado Counties.

41 percent of the sample population in Montserrado County and 44 percent of the sample population in Nimba County had experienced some incident of sexual violence in the previous 18 months. Among women who declared themselves married or separated, more than 72 percent in both counties reported that their husbands had forced them to have sex in the last 18 months. Outside of marriage, rape and sexual abuse occurred for nearly one-fifth of the sample population in Montserrado and more than one-quarter of the sample population in Nimba County. 13 percent of minors in Montserrado and 11 percent of minors in Nimba had been sexually abused in the previous 18 months.

The vast majority of perpetrators are known by survivors, often intimately so. Husbands and other intimate partners are the most frequent perpetrators of physical and sexual abuse. "Strangers" accounted for less than 2 percent of the perpetrators in either county. These incidents are most commonly disclosed to other family members or to friends and neighbors, and less often through formal reporting mechanisms such as the police, court or community leaders. The incidents are least likely to be reported to formal audiences if the perpetrator is a husband or boyfriend, and most likely to be reported to formal audiences if the perpetrator is a neighbor or a stranger.

Further analysis of the data will allow the identification of confidence intervals for such estimates of the incidence of physical and sexual violence. In advance of such analysis, such figures should be taken as reports of the experience of those sampled by the survey, rather than extrapolated to the broader populations of these program areas.

¹ "Adult" is defined as people age 18 and over, as defined by international and Liberian law. "Minors" are people 17 and under.

I. Introduction

From the late 1980s to the early 2000s, the West African nation of Liberia was embroiled in multiple stages of violent conflict. A series of civil wars from 1989 to 2003 shredded the fragile social fabric and infrastructure of the county, and deepened the poverty and vulnerability of many Liberians. 270,000 people died as a result of the war, either from violence or from illnesses that went untreated because war disrupted their access to life-saving medical facilities and medicines. More than 700,000 people fled Liberia, and more than 1.4 million people were displaced within the country.²

No Liberian was left unscathed by the conflict and its economic and social fallout. However, women and girls bore the brunt of the hardship. Large numbers of women and girls suffered from sexual violence during the civil war. While reliable recent estimates are difficult to find, a World Health Organization study in 2005 estimated that 90 percent of Liberian women had experienced physical or sexual violence, and 3 out of 4 had been sexually violated or rape.³

While the war officially ended in 2003, the war on women continued. A study by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in 2003 interviewed Liberian refugees in three refugee camps in Sierra Leone and found that 75 percent of them had been victims of sexual abuse prior to their displacement. 55 percent of them had suffered further abuse since their displacement.⁴ A 2005-2006 *Médecins sans Frontières* study in a Monrovia hospital of 658 rape survivors found:

- 85% were under 18 years of age;
- 48% were between 5 and 12 years of age.
- Most perpetrators were known to their victims before the attack.⁵

When Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was inaugurated as President of Liberia in January 2006, one of her first executive acts was to enact a new rape law. The new legislation expanded the definition of rape to include the intentional penetration of any part of the body without consent. It also raised the age of consent to 18 and stipulated a sentence of life imprisonment for anyone who committed these acts against women, girls or boys. However, the legislature struck down “marital rape” as a criminal act.

While this new legislation strengthens the legal standing for many survivors of rape, there are still many obstacles to its impact on the prevalence of rape and other forms of abuse. Organizations and individuals working in Liberia see firsthand that violence against women and girls continues to occur at alarming rates. However, there has not been a recent study that estimates the actual incidence rate of violence. Without such numbers, programs that attempt to reach survivors have incomplete information, and

² *Liberia National Human Development Report: Building and Mobilising Capacities for Reconstruction and Development*, United Nations Development Programme, 2006, http://www.lr.undp.org/NHDR%2706_web.pdf.

³ Quote by Mendy Marsh, Program Coordinator, Christian Children’s Fund Liberia, in “Addressing Sexual Violence in Liberia” Panel Discussion, December 6, 2006, United Nations Secretariat, New York.

⁴ A. Benton, Research Report: Prevalence of Gender-based Violence Among Liberian Women in Three Refugee Camps, International Rescue Committee (IRC) (Sierra Leone, February 2004) unpublished data; also cited in IRC, Situation Analysis of gender-based violence (Liberia, April 2004)

⁵ Marsh, Mendee, 2006.

lack a baseline for measuring progress over time. Moreover, the absence of reliable figures hampers advocacy efforts for increased funding, policies and legislation that will strengthen the position of women and girls in Liberia.

It is in this context that the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the Columbia University Program on Forced Migration and Health collaborated on a joint research effort to quantify the magnitude of violence against women and girls in IRC's operational areas in two counties of Liberia. As one of the leaders of GBV programming in Liberia, IRC has the knowledge and experience in issues of violence against women to provide the foundation for this research. Meanwhile, CU has the technical research capacity to coordinate a population-based survey, and through its Care and Protection of Children in Crisis-Affected Countries (CPC) project, it has been piloting novel methodologies for the measurement of gender-based violence.

II. Objectives

The objectives of our research were to:

- Contribute assessment information regarding the incidence⁶ and nature of physical violence against women and girls in IRC's operational areas in two counties;
- Investigate reporting and disclosure trends; and
- Establish a baseline against which to measure change over time.

The time frame covered was January 2006 through the day of the interview (approximately 18 months). To aid recall, the interviewers used the inauguration of the new President (Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf) as the start date. This date is also significant because it is the month that the new rape law was enacted in Liberia.

The interview covered three main areas of violence, which for the purposes of this study, were defined as the following:

- Domestic violence: Any act of (non-sexual) physical violence perpetrated by an intimate partner or family member.
- Rape/sexual abuse: the intentional penetration or attempted penetration of another person's vagina, anus, mouth or any other opening without the victim's consent.⁷
- Marital rape: the intentional penetration or attempted penetration of another person's vagina, anus, mouth or any other opening without the victim's consent, in context of marriage.

III. Training and Preparation

Prior to the Research Coordinator's arrival in Liberia, discussions were held between several of Columbia University's faculty and staff, and with key staff in IRC's GBV technical unit and the research and evaluation unit. IRC Liberia shared information on

⁶ Incidence, rather than prevalence, is used to distinguish the fact that we are counting only *new* cases (over the previous 18 months), rather than cumulative cases over a lifetime.

⁷ With the exception of "or attempted penetration," this definition comes from Liberia's 2006 Rape Law.

their programs and on characteristics of their operational areas, which informed the sampling strategy and content of the questionnaire.

The Research Coordinator trained six IRC GBV social workers in the data collection and interviewing methods. Two interviewers were recruited from each county in which IRC works, and the training took place at the head office in Monrovia. The training lasted for three days and included extensive role playing and practice to increase the quality and consistency of data collection. Training was followed by one week of piloting in communities in Monrovia. During the pilot the team practiced different versions of the questionnaire before deciding on the version that worked best (described in more detail in Section IV below). Once training and piloting were completed, data collection began in IRC's operational areas in Montserrado County. Data collection lasted from June 19 through July 19, 2007.

IV. Methodology

Overview. The research team used the “Neighborhood Method,” first developed at Columbia University and piloted in 2006 in Northern Uganda, in collaboration with the Christian Children’s Fund. The Neighborhood Method is unique in that it uses household interviews to ask women not only about their own experiences, but also those of others in their home and their community. This method allows for a bigger sample size than is possible by conducting individual interviews with the primary respondents only, and it also provides a “window” into some of the reporting and disclosure trends in the sample area. In the model adapted for the Liberian context, the interviews covered:

1. The woman herself;
2. The other women and girls in her household;
3. Her 4 four closest neighbors; and
4. The other women and girls in the neighbors’ households.

In Northern Uganda, women were asked about their 4-6 closest neighbors as well as their sisters. The Liberia model was adapted to include children by asking about other females in the respondent’s and neighbors’ households. Also, sisters were left out of the Liberia model, because families were often more geographically dispersed in Liberia, and sisters were often outside the sampling universe of IRC’s operational areas.

Sampling. Multi-stage cluster sampling method was used to select households. Cluster sampling was based on population figures collected by the IRC, with some modifications made during the early phases of research based on revised population estimates. To reach the desired sample size based on the effect size anticipated, the size of the population, and a confidence level of 95 percent, the team identified a minimum number of interviews, through which information would be collected on the respondent herself and the other female members of her and her four closest neighbors’ households. The team sampled 30 clusters of 10 households within IRC’s operational areas in each county (300 households in each county).

The number of clusters assigned to each community was based on its population size. Communities were then divided into clusters of 200 or fewer households using a

combination of simple mapping and global positioning satellite (GPS) technology. The clusters were then randomly selected and a random number sequence was used to select the starting household in each cluster. The interviewers then went to every tenth household following that first house (unless the number of houses in the cluster was less than 100; then the interval between houses was 5). If a woman over 18 was not available or not willing to participate, the interviewer went to the house next to this one. If there were more than three unavailabilities/refusals in a row, she would begin the counting interval over again at the next house. Two or three interviewers worked in each cluster, and they were able to conduct between three and five interviews per day.

Interview. The interviewer approached the house and asked to speak to an adult female who lived there. She then explained the purpose of the interview, the anticipated length, the assurance of anonymity and the need for privacy. Once the woman understood and gave her informed verbal consent, the interview began in a private location chosen by the respondent. If the woman refused or was unable to speak to the interviewer privately, the interviewer thanked her for her time and moved to the next house.

The interviewer first asked for basic information (age, marital status, household size, and length of time living in the community) about the respondent, other women and girls in her household, her four closest neighbors and all the women and girls in those four households. She then asked the woman to describe some of the biggest problems facing women and girls in her community. If domestic violence and/or rape were mentioned without prompting by the interviewer, she would circle “mentioned” on the data collection sheet. The interviewer would then segue to targeted questions about incidents of physical violence in her neighborhood. (If domestic violence and rape were NOT mentioned, she would circle “prompted.”)

First she asked about the first neighbor and the other females living in that household – whether any of them experienced domestic violence or sexual abuse since January, 2006. The interviewers used local terminology to discuss this sensitive topic and elicited a “yes,” “no,” or “don’t know” response. If an incident had occurred, the interviewer asked for information about the perpetrator (relationship to survivor, approximate age), whether or not the survivor had reported the incident, and if so, to whom. She also recorded additional information in narrative form. She continued this line of questioning for each of the four neighbors and the other women and girls in those households, and then asked about the woman herself and other women and girls in her household.

Interviews averaged 40 minutes in length, depending mainly on the size of the households in the respondent’s area. The interviews did not follow a rigid format; rather, they allowed for the interviewer to build rapport and trust with the respondent. Privacy and confidentiality were paramount concerns. Interviewers took care to assure participants that no names would be collected, and that there would be neither repercussions nor rewards for their participation. At the end of the interview, the interviewers provided information on relevant social services in their area. (Interviewer Guide and Data Collection Sheet included as Appendices A and B).

Montserrado County

300 interviews were conducted in IRC's main operational areas in Montserrado County. Communities sampled included West Point/Slipway, Paynesville, Chocolate City, Topoe Village, Chicken Soup Factory, Barnersille and Central Monrovia. Data collection took place from June 19 through July 3, 2007.

Nimba County

300 interviews were conducted in IRC's main operational areas in Nimba County. Communities sampled included Ganta, Saniquelle, Seykhimpa, Yekhipa, Karnplay, Saclepea and Tappita. Interviews were conducted in Nimba County from July 7 through July 19, 2007.

V. Findings

A. Information on Sample Population

There were high participation rates in the study. In Montserrado County, the participation rate was 90 percent (18 unavailabilities and 14 refusals). In Nimba County, the participation rate was 88 percent (28 unavailabilities and 14 refusals).

Table 1, Profile of Sample Population

	<i>Montserrado County</i>	<i>Nimba County</i>
Sample Size	7015	6632
▪ <i>Respondents</i>	300	300
▪ <i>Others in respondents' household</i>	1282	1178
▪ <i>Neighbors and others in neighbors' household</i>	5433	4854
Average age	26	24
Marital Status		
▪ <i>Single</i>	61%	70%
▪ <i>Married</i>	32%	24%
▪ <i>Separated/Divorced</i>	1%	1%
▪ <i>Widowed</i>	6%	4%

B. Frequency of Violence

The first question women were asked was, "What are the major issues facing women in this community?" 95 percent of the 300 women interviewed in Montserrado named domestic violence as a major issue without prompting, and 44 percent named rape as a major issue without prompting. In Nimba County, 93 percent of the 300 women interviewed named domestic violence as a major issue without prompting, and 33 percent named rape as a major issue without prompting.

Respondents answered questions in three categories of violence: domestic violence, marital rape (if they were married or separated), and rape outside of marriage. These categories are overlapping. Anyone in the population could have been "eligible" for domestic violence or rape outside of marriage. Only women who declared themselves as married or separated could have been eligible for marital rape. Marital rape was retained as a separate category to ensure that information was being systematically

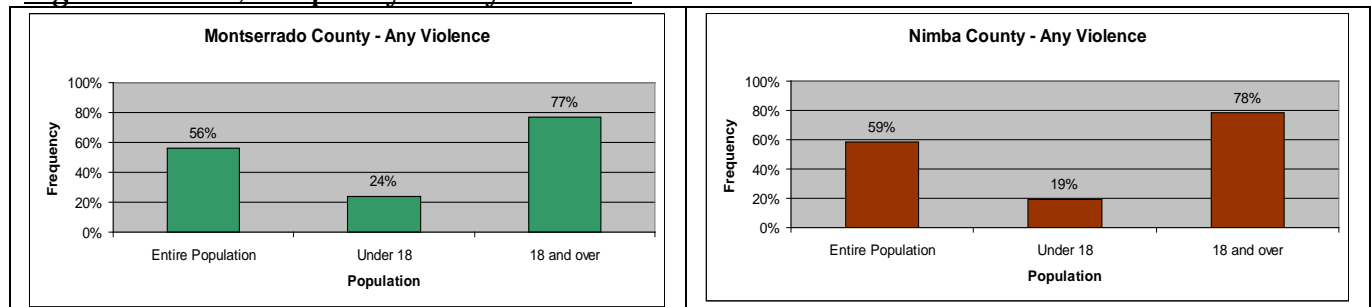
collected on this contentious issue. “Any violence” is an umbrella category that was added during analysis to capture for each individual whether *any* act of violence had been recorded during the time frame (for instance, a woman who may have survived rape but not domestic violence, or a girl who had been beaten by a neighbor, which would not otherwise fall into any of the three case definitions).

Table 2, Incident Frequency, January 2006-July 2007 (18 months)

	Montserrado County	Nimba County
Any violence (out of total sample)	56.2%	58.7%
▪ <i>Under 18</i>	24.1%	19.4%
▪ <i>18 and older</i>	76.9%	78.4%
Domestic violence (out of total sample)	54%	55.8%
▪ <i>Under 18</i>	14.8%	14.1%
▪ <i>18 and older</i>	75%	76.4%
Rape and sexual abuse outside marriage (out of total sample)	19.3%	26%
▪ <i>Under 18</i>	13%	11%
▪ <i>18 and older</i>	23.2%	32.3%
Marital rape (out of women who are married or separated)	72.3%	73.8%

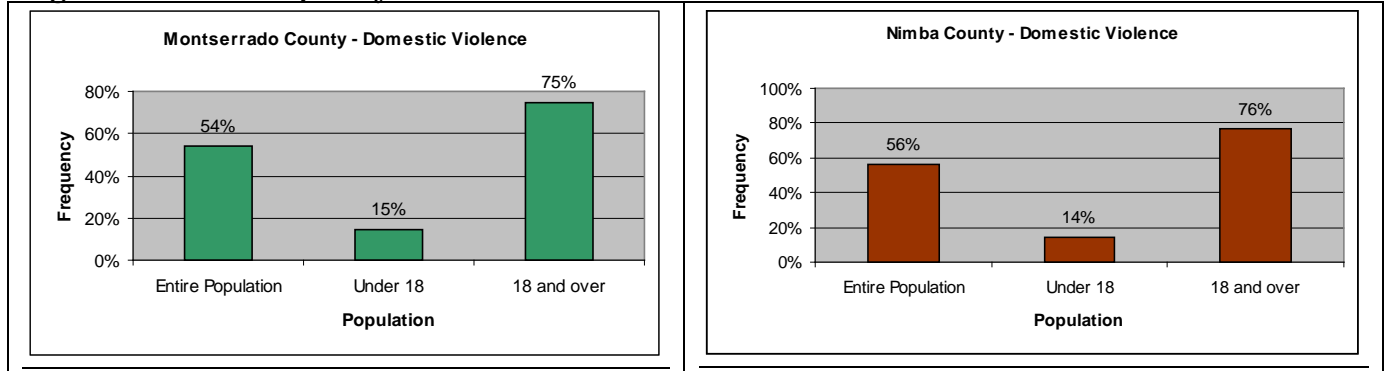
In Montserrado County and Nimba Counties, more than half of the sample population had experienced at least one incident of violence in the previous 18 months. When broken down by age, more than three-quarters of adults had experienced some form of physical violence, while one-fifth to one-quarter of minors had experienced violence.

Figures 1 and 2, Frequency of Any Violence



Domestic violence had affected more than 54 percent of women and girls in both sample populations. More than 14 percent of minors and more than 75 percent of adult women had been the victim of some incident of non-sexual domestic violence in the previous 18 months.

Figure 3 and 4, Frequency of Domestic Violence



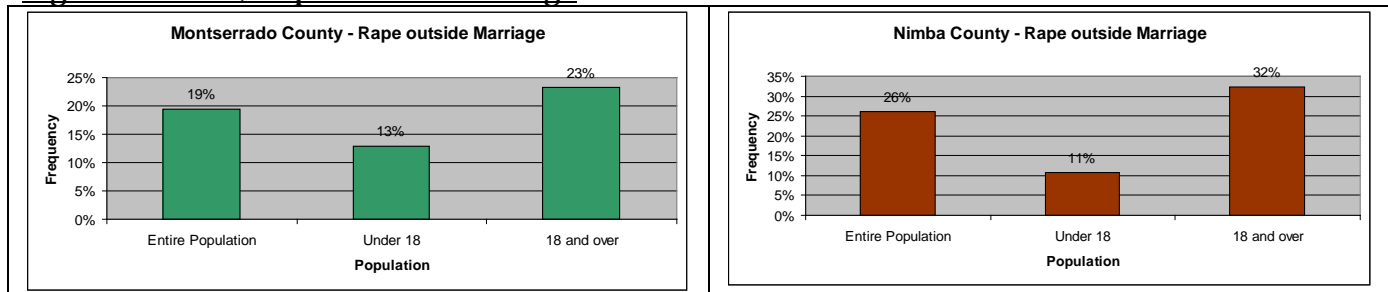
Many of the interviewed women said that physical violence was rampant in their communities⁸:

"The men are always in the habit of beating their wives. They don't want to understand that we are their helpmate but instead, they take us to be their drum to beat." (24 year old woman, Nimba County)

"Most of these girls' boyfriends can beat them. The reason is that whenever these boys asked for love, we don't tell our parents about it. So when they do bad to us, we only tell our friends sometimes our mother. They hurt us so much. Some times our mothers want to take action, but she can be afraid of the reaction of these boys." (18 year old woman, Nimba County)

Rape and sexual abuse is also widely prevalent. Combining all the incidents of marital rape and rape outside of marriage, 41 percent of the sample population in Montserrado County had experienced some incident of sexual violence in the previous 18 months. 44 percent of the sample population in Nimba County had experienced the same. Outside of marriage, rape and sexual abuse outside marriage occurred for nearly one-fifth of the sample population in Montserrado and more than one-quarter of the sample population in Nimba County.

Figures 5 and 6, Rape outside Marriage



⁸ All quotes appear as recorded by interviewers on data collection sheets. Some minor spelling errors have been corrected for ease of reading.

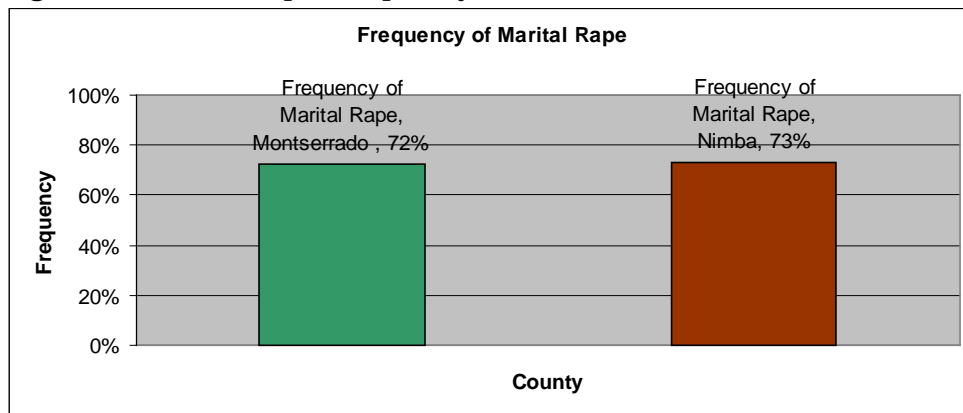
Among women who declared themselves married or separated, more than 72 percent in both counties reported that their husbands had forced them to have sex in the last 18 months. The following excerpts from interviews describe such incidents, which often involve other forms of physical violence:

“One day she works ever so long at home and she was tired when the both of them went to bed he asked to have sex and she said she was tired. The man went on to say she was his property for this reason he beats her and broke her hand.” (about a 20 year old woman, Montserrado County)

“Her husband always beat her and strip her naked. At times I go to her rescue and gave her lappa to tie on her.” (about a 45 year old woman, Montserrado County)

“Marital rape is one of the big problems in this community but people don’t say it.” (42 year old woman, Montserrado County)

Figure 7, Marital Rape Frequency, Montserrado and Nimba Counties



While the interviewers reported that it was usually easier to get women to talk about beatings and other forms of non-sexual violence than sexual violence, many respondents stressed the widespread nature of sexual violence. Some comments gathered by interviewers suggest that it is seen as “acceptable” for husbands and boyfriends to beat or force their partners for sex, but it is less acceptable for someone to rape another man’s partner or child.

“Beating women in this community is common. Most of these men here beat their women... This man and woman business [rape] is all over woman tired of having sex men forcing them is all over, between wives and husbands, boyfriends and girlfriends, but it is not bad, because that’s the man’s wife or girlfriend. The main bad one is the people that can rape other people women and daughters.” (32 year old woman, Montserrado County)

“You know this marital rape you’re asking for I always heard people say boyfriend or girlfriend can rape their women. I don’t believe it. Your husband

have the right to have sex whenever he wants. So I don't see it to be a problem."
(36 year old woman, Montserrado County)

Children are suffering from rape and sexual abuse at alarming levels. As shown in Figures 5 and 6 above, more than one in every ten children in the sample population had experienced at least one incident of rape and sexual abuse in the previous 18 months. In Montserrado County there were 219 incidents reported of rape or sexual abuse of a minor. 90 of these were children 12 and under. In Nimba County there were 229 incidents of rape or sexual abuse of a minor, and 73 of these were children 12 and under. Often children were raped when they were working without parental supervision.

"This is a little girl who was coming from roasting corn for her mother on the road. On her way home she was slapped in the face and this boy jumped on her and raped her. But he could not be found. Presently her eye is very red and running water but she was taken to the hospital for treatment." (about an 11 year old girl)

"She was raped by 19 yr old in the community when she went out to sell cold water." (about a 12 year old girl)

Comparison of Montserrado and Nimba Counties. The overall frequencies are comparable in Nimba and Montserrado Counties, with a few differences when stratified by age. In general, there were higher rates of all the different types of violence in Nimba County. However, there were higher rates of violence committed against minors reported in Montserrado County. Domestic violence had occurred for nearly one-quarter of minors in Montserrado County, compared to less than one-fifth in Nimba County. Rape and sexual abuse of minors had occurred for nearly 13 percent of minors in Montserrado County, compared to nearly 11 percent in Nimba County.

C. Perpetrators

The data on perpetrator identity indicates strongly that violence in all categories is primarily "domestic" in nature. The majority of perpetrators of these acts of violence were not strangers, but were usually known by the survivor, often intimately so.

There were only three categories for domestic violence perpetrators by the case definition – husband, boyfriend or other family member. Approximately 96 percent of the perpetrators of domestic violence were identified as husbands or boyfriends in both Montserrado and Nimba Counties. Around four percent were other family members or household members, such as a parent, sibling, or uncle.

"My husband beat me a lot, simply because he don't want for me to take part in making decision in the home. At one time he beat me my jaw could not come together for two weeks my mouth was just open. My mother was very angry with him." (31 year old woman, Montserrado County)

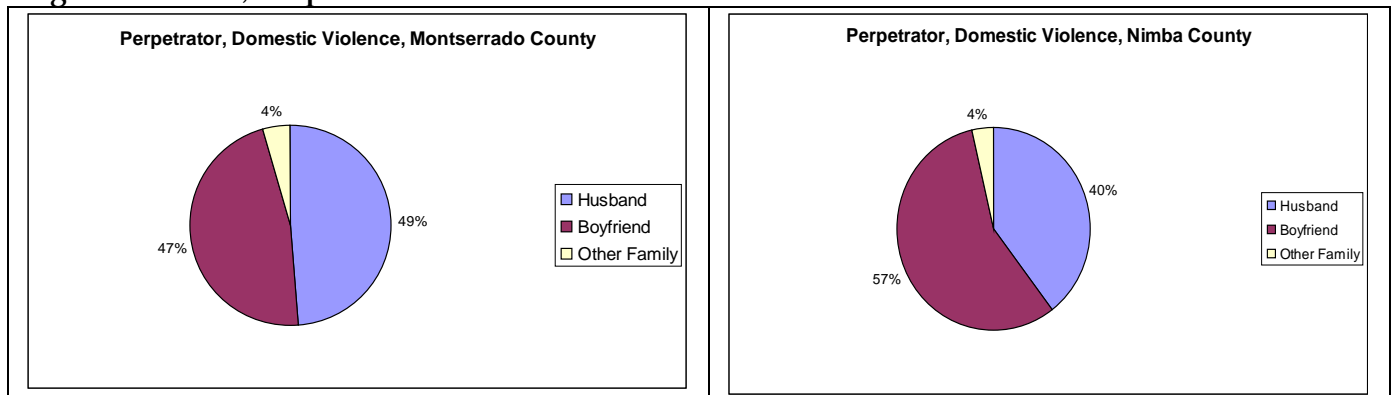
"My husband has a girlfriend and because of this he beat me a lot, you can see the mark that is on my forehead. I don't want to leave him because I have already born two children for him. I was eighth grade student when he married me, but since then, there is no money to go back to school. He and I were doing business together, but he have change business ..., and I don't have idea in that business. So he alone is doing the business. I can't see his money nor have control over his money or have access to his money." (31 year old woman, Nimba County)

"My fiancé and I used to live together, he used to beat me so badly that I can not see clearly with my right eye. I left his house and came to my mother house, but he [still] persuade me to my parents' house. He is begging me not to leave him." (22 year old woman, Montserrado County)

"She always discuss with us her friends that she like for her boyfriend to beat her. If her boyfriend don't beat her then he doesn't love her." (about a 27 year old woman, Nimba County)

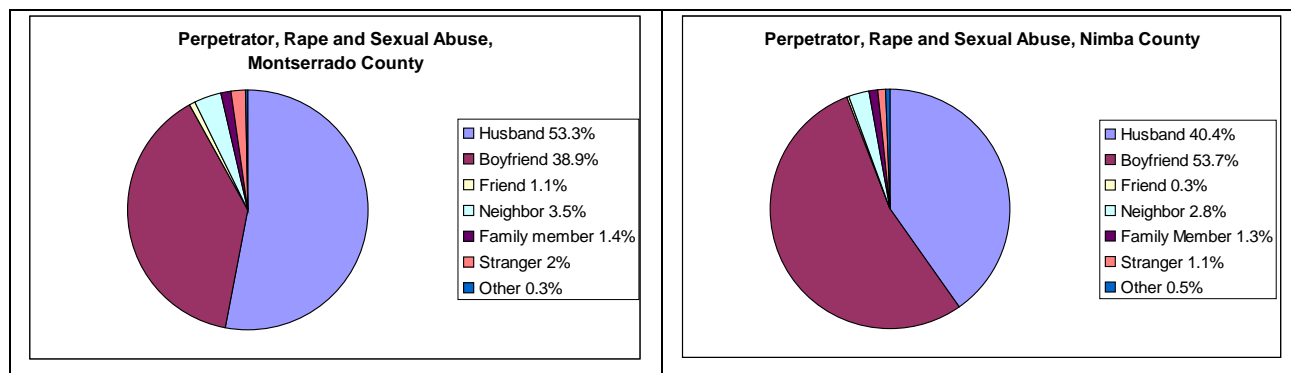
"Her father can really beat on her. When he get ready to beat that girl, the neighbor all will come to beg him, he can't hear. One day he cut her hair and saw the hair that making her to go out." (about a 14 year old girl, Montserrado County)

Figures 8 and 9, Perpetrators of Domestic Violence



The major categories for perpetrators of rape and sexual abuse were husband, boyfriend, other family member, neighbor/community member, friend, stranger or other. Again, most of the perpetrators of rape and sexual abuse were husbands and boyfriends, at 92 percent in Montserrado and 94 percent in Nimba. The next highest category is neighbors and community members, at 3.5 percent in Montserrado and 3 percent in Nimba. "Strangers" counted as less than 2 percent of perpetrators of rape and sexual violence.

Figures 10 and 11, Perpetrator, Rape and Sexual Abuse



Selected quotes from survivors help convey their impressions of violence in their homes and communities, and some of the dynamics that underlie it. Financial dependency, familial pressure, fear and stigma are just a few of the factors suggested as factors in abusive relationships.

"My husband can beat me always and force me to have sex with me after beating me, if I say no he can force me and have me. He some time go away from the house and live with girlfriend and went he do that, he cannot give us food money, he will just go without giving food money in the house. I am tired of living with him but my family say No I can [not] go away and the children stay with the man." (39 year old woman, Montserrado County)

"God just directed you to me because I am going through what you are saying. My children pa [boyfriend] and I have spent four years together but since we started this relationship, I can't sleep at night. He sex me every night. When I give birth, after two weeks he forced me for sex. He went as using candle light to burn the hair on my vagina. Presently, I got sore to my vagina from forceful sex." (26 year old woman, Montserrado County)

"As for me I don't have problem with my husband forcing me for sex, because it is his right to have sex anytime he wish to. My husband and myself have sex almost every night even when I'm tired, I do it to make him happy to give me what I need." (30 year old woman, Montserrado County)

"Sometimes when my boyfriend want to have sex, I say no and he can beat me. So this time, I'm so scare anytime he ask me for sex, I can tell him yes, because I don't want him to beat me." (27 year old woman, Montserrado County)

While the majority of the violence is perpetrated by people who are known by the survivor, there are also incidents where women have been violently attacked by strangers. There were 55 cases of rape by a stranger reported in Montserrado and 29 in Nimba:

"The Issakaba boys (armed robbers) enter on that woman room and one of them put the gun mouth in her vagina and told her that if she talk, he will

fire/shoot the gun in her. The next day she went and told the police but they said that there's no way to locate the perpetrator."(about 28 year old woman, Montserrado County)

"One night I was going to my friend place, I stopped the taxi and told the cab man I was going to Point Four the man passed with me on speed took me another area and rape me since then my stomach can really hurt me. I can really feel the pain in my stomach. It was late I could not identify the man." (27 year old woman, Montserrado County)

Rape and sexual abuse of children is usually committed by adult men, although there were also reports of boys sexually violating younger girls. The selected quotes depict a few of these cases:

"My daughter was also rape by one of my neighbor son, and she got pregnant after we went at the hospital, the boy say he done know my daughter, he was taken to jail but they free him, and now my daughter have problem, the baby die in her stomach and end up to this time she is not well, I am just taking her from hospital to hospital. Perpetrator is 59 years old and live in this community with us." (about 14 year old)

"Daughter was rape by stepboy in same house and the stepbrother is 23 years the family call him for the case and he ran away from the house, up to this time he cannot be found." (about 9 year old)

"This little girl left with one of the rentals while the aunt went to Red Light to buy some things unfortunately for her one of the neighbors jumped on her and raped her. This was reported to the police and he is presently in jail." He is 37 yrs old. (about 5 year old)

"My grandchild and her friends were playing one of the little boy took his finger and put it in her vagina, I beat the boy he is 12 years." (about 3 year old)

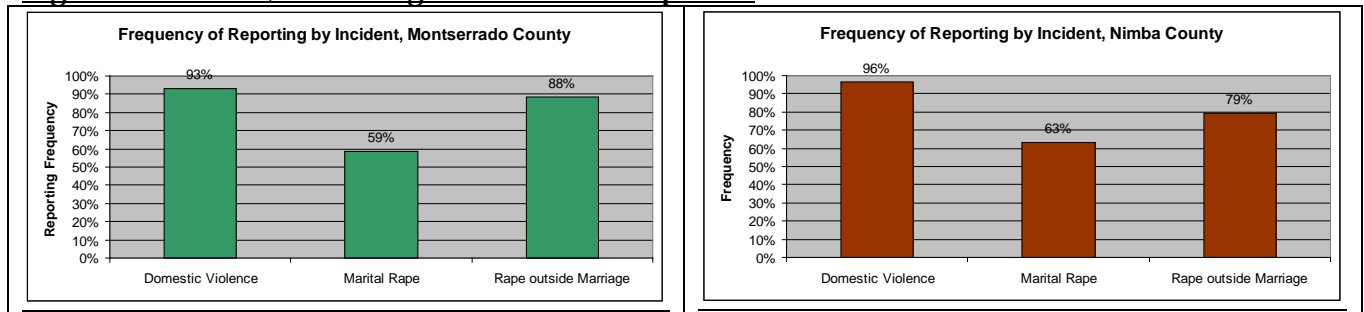
"She was raped at her school by her teacher. The man took her in the bathroom and started raping her while she was crying some of the senior student went to see who was crying in the bathroom, and that was how he was caught with the girl. The principal took the teacher from the school. The girl was taken to the clinic. The man is big. I think he will be in his 30 years." (about 14 year old)

D. Reporting and Disclosure

By Incident. If the respondent confirmed that an incident of physical violence had occurred, the interviewer asked, "Did you/she tell anyone?" If the answer was yes, the interviewer asked, "Who did you/she tell?" 93 percent of domestic violence cases in Montserrado and 96 percent of domestic violence cases in Nimba described to the interviewer were also said to have been reported or disclosed to another person. The

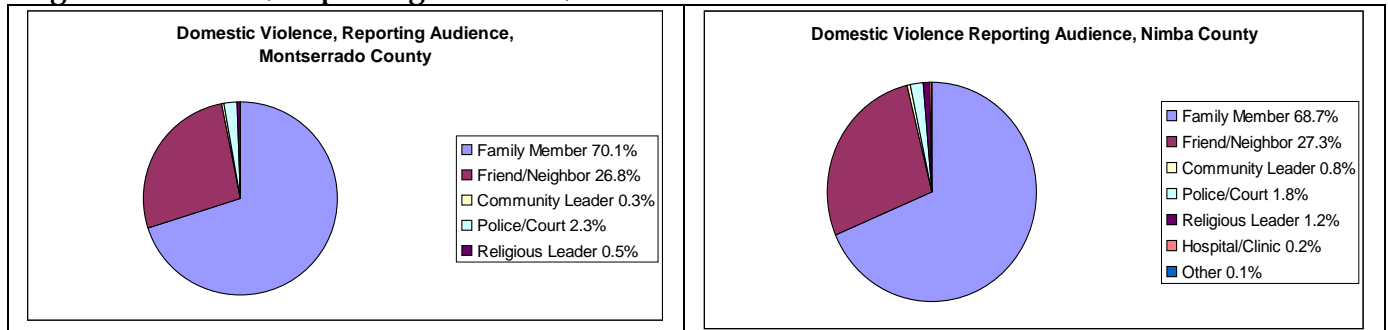
numbers are less for rape outside of marriage, and even less for marital rape, at 59 percent in Montserrado and 63 percent in Nimba.

Figures 12 and 13, Percentage of Incidents Reported



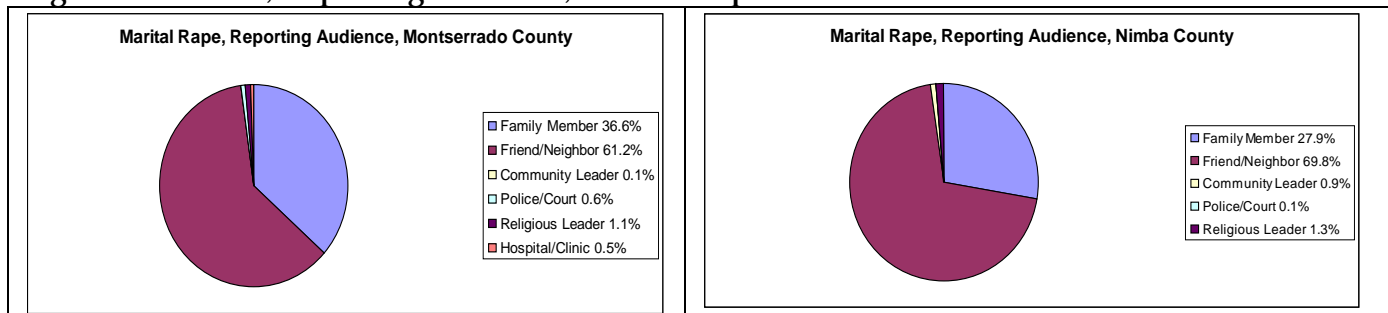
If an incident of domestic violence was disclosed, the most likely audience was a family member, followed by a friend or neighbor. More than 97 percent of domestic violence cases in both counties were reported to “informal” sources (friend, neighbor, family member, or religious leader), and less than 3 percent were reported to “formal” sources (police, court, community leader). Only around 2 percent of domestic violence survivors in either county said that the incident had been to the police or court.

Figures 14 and 15, Reporting Audience, Domestic Violence



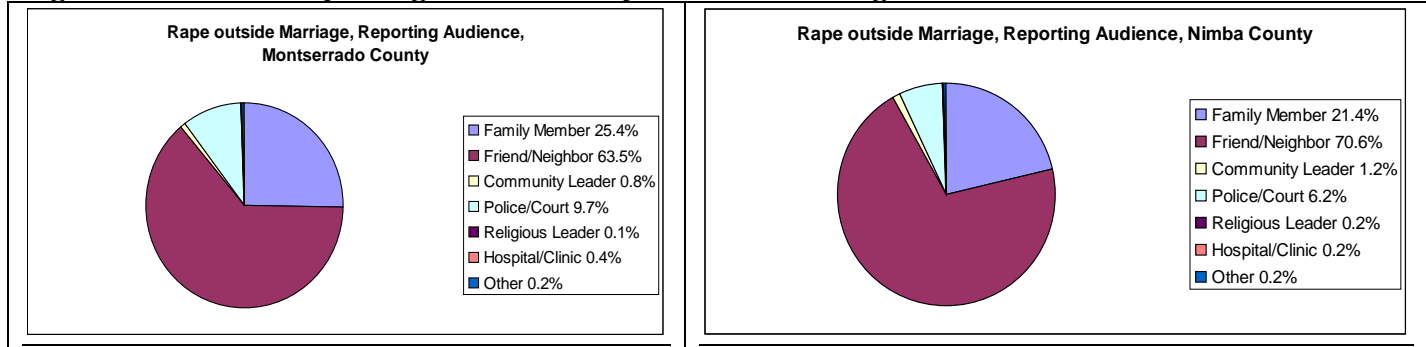
For survivors of marital rape, the most common person told was a friend or neighbor, followed by a family member. In both counties, less than 2 percent of marital rape survivors told “formal” audiences, such as the police or court system, or community leaders. Survivors were less likely to report the incidents within their families than they are for domestic violence.

Figures 16 and 17, Reporting Audience, Marital Rape



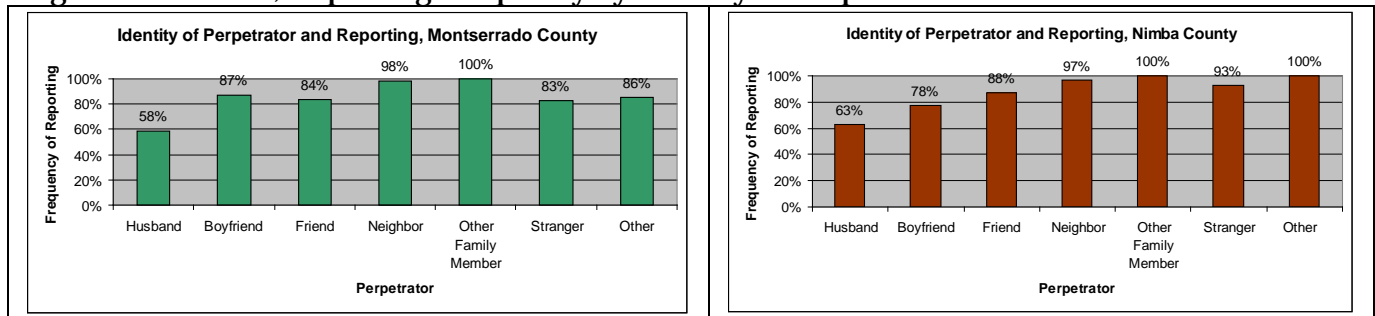
As with marital rape, rape outside of marriage was also most commonly reported to a friend or neighbor. However, a significantly higher percentage of rape outside of marriage was reported to the police, at nearly 10 percent in Montserrat County and more than 6 percent in Nimba County.

Figures 18 and 19, Reporting Audience, Rape outside Marriage



By Perpetrator. Reporting rates varied not only by incident, but also by identity of the perpetrator. The event was least likely to be reported if the perpetrator was the husband, and was most likely to be reported if the perpetrator was a neighbor or another family member (not the marital partner). In Montserrat County, the event was reported 83 percent of the time if the perpetrator was a stranger.

Figures 20 and 21, Reporting Frequency by Identity of Perpetrator



Information was not systematically collected on women's perceptions of why rape does not always get reported. However, some of the reasons captured in interviews mention shame as a powerful disincentive for disclosing the incident.

"My baby was about 4 months when my boyfriend and I met. The first time he met me, he helped with \$30LD to buy food since I was breastfeeding. He give me offer for two to three times and then he came to visit me one night. By then my baby was walking. He asked for the same thing but I said no. He pushed me on the bed... I couldn't cry or report because I was still breastfeeding and people have seen him before giving visiting and me offers. If I was going to complain him, my friends in the community were going to testify that [he was my]

boyfriend. Since that day, he became my boyfriend and he's the one taking care of me and my mother." (33 year old woman, Nimba County)

"Marital rape is common here but the women see it as disgracing themselves to report such case. She now see it as one of the reasons a woman will born 10-14 children, because the men can't give them chance at night." (21 year old woman, Nimba County)

"When it comes to women and girls telling friends about their bedroom problem, it very hard to see women or girls doing it because they can be shame to tell people. When you ask any woman about that marital rape, they will tell you it's not happening; but it's happening plenty in this town, people are shame to tell it out."(29 year old woman, Nimba County)

Other reasons articulated were the perceived ineffectiveness or complicity of police, fear of retribution, or financial dependence on the perpetrator:

"Some men in this community love to rape women, and when ever they carry the case to court or police, they can free the perpetrator from jail. So even if some happen in our community we can just sit with it. Some of the man can pregnant our children and say they don't know about it or don't know them." (55 year old woman, Montserrado County)

"That raping problem you talking about it can happen in our area and even the police can do it because if you carry your case to them and you done have money to give to them they will rape you and that is the only way the police will take in your case." (27 year old woman, Montserrado County)

Tables 3 and 4 below provide more detailed information on who the survivor is likely to report to, depending on who the perpetrator was.

Table 3, Reporting Trends for Rape, Depending on Perpetrator, Montserrado County

	Family	Friend	Community Leader	Police/Court	Religious Leader	Hospital/Clinic	Other
Husband	36.6%	61.2%	0.1%	0.6%	1.1%	0.5%	0.00%
Boyfriend	23.6%	75.3%	0.1%	0.98%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Friend	23.1%	34.6%	0.0%	38.5%	0.00%	0.00%	3.9%
Neighbor/ Community Member	30.9%	9.6%	6.4%	53.2%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Other Family Member	59%	2.6%	2.6%	33.3%	2.6%	0.00%	0.00%
Stranger	25.%	11.4%	2.3%	52.3%	0.00%	9.1%	0.00%
Other	16.7%	0.0%	0.00%	66.7%	0.00%	0.00%	16.7%

Table 4, Reporting Trends for Rape, Depending on Perpetrator, Nimba County

	Family	Friend	Community Leader	Police/Court	Religious Leader	Hospital/Clinic	Other
Husband	27.9%	69.8%	0.9%	0.1%	1.3%	0%	00%
Boyfriend	20.2%	78.4%	0.5%	0.6%	0.2%	0.00%	0.09%
Friend	14.3%	14.3%	14.3%	57.1%	0.0%	0.00%	0.0%
Neighbor/ Community Member	23.9%	13.4%	7.5%	53.7%	0.0%	1.5%	0.0%
Other Family Member	62.5%	0.0%	9.4%	25.0%	0.0%	3.1%	0.0%
Stranger	24.0%	12.0%	4.0%	56.00%	0.0%	4.0%	0.0%
Other	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	80.0%	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%

Although information was not systematically collected on the outcome of disclosure, anecdotal evidence from interviews suggests that the cases are often “settled” between families.

"My husband beat on me in Buchana and I came to my parents to complain him. During the investigation, he said that I insulted him. He started beating on me before my parents. He told my parents that I shouldn't follow him to go back to Buchana where he works. My parents advice me to stay until I give birth." (26 year old woman, Nimba County)

"We live here as one family. My neighbor's problem is ours. These people don't report domestic violence or rape; they like to settle cases as family."

"My boyfriend impregnated me and left. He is now in Monrovia attending school. As for me I am here taking care of my two months old son. I lived with my grandmother. Whenever there is confusion amongst the neighbor, the oldest of the community will call us and we will settle the matter. We don't take our cases to the police station." (19 year old woman, Nimba County)

However, others indicate that there is a growing awareness of women’s legal rights, and of the importance of reporting violations to the authorities:

"The boys in our community love fighting. They do not know the right of women in our community. But we the young put together and say if any of them beat on women in this community without good reason we will take them to court." (25 year old woman, Nimba County)

"We the community people, when these things happen, we can take it to the police but the police will put them to jail and after some time they can free them and we will see the perpetrators in the community again. So we the women put together and went to the court and talk it over with the big big people, if they free these people, they will always rape our women and girls. So they should stop abusing our rights. And from there IRC came in and say that anytime we the women get such a cases we should take them to IRC and they will do the follow-up with the police." (39 year old woman, Nimba County)

VI. Challenges and Limitations

This study was adapted from a study piloted in 2006 in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Lira District, Northern Uganda. The Liberia study was expanded to include minors in the study population, so questions were not only asked about the experiences of the respondents and their adult female neighbors, but also of all the other women and girls in their households.

A. Validity of Method

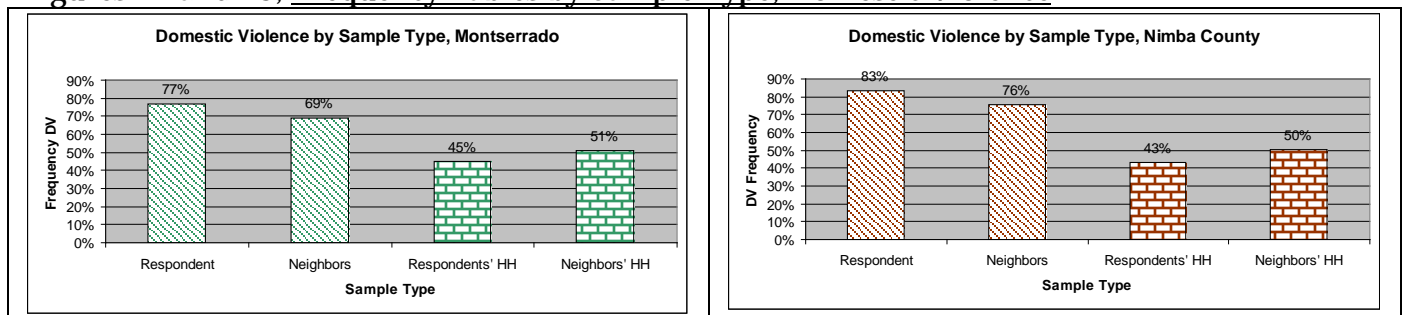
The validity of the method was analyzed by comparing response rates among the different “types” of sample population, which include:

1. Respondent
2. Other women and girls in respondent’s household
3. Neighbors
4. Other women and girls in neighbor’s household

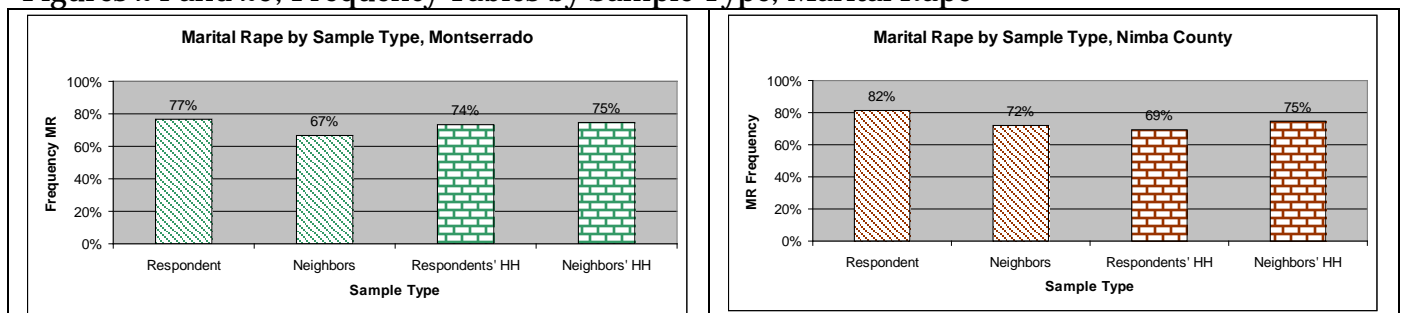
The first and third categories– respondent and neighbors – are comparable, because these are all adult women. The second and fourth categories are comparable because the household is a mix of adult women and children. In all three major categories of violence in both counties there was less than a 10 percent difference among the comparable categories, which lends confidence to our findings.

The figures below illustrate the frequencies of each incident by sample type in both counties. The different grids illustrate those columns that can be compared to one another.

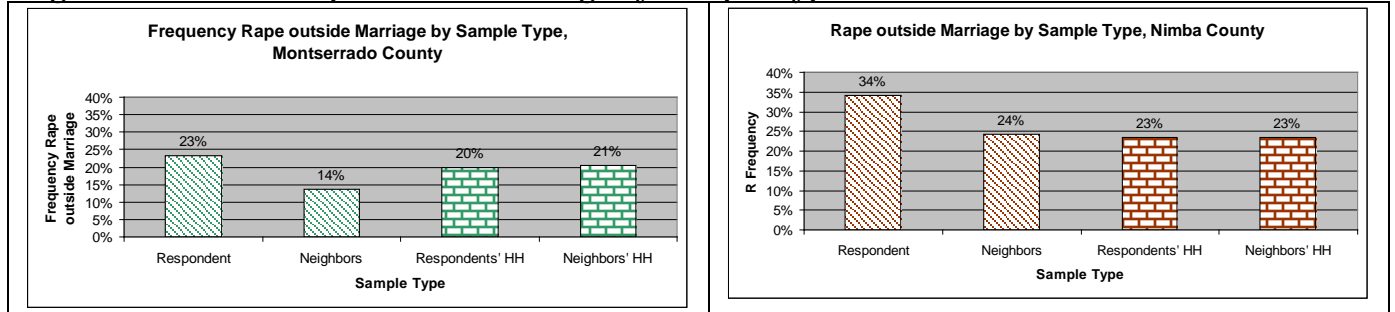
Figures 22 and 23, Frequency Tables by Sample Type, Domestic Violence



Figures 24 and 25, Frequency Tables by Sample Type, Marital Rape



Figures 26 and 27, Rape outside Marriage by Sample Type



While the differences are relatively small, it is interesting to note that the respondents in both counties consistently reported higher frequencies of all three types of incidents for herself than for her neighbors. This suggests that either women themselves exaggerated their experience with physical violence, or that they know less about what is happening in their neighbors' households than in their own. Because the interviewers were clear that they would not receive any compensation for their participation, the first theory seems less plausible than the second. If the second theory is true, then it is likely that the frequencies we have arrived at among the entire sample population may underestimate the actual levels of violence among the population. This theory is also supported by the data we have on reporting, which suggests that reporting rates are quite low for sexual violence.

On the other hand, the respondent consistently reported slightly *lower* rates of these events for other females in her household than for those in her neighbors' households. There may be reluctance to admit that violence is occurring for the other women and girls in her household, particularly if the respondent views herself as responsible for their safety and security. Data collected for this research effort does not offer sufficient explanatory power for this trend, but it is worth exploring in follow-up trends.

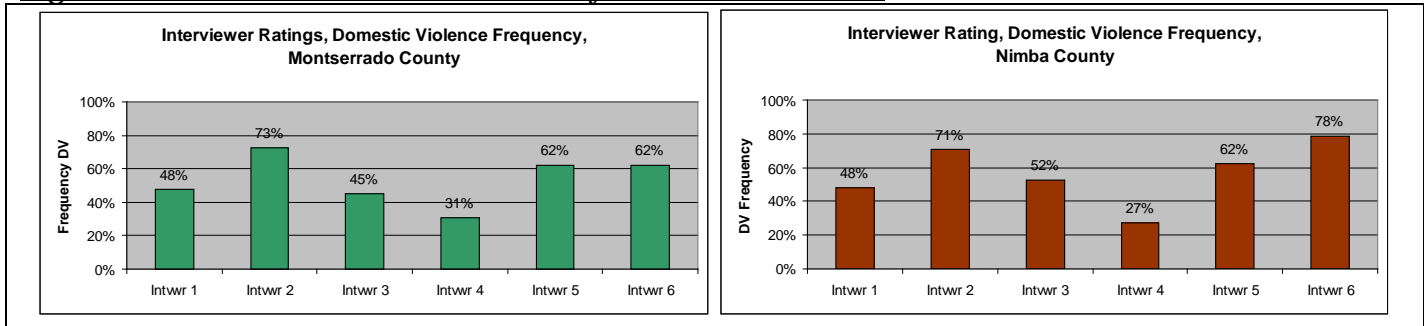
B. Inter-Rater Reliability

Another strategy for gauging internal validity was comparing the frequencies of different events as rated by the six interviewers. There was a high degree of variance among interviewer ratings, which is one of the major limitations of our findings. The reasons for the variance in these ratings may be the result of a lack of consistency in an open-ended interview setting, and they probably also reflect some of the confusion and silences around these issues in Liberian society (and for that matter, the world). These are extremely sensitive topics, and the interviewers have different techniques and skills to address them. Future analysis will look more closely at inter-interviewer variance, and this will be reflected in the confidence intervals around our frequencies.

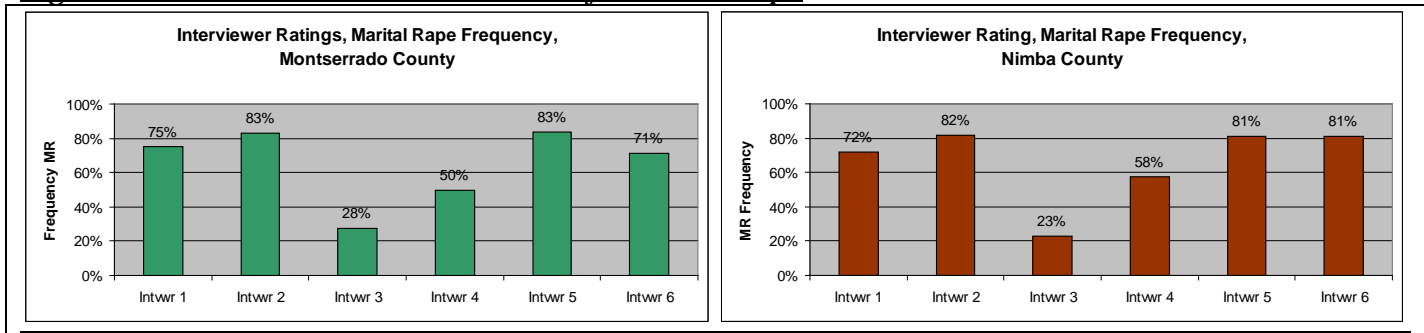
- The range for domestic violence is 30.99% to 72.77% in Montserrado, and 27.42% to 78.42% in Nimba.
- The range for marital rape is 27.64% to 83.4% in Montserrado, and 23.08% to 81.58% in Nimba.

- The range for rape outside marriage is 11.56% to 27.87% in Montserrado and 17.28% to 44.17% in Nimba.

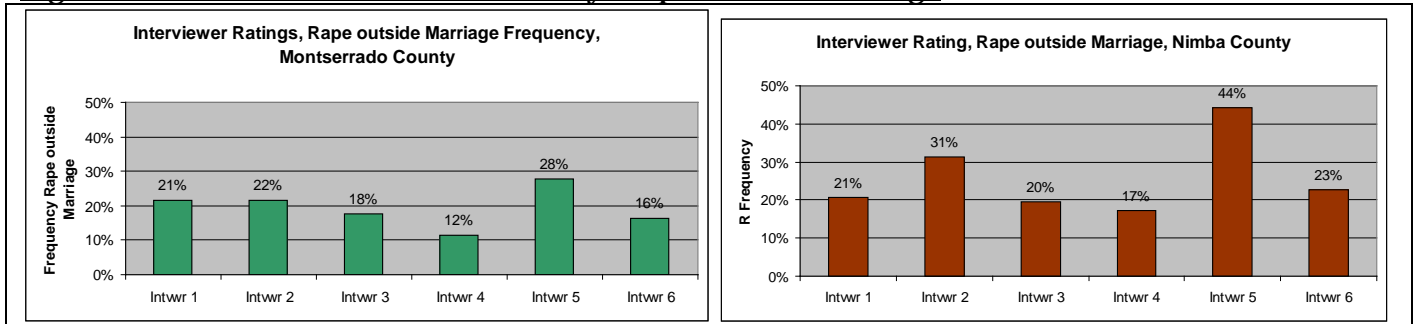
Figures 28 and 29, Inter-Rater Reliability, Domestic Violence



Figures 30 and 31, Inter-Rater Reliability, Marital Rape



Figures 32 and 33, Inter-Rater Reliability, Rape outside Marriage



C. Other Challenges and Limitations

In addition to some of the challenges mentioned in the previous section with inter-rater reliability, this study was subject to other limitations. First, any population-based survey is a significant challenge in an area where conflict has displaced people and degraded the capacity of government institutions to collect information on its citizens. The last census was conducted in Liberia in 1983, which made it extremely difficult to get reliable population figures.⁹ Moreover, there were very few maps on which to base

⁹ A national census is scheduled for 2008 in Liberia.

decisions about cluster sampling. Therefore, more time than was desirable was required each day to work on manual mapping and counting of houses. This detracted time and attention from the data collection process itself.

In future efforts of this kind, more time should be spent on qualitative research before launching into quantitative surveys. It would have been advantageous for the entire team to have had led focus group discussions with the target population on their perceptions of physical violence. In particular, it may have helped the team to develop more cohesion on decisions about coding events.

The training was only led by one person, and the research would have greatly benefited from the participation of co-facilitators, particularly those familiar with the Liberian context and skilled in Liberian English and other dialects. Moreover, data collection could have been more efficient with at least two field coordinators. The entire data collection process was rushed, and could have been even stronger with more time built in for analysis and reflection.

This study is limited to physical violence, which is just one element of women and girls' vulnerability in Liberia. Issues such as abandonment, illiteracy, unemployment and poverty deserve further study as both cause and consequence of physical violence.

Finally, the estimates provided here cannot yet be generalized to the broader population of these program areas. In the coming months further analysis will be done to identify the appropriate confidence intervals around these estimates.

VII. Recommendations and Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that violence against women and girls is an epidemic in Liberia. While the war has been over for four years, violence continues to undermine the safety and security of women and girls. In contrast to the findings of IRC's research conducted among Liberian refugees just four years ago, where the vast majority of abusers were armed soldiers, today's violence is overwhelmingly occurring in the household. Ongoing domestic violence is perhaps even more insidious than isolated attacks by strangers, yet it receives even less programmatic and policy support than violence during wartime. Future programming directions must focus on the domestic nature of the violence, and of its root causes.

Marital rape, in particular, is extraordinarily prevalent. More research must be done to understand the consequences of marital rape in this context, and how it can be effectively addressed in Liberian society.

This study corroborates other quantitative and qualitative research pointing to the prevalence of abuse of children. The abusers are adult strangers, neighbors and family members, as well as teenage boyfriends and other children. More must be done to protect children from these abuses, and to ensure that perpetrators do not continue to commit crimes with impunity.

The research also demonstrates that more work must be done to strengthen reporting mechanisms, and in the accountability (and perceived accountability) of the criminal justice and legal sectors. While the rape law has strengthened the legal status of rape survivors, it cannot be an effective instrument if the cases remain within the family or community and do not get properly reported to and treated by formal authorities.

Some research objectives to consider for the future are:

1. Undertake Neighborhood Study in Lofa County, to determine if there are significant differences in the nature and level of violence in IRC's other major operational area.
2. Conduct qualitative research with women and girls to understand their perceptions of vulnerability and violence, and how physical violence interacts with other kinds of vulnerabilities.
3. Conduct interviews and focus groups with men, women, boys and girls to understand the role that marriage plays in Liberian society.
4. Conduct qualitative research with men and boys to gauge their perceptions of the levels, causes and consequences of violence toward women and girls.
5. Explore the levels and types of violence that boys and men are witnessing and/or experiencing both inside and outside the home, and how these experiences may be contributing to household violence.

APPENDIX A

Interviewer Guide

INTRODUCTION

My name is X, and I work for the International Rescue Committee. I am part of a research team that is studying issues affecting women in this community, and I would like to ask you some questions if that is OK. My questions will cover the time period since January 2006, when the new President came to office.

Are you over the age of 18? *If yes: can you spare 30-45 minutes to answer some questions? Let's find a private space so that we can talk confidentially. [Go to private area.]*

If she is under the age of 18, ask if there is a woman over the age of 18 in the household who she can talk to. If there is none, thank the woman for her time, but that you are only able to interview women who are over the age of 18. [Mark the top of the sheet as "unavailable," and go to the next house.]

Obtain informed consent: Everything you tell me today is completely confidential. There is no pressure on you to talk with me. If you agree to talk with me, you are free at any time to not answer any questions or to end the interview. There is no compensation for this interview; your participation will help IRC better understand the issues facing women in this community, and will help us provide better services.

- Do you have any questions?
- Do you understand our purpose?
- During this interview I will ask your name and those of some of your neighbors and family members, but the names will be removed as soon as we are done talking. Everything you say here is confidential. Is that OK?
- Do you understand that you are free not to answer any question or to end the interview at any time?
- Are you willing to talk with us and share your experiences?

If yes, you are ready to proceed!

If no, thank the woman for her time; mark the interview sheet with an X under "woman did not consent," and move to the next house.

OBTAIN BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESPONDENT AND OTHERS:

1. What is your name?

2. How long have you lived in this community?
3. How old are you?
4. What is your marital status?
5. Tell me about your neighbor who lives there [point to nearest house]. What is her name? Is she married? About how old is she? Who else lives in her household? How many women, and how many girls? What is their relation to the neighbor; what is their age and marital status?
6. What about that neighbor over there [point to nearest house on next side]? What is her name? Is she married? About how old is she? Who else lives in her household? How many women, and how many girls? What is their relation to the neighbor; what is their age and marital status?

[Continue asking about four closest neighbors.]

7. How many people live in this house? How many of these are adult women? How many of these are girls? What are their ages and their relationship to you?

OPEN-ENDED QUESTION ABOUT ISSUES FACING WOMEN IN COMMUNITY

8. Can you tell me about the biggest problems facing women in this community?

*If violence against women is mentioned, circle **mention** following "DV" on sheet. If it has to be prompted, circle **prompt**.*

*If rape is mentioned, circle **mention** following "R" on sheet. If it has to be prompted, circle **prompt**.*

Probe: Any other issues? If they have not yet mentioned gender-based violence, prompt with "In some of the communities where we work, violence against women and girls is a problem. Is violence against women and girls a problem in this community?"

QUESTIONS ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Neighbors

9. *If domestic violence was raised by the woman:* You mentioned that domestic violence is a problem in this community.

Or if she has not mentioned domestic violence: Many women have said that domestic violence is an issue in their communities, and I wonder if it is an issue here. What about your neighbor X? Since the new government started [January 2006], has this neighbor experienced violence in her home?

If the woman says yes, ask:

- a. What did she do after this happened? Did she tell anyone? Who? How did they respond?

10. What about the other girls and women in that neighbor's household? Since the new government started [January 2006], have any of them experienced violence in her home?

If the woman says yes, ask:

- a. What did she do after this happened? Did she tell anyone? Who? How did they respond?

11. And what about your neighbor Y? Since last January, when the new government started, has she experienced violence in her home?

If the woman says yes, ask:

- a. What did she do after this happened? Did she tell anyone? Who? How did they respond?

Interviewer should continue in this way and ask about each of the four neighbors, as well as the other women and girls in that neighbor's house.

Respondent (Woman Herself)

12. And what about you? Since last January, when the new President came to office, have you experienced violence in your home?

If yes, ask:

- a. What did you do? Did you tell anyone? Who? How did they respond?

13. And what about X female household member? Since the new government started, has she experienced physical abuse in her home?

If yes, ask:

- a. What did she do after this happened? Did she tell anyone? Who? How did they respond?

Continue to ask about each female household member.

QUESTIONS ABOUT RAPE

Neighbors

14. *If woman mentioned rape as an issue, say:* You mentioned that rape and sexual abuse is a problem in this community.

Or: lots of women report that rape is a big issue in their communities.

What about for neighbor X? Since the new government started in January 2006, has she been raped or sexually abused?

If yes, ask:

- a. By who? Someone in her household? What did she do after this happened? Did she tell anyone? Who? How did they respond?

15. What about the other women and girls living in neighbor X's house? Since the new government started in January 2006, have any of them been raped or sexually abused?

Continue asking for each neighbor, and each girl and woman in neighbor's household.

Respondent (Woman Herself)

16. What about you? Since last January, when the new government started, have you been raped/sexually abused by anyone?

If yes, ask:

- a. By who? Someone in your household or outside? Did you report the incident? To whom?

17. What about for X female member of household? Since last January, has she been raped/sexually abused?

- a. If yes, by someone in her household? Did she report the incident? To whom?

Continue for all female members of household.

CONCLUSION

18. For women who have experienced domestic violence and rape, what do you think might help them cope?

19. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me. I have gone through all of my questions. Is there anything else that you would like to share or ask me?

Interviewer will:

- thank the woman for her time
- explain the medical services available
- explain the social services available
- explain legal protocols
- explain what IRC is equipped to do
- ask the woman if she has any more questions.

Empty house/no one over 18 available? _____

Woman did not consent? _____

Data Collection Sheet

Date _____

Location _____

Interviewer Name _____

How long has respondent lived in this community? _____

DV (circle one): Mentioned Prompted

R (circle one): Mentioned Prompted

Yes = Y
 No = N
 Attempted = A
 Don't Know = DK
 No Response = NR
 Does Not Apply = line through

NEIGHBORS

	Name	R'ship to N	Age	Mar. Status	DV	Report?	MR	Report?	R Other	Report?
N1										
TOTAL NUMBER OF OTHER FEMALES IN N1's HH:										
a.										
b.										
c.										
d.										
Other ppl in N1 household (ages, marital status) and did they experience DV, MR or R Other?										
N2										
TOTAL NUMBER OF OTHER FEMALES IN N2's HH:										
a.										
b.										
c.										
d.										
Other ppl in N2 household (ages, marital status) and did they experience DV, MR or R Other?										
N3										
TOTAL NUMBER OF OTHER FEMALES IN N3's HH:										
a.										
b.										

Empty house/no one over 18 available? _____

Woman did not consent? _____

c.										
d.										

Other ppl in N3 household (ages, marital status) and did they experience DV, MR or R Other?

	Name	R'ship to N	Age	Mar. Status	DV	Report?	MR	Report?	R Other	Report?
N4										

TOTAL NUMBER OF OTHER FEMALES IN N4's HH:

a.										
b.										
c.										
d.										

Other ppl in N4 household (ages, marital status) and did they experience DV, MR or R Other?

RESPONDENT

Name	R'ship to R	Age	Mar. Status	DV	Report?	MR	Report?	R Other	Report?

TOTAL NUMBER OF OTHER FEMALES IN RESPONDENT'S HH:

H1									
H2									
H3									
H4									
H5									

Other ppl in Respondent household (ages, marital status) and did they experience DV, MR or R Other?

NOTES (please attach 2nd sheet for additional notes if necessary):