Chapter 6

Gender Relations in Troubled Transition

Summary
Women’s and men’s roles are going through major changes, creating turmoil at the household level. In many cases male unemployment and deepening economic stress have placed greater responsibilities on women to seek paid work. Some women are finding that their increased earnings help to increase their decisionmaking authority in the household, but the extent of changes reported vary widely across countries and communities. Women report heavy work burdens as they add livelihood responsibilities to their household duties.

Men express humiliation and anger over being unable to maintain their role as the household’s main or sole breadwinner. Discussion groups indicate rising alcohol and drug abuse among men and increased domestic conflicts. Physical violence against women is widespread and has increased in some communities. However, in others levels of domestic physical violence are declining. This is associated with women’s increased economic role and with increased awareness, participation in women’s groups, and supportive actions by NGOs, churches, the media and in some cases, the police.
Introduction

If you have a job at all now, you're overworked and underpaid.

—A young woman, Dimitrovgrad, Bulgaria

My husband who is not working has taken to hard drinking... I have to feed and clothe him in addition to my children. All the above has made life very hard for me now since my income is not much.

—A woman, Tabere, Ghana

The insufficiency of income is what affects the man-woman relationship. Sometimes she wakes me up in the morning asking for five pounds, and if I don't have it I get depressed and I leave the house. And when I come back, we start to fight.

—A man, Borg Meghezel, Egypt

Poor people across a majority of communities state that women's roles are undergoing tremendous change.1 As men's and women's sense of well-being is often linked to their gender identities, the shifts in these identities are a source of deep anxiety for both sexes. With increased economic hardship and rising male unemployment, poor women are working outside the home in larger numbers than ever to supplement, sometimes very substantially, household budgets. Women's rising economic responsibilities, however, do not automatically give them greater power and security in their households.

The chapter opens with findings on women's greatly increased economic activities, and then reviews highlights on changes in gender roles, responsibilities and decisionmaking in the household. Many women report feeling overburdened with having to add or increase livelihood responsibilities on top of their household chores; however, they do acknowledge greater influence over household decisions, but with strong differences across countries and communities. Men often share feelings of humiliation and anger over being unable to maintain their status as the sole or main breadwinner in the home.

The next section focuses on poor people's definitions and causes of domestic abuse. Discussion groups of both sexes acknowledge the presence of more intense quarreling between husbands and wives as well as alcohol and drug abuse among men, and often link these trends to increasing economic hardship. As a woman from El Gawaber, Egypt confides, "Problems have affected our relationship. The day my husband brings in money we are all right together. The day he stays at home [out of work] we are fighting constantly." The chapter then moves into findings on trends in physical violence against women in the household. A very large number of communities report that
domestic violence exists where they live; however, trends in the level of violence are mixed, with strong regional differences.

**Changing Gender Roles and Responsibilities**

Both men’s and women’s roles and responsibilities are in flux and are a source of turmoil within households in many parts of the world.

**Diversification of Women’s Work**

We women will work for what no man would work for. Women will come down to get better or to keep the home going, but the man stands on his pride.

—A woman, Jamaica

Before, day cares were not needed, but now they have the young ones all day and they feed them because before the women did not have to work with what the men were able to earn.

—A woman, Moreno, Argentina

Across the study countries, women are stepping outside of their household responsibilities to earn a living and help bring food to the table. Typically, women’s livelihood activities include petty trade, vending, casual labor (including agricultural labor), factory employment, piecework and service sector jobs (mainly menial and poorly paid work). As the team from Malawi writes in their report, “Many men have been retrenched, are jobless, and do not have any steady sources of income. As a result, women have assumed the role of the breadwinner in many households.”

In several places people stress that the poorer the household, the more likely it is that the woman will be involved in some form of work outside the household. In the village of Borg Meghezel, Egypt a married woman reports, “The good woman doesn’t work. Her husband is the one who travels and has boats as well as money in the bank.” The researchers from India report that more women of disadvantaged castes and tribes are taking jobs outside the home than women in other castes.

While it is not new for women to be involved in some economic activities, participants indicate that pressure on women to secure a livelihood is far stronger today, and reports from nearly all communities narrate the trend of increasing numbers of women entering into temporary wage employment and informal commerce. Poor people most frequently mention male unemployment as the principal factor driving women to work, but other important factors include improvements in women’s education status, greater awareness about rights, and increased access to information (media), credit, property and NGO-supported activities. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia women
are benefiting from reduced barriers to trade. There and in Latin America and the Caribbean a growing service sector has also opened up opportunities for women. In many communities around the world men and women mention that women are more willing than men to take up menial and very low-paying work.

Participants in discussion groups from Kowerani Masasa, Malawi explain that “times have changed” and women “need not rely on their husbands” but rather “have to complement” them by working because men “do not have well-defined [substantive] means of livelihood.” In Doryumu, Ghana, researchers observe similarly, “women have taken over some of the functions of their husbands like providing for all the needs of the children and making decisions because the men are not gainfully employed.” A discussion group of men and women from Umuoba Road, Nigeria explains that women assume the responsibilities for paying school fees, purchasing clothing, and providing food when the husband is jobless or deceased; even when husbands do bring in income, women also supplement household expenses. In the village of El Gawaber, Egypt women are working less on family farms and engaging increasingly in wage labor. In the village of Dahshour, Egypt women purchase a basket of vegetables on credit or bake bread to sell in the market, “however little they may gain.” The researchers in El Gawaber observe, however, that men are reluctant to admit this change as it is a sign of their own inability to provide for the household.

In India women in rural and periurban households are also taking on increased responsibility for bringing income into the household. They often engage in petty trades like selling wood for fuel and are making a “significant contribution toward meeting household expenditure.” In Bangladesh increasing numbers of poor women are taking part in NGO-supported activities, which has boosted their incomes as well as their workloads. With the availability of credit, women are also engaged in self-employment activities like cattle and poultry raising and petty trade.

In Villa Atamisqui, Argentina a discussion group of 21 women rate unemployment among women as a pressing problem. They explain that men spend three or four months at a time out of the house and while some women find work providing domestic services in the cities, they have to leave the children with grandparents. Many times both parents never return. The increase in both male and female migration has been propelled by farming and herding difficulties in the wake of a dramatic drop in the water levels in a local river. In Atucucho, Ecuador a 23-year-old poor mother says that the situation of women is difficult because of extremely low wages: “Some mothers work as domestic employees for 250,000 sucres per month. You know how much bus fare costs these days; they have little money left for anything else.”

Gender differences in educational status and expansion of the service industry also contribute to women’s increased economic roles in the region. In both Brazil and Jamaica discussion groups indicate that women often have more education and job opportunities than do men. In Jamaica, for instance,
there is discrimination against men for several types of urban jobs, and women feel they have better chances of getting hired. Women are even working in construction, traditionally considered a male preserve. The report for Florencio Varela, Argentina notes, “For men, if they are more than 35 years old, not a single place will take them.” In Brazil, meanwhile, many factories have left the São Paulo area, and men have been the most affected. The researchers there say that “sectors that typically employ men, e.g., construction industry and manufacturing, are in decline whereas the service industry is expanding apace.”

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia a very different set of forces has led to the double bind of female and male unemployment. With the collapse of the communist system, women who were primarily employed in the service industry and as civil servants have lost their previous livelihoods and are increasingly involved in trading and the informal sector. Many women are becoming their family’s main breadwinner in the transition. Women from the village of Achk in the Kyrgyz Republic, for instance, report that they make crafts and beautiful bedclothes to sell. A 41-year-old mother of five from Oita, Uzbekistan says, “To be able to feed my children I have been selling sunflower seeds in Urada [a district in Tashkent] for four years. I go there 3–4 days since 1995.... When my brother heard about it, he reproached me and said it was shameful. I stopped going....”

Women in Eastern Europe and Central Asia are also increasingly involved in trading activities that take them across the country borders, away from home for days and sometimes months. Researchers in Kyrgyz Republic observed in the village of Achk that “most of the rural men found themselves unemployed, while rural women who used to stay at home and obey their husbands began trading.” Since 1993, they note, women have been involved in shuttle trade (also known as “bazaar economy”) and chelnochny business (that of traveling to other towns and even countries to purchase goods and products for resale). Liberalization of the economy underway in the country has created better opportunities for trade, especially for women. Urban and, to some extent, rural women travel to Kazakhstan, Russia, Uzbekistan, and even more remote countries such as the Arab Emirates, India, Iran, Italy, Pakistan, Syria, Thailand and Turkey, where they go on buying tours, and resell goods in the Kyrgyz Republic. Discussion group participants explain that it is easier for the women to undertake this kind of trade, as they are better at handling the authorities at the borders (police, customs officials and taxation authorities). Women are better at “gritting their teeth and getting on with the work” and in resisting the harassment meted out to them at the border. Women also feel that women traders are more likely to bring home their earnings, unlike most male traders who “spend their money on vodka with friends.”

It also seems that a growing number of women are taking over as heads of households. In Ivanovo, Russia where woman are said to have greater opportunities as street peddlers and in selling food in the market, discussion groups mention a growing trend of women driving “the husband out of the
house because he doesn’t earn money.” Apart from male unemployment, female-headed households can be triggered by civil strife, divorce and desertion, a husband’s migrating away from home for long periods, a husband’s ill health or death, or women simply deciding to live without a male partner. In Kowerani Masasa, Malawi discussion group participants report women take over because they are divorced, widowed or have “irresponsible” husbands. The researchers in Jamaica note that growing numbers of women have entered the work force at the same time as men have faced rising unemployment, resulting in a new phenomenon of women becoming their families’ chief breadwinners. In Little Bay, Jamaica for instance, women are increasingly involved in the fishing industry as well as farming.

In Buroa, Somaliland the women’s discussion groups estimate that women are the breadwinners in almost 70 percent of the households. And, as the researchers from Buroa note:

The participants agreed that opportunities have improved for women, which is probably the only positive thing that came out of the conflict. Because women could move across the territorial borders of warring clans and could culturally belong to any clan they marry into, they had taken over almost all small- to middle-sized trade and business. This provided women with a lot of economic clout in the family and at the community levels.

### Increased Work Burden of Women

These men now have realized that we women are overworking and the work itself is tiresome.

—A woman, Mbwadzulu, Malawi

While women may be working outside the home in larger numbers than ever before, the demanding responsibilities of running a household remain largely with them. In Ethiopia participants generally feel that “the more the men become jobless, the heavier the burden on the women.” As a woman from Bode, Brazil puts it very clearly, “Women have really managed to improve their lives, to be more independent, but there is no doubt that they are overloaded.” Similarly the research team in Oq Oltyn, Uzbekistan reports, “[Women] are taking more responsibility for providing for their families, but they also do the same amount of housework as before. On the whole, this means that they have to work more than they used to.”

In Indonesia both men and women participants agreed that stereotypical gender roles in the household have not changed much in the last 10 years even as women have taken up more work outside the household. “It is both our destiny and old tradition that women should be playing a bigger role than men in the household,” a woman from Ampenan Utara explains. Researchers in Vietnam stress that women are “quite clearly overworked,” with consequences that include increased health problems. Women there say
they have little time for outside activities such as evening literacy classes, community events or even informal socializing.

In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the collapse of all forms of state support have added to women's burdens. Working women before (typically in state enterprises or as civil servants) enjoyed access to childcare, health care and schools for children. Not surprisingly, discussion groups of women from Latin America as well as Eastern Europe and Central Asia frequently mention a pressing need for day care.

**Household Gender Roles: A Blurred Divide**

Women are working at the market while men are cooking.
—A man, Kok Yangak, Kyrgyz Republic

Before? Before they [men] were like the master and señor.... Not lifting a finger in the house.... Things are changing slowly, but they are changing.
—A woman, Florencio Varela, Argentina

It is Allah who has differentiated women's and men's responsibilities. It will culturally be out of the way and shameful if a man does any of women's responsibilities.
—A man, Mitti Kolo, Ethiopia

Both women's and men's traditional gender roles are changing, sometimes marginally, sometimes more dramatically. Increasingly, household budgets depend on women's earning capacities. The increase in women's relative economic power shatters the generally accepted image of the man as the breadwinner. According to researchers in Russia, “Unlike the unemployment of a woman, unemployment of a man is seen as a huge violation of the norm, which dramatically affects his role also of a husband and father.” The report adds that the division of gender roles started blurring a long time ago. With the notion of “man as the provider for the family and the woman taking care of the home” so deeply rooted in people's minds, it is only after years of widespread unemployment that the violation of these traditional roles has become more explicit.

Examples of men stepping in to assume household responsibilities are few and scattered. Isolated incidents of men sharing some of the “female” responsibilities include when the wife is unwell, away visiting relatives, attending to other social obligations, or when work keeps her away from the home for long periods (Bangladesh, Brazil, Indonesia, Malawi and Zambia). In Indonesia the researchers find that only men who are 35 or younger are helping out more with housework and childcare, and then only when their wives obtain a factory job or go overseas to work. The researchers add that casual work by women doesn't seem to merit additional help from husbands with household chores.
There are also cases of almost complete role reversals, with the men assuming the bulk of the cooking, cleaning and looking after children. Typically, this occurs where men are unemployed and at home, while women bring home the wages (Argentina, Bulgaria, Ecuador, Jamaica and the Kyrgyz Republic). As a woman in Dock Sud, Argentina puts it, “Now there are more men who help at home. The men are gaining awareness…. They are only a few, but they are changing. If the woman works and earns more, the men take care of the children and even take them to school sometimes.”

Reports from Argentina, Ecuador and Jamaica and, to some extent, from Bulgaria and Russia, suggest that some women prefer to be independent of men once they have access to some economic resources. A Russian woman, for instance, shares that “it is easier now to survive alone with a child than with a husband in the family.” In some communities in Jamaica female-headed households are perceived to be the best off in the community. The presence of domestic violence, in addition to economic independence, is sometimes mentioned as a factor pushing women to manage households on their own. Women from Latin America and the Caribbean especially speak of having gotten the confidence to move out of abusive relationships, and this, reports a study participant from Jamaica, is “because the women can now afford to have separate homes.”

Decisionmaking at the Household Level

When I was working I used to decide. When she is working, she owns her money and does anything she wishes.

—A man, Vila Junqueira, Brazil

They exercise some rights. They decide on how much salt or pepper is needed for the household. This is because they know these things.

—A man, Kajima, Ethiopia

Most women report that they participate more in household decisions compared with 10 years ago, but the extent of change varies quite widely from country to country and community to community. A small positive change for women in a traditionally conservative culture can be experienced as a big change, while still falling far short of equity. Where women are actively seeking equity and significant changes in gender roles and identities, this is strongly linked to their rising economic power, and generally associated with changes in male attitudes and growing awareness about gender inequities because of church activities, NGO programs, education and the media.

The diversity of cultures and contexts across the study countries makes comparisons of shifts in power relations at the household level very difficult. In some communities the changes reported can be quite small. As a man from a discussion group in Nchimischi, Zambia explains, “Generally it is the men who make major decisions about the use of finances. The wife is only
consulted, and her advice may not be taken.” In many communities men and women report that men continue to be responsible for major decisions (e.g., the purchase or sale of assets). With some frequency, however, women acknowledge having gained more decisionmaking power over household budgets, food purchase and consumption patterns, and children’s education, health care and marriage. In some places they also can influence decisions on types of crops to be planted, their own travel and employment, the use of family planning methods and, in very rare cases, divorce.

An interesting illustration of the different meaning of change can be found in comparing women’s views in Bangladesh and Jamaica. In general, most women from both these countries feel that they can take more part in decisionmaking processes at home and feel more “free” and confident. However, the two groups are referring to very different types of freedom. In Bangladesh women feel they have more freedom because their husbands now permit them to move outside the house to buy groceries and attend women’s group meetings. The women thus feel they have more contact with the outside world and have some control over the household budgets. At the urban sites in Jamaica women talk about their freedom to choose family planning methods, as well as the confidence to walk out of an abusive relationship. Importantly, similar trends could not be found in rural Jamaica.

While exceptions are found everywhere, some communities in Asia, Egypt and Ethiopia seem to be at one end of the spectrum, where local customs and tradition continue to dictate the roles men and women are expected to play within a household and community, whereas some urban communities in Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador and Jamaica seem to lie at the other end, with women there expressing a need for, and gaining, more freedom and independence.

Inequitable gender roles are reported in Indonesia in the eastern islands of Nusa Tenggara Timor (NTT), where local customs and tradition define the lower status of women. “A woman is ‘a second-class creature’ and is bought by her husband, by paying the agreed price to her parents in cash, cattle, and other assets. A ‘bought woman’ is not expected to have opinions; her sole contractual obligation is to obey and serve her husband.”

In South Asia (Bangladesh and India) in the communities studied women say they are now more involved in handling household budgets as well as in decisions related to their children’s education and marriage.

Some slow but positive changes come from Africa. In Somaliland women see the increase in their decisionmaking power as a result of the war, when men were either away from home for a long period or were restricted in their movements. In Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria and Zambia a positive link is found between women’s earning capacity and their role in household decisions. A discussion group from Adaboya, Ghana laughed loudly when asked whether the women have more or less power in the household. The researchers note that the men believe “women have virtually become the landlords [household heads]!”

In some favelas of Brazil, many women identify a strong relationship between their income and their decisionmaking authority in the household. In
one community, the women list “the decision to separate from the husband” and “to lodge complaints about aggressive behavior of men” as the top two decisions they can take. They add that they would not have had the courage to take these decisions in the past. A woman from Entra a Pulser relates her income-earning role to freedom and to the power to make decisions: “Today we go out, knocking at every door, looking for a job...this is what making decisions in life is about...it is to feel free.”

In Argentina and Ecuador as well, a number of women seem to have gained far more decisionmaking power at the household level in recent years, especially in urban areas. Again, they link this to their income-earning power, as “decisionmaking is related to who earns the money.” In Florencio Varela, Argentina researchers are told, “Now that the woman goes to work outside the home and takes care of the household expenses with what she earns, she decides many more things.”

In addition to economic factors, reports from some countries indicate that a woman’s age affects her relative power in the household and the wider community. In Bangladesh, India, the Kyrgyz Republic and Somaliland, older women have more influence in household decisions than younger ones. In Somaliland older women settle minor disputes among women. They also acted as goodwill ambassadors or couriers during peace-making efforts among the clans.

**Male Frustration, Anxiety and Sense of Inferiority**

...if you lose your job outside, you lose the job inside.

—A man, Bower Bank, Jamaica

The unemployed men are frustrated, because they no longer can play the part of family providers and protectors. They live on the money made by their wives and feel humiliated because of that. Suicides among young men have become more frequent.

—An elderly woman, Uchkun village, the Kyrgyz Republic

Unemployment and loss of economic power accompanied by a relative increase in women’s economic power is perceived, especially by many men in the study, as a serious violation of the accepted gender norm. Several men report feelings of humiliation and the sense that they have lost control within the household. According to an elderly man in Kenesh, Kyrgyz Republic,

Before it was clear that the woman is to keep the house and take care of the family, while the man was earning the daily bread. Now the woman buys and sells stuff irrespective of the weather and earns the income for the family, while the man is sitting at home and takes care of the children, fulfills the traditional women’s work. This is not right; this is not good.
This emerging male frustration and anxiety is most visible in the reports from Eastern Europe and Central Asia (and to some extent in Latin America and Jamaica) where communities are witnessing rapid changes. Men at several sites talk about the psychological illbeing they feel. Says one man from Ozerny, Russia, “I cannot feed my children normally any more. I feel ashamed to come home.” In Kyrgyz Republic, the researchers note that many men fear and oppose their wives’ financial independence and ability to develop a career. Some men, especially when they are unemployed, view the success of their wives as their own failure.

In Doryumu, Ghana men who cannot provide a home for their families and rely on their wives are nicknamed “Salomey,” or “almost a nonperson in the man’s world.” Or this from a woman in a discussion group in Entra a Pulso, Brazil: “Today when a woman earns more than her husband, he has to obey her...he cannot complain about the kind of work, because it is with this wage that the family is maintained.”

In Bower Bank, Jamaica researchers write:

The men stated that their status and position are worsening. They expressed feelings of helplessness at the erosion of their “power” resulting from having less access to work. Both adult men and the younger men seem to be more accommodating of women turning to more than one man to help support the household. One man went as far to say, “If I come home and find a man in my bed, and the woman says to me, ‘That man is the one providing the food,’ I have to say to her, ‘Cover him up better because he is providing the food.’”

The study reveals clearly that male frustration weighs heavily on other members of the household as well, often leading to increasing levels of tension, violence and even family breakdown.

**Domestic Abuse and Violence**

In my home I am abused in ways that I can’t even tell...let’s not get into it.

—A woman, Vila União, Brazil

Brutes have always beaten and will go on beating their wives.

—A youth, Krasna Poliana, Bulgaria

As part of the discussions on gender relations, participants were asked to define domestic violence and share their perceptions of why domestic violence occurs, and whether they perceive changes in the levels and types of violence in the household. Although the focus was on violence faced by women, the issue was left open to allow people to articulate whether men face some forms of abuse and violence as well. For this analysis, “violence”
refers to physical assaults and “abuse” to verbal and psychological forms of aggression.

**Definitions of Domestic Abuse and Violence**

There are times when a man hits for the wrong reasons. I think it’s fine when he hits me if he’s right.

—A woman, Esmeraldas, Ecuador

In defining domestic violence, participants provide a very wide spectrum of responses across communities—ranging from rape, beating and insults faced by women at one end, to husbands not getting their meals on time or their wives not giving them a massage at night at the other end. Domestic violence also is interpreted in a variety of ways across different gender and age groups within the same communities (see box 6.1). In most cases both women and men also view the violation of social norms and the failure of their partners to play their expected gender roles as domestic abuse and violence.

The reports from a large number of the communities indicate that both women and men are victims of violence and abuse, and both perceive that these behaviors exist in many forms. With some exceptions, discussion groups of men and of women conclude that women endure both more varied and more severe forms of abuse than do men. As one example, the Malawi researchers note that both men and women are identified as victims of beatings, catching sexually transmitted diseases, “being left alone overnight” or locked out of the house, “obscenity,” and “selfishness.” Women alone, however, also experience rape, being beaten for refusing a proposal, and not having “enough money for the household.”

Following in table 6.1 are some of the main types of domestic abuse and violence women and men mention that cut across most of the study sites in the 23 countries.

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**Box 6.1 Men’s Perspectives of Violence: Views from Tabe Ere, Ghana**

Men see the usurpation of control over sheanut and dawadawa (the West African locust bean, used in fermented food and seasoning) proceeds from them by the women as a form of violence against men. In the past it was the sole preserve of the man to instruct his wife to pick sheanut and dawadawa from the farm, and the man determined the way proceeds from these should be used.

Some of the men, however, admit that there is some violence against the women, too, because some husbands beat up their wives when they refuse to obey what the man says. Some also beat up their wives when they do not readily give in to sex. Consequently, rape is another form of violence committed against women. Some of the men, however, argue that by virtue of the fact that it is the men who pay the bride a price they must have unrestrained access to sex.
Verbal and psychological abuse is the most frequently mentioned form of domestic conflict. While it is directed at both women and men, women appear to be victims of more severe and frequent abuse than do men. This description by a woman from Kawangu, Indonesia is typical: “My husband never beats me. We are sometimes engaged in little family disputes but at the most he just chased me and shouted at me.” In Vila Junqueira, Brazil women say that men practice “silence aggression” more than in the past, and they consider this one of the worst forms of mistreatment because they are isolated in their own homes.

Depriving the man or woman of food, shelter or sex is the next most frequently mentioned form of abuse. In Tabe Ere, Ghana a group of women indicate that refusing sex is the most common cause of women being beaten, and often the husband is drunk. They add that this problem is growing worse for women there. Women in Doryumu, also in Ghana, say that wife beating is on the decline and mention other forms of abuse, such as divorce, separation, no “chop money” (for housekeeping), having to endure the husband’s infidelity, men’s refusal to eat what the women cook, and denial of sex. Where women are dependent on their husbands for social and

Table 6.1 Typology of Domestic Abuse and Violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of abuse and violence</th>
<th>Victims</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal abuse (nagging, arguments, shouting, harsh comments,</td>
<td>Women and men</td>
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<tr>
<td>questioning, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Deprivation (denying food, sex, shelter [locking the husband or</td>
<td>Women and men</td>
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<tr>
<td>wife outside], water for bathing, the right to visit friends and</td>
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<tr>
<td>relatives, and permission to work outside the home, and</td>
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<td>restricting freedom, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical abuse (beating, raping, pulling by the hair, throwing</td>
<td>Usually women,</td>
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<tr>
<td>out, dragging, “flying dishes,” giving drugs and “potions,” etc.</td>
<td>sometimes men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking and gambling by men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polygamy (affecting women), promiscuous behavior and casual</td>
<td>Women and men</td>
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<tr>
<td>sex</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Property grabbing (Malawi, Zambia)</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dowry (India, Bangladesh) and bride price (Ghana, Indonesia,</td>
<td>Women (also both parents of the</td>
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<td>Uzbekistan)</td>
<td>bride)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Divorce and desertion</td>
<td>Women, sometimes men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenage pregnancy (Jamaica, Malawi, Zambia, etc.)</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusive in-laws (Bangladesh, India, Uzbekistan)</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Abduction and rape were also mentioned in Ethiopia, although it is usually men from outside the family who are involved in these. Similarly, throwing acid at women is one form of physical violence that women face at the community level in Bangladesh. “Ritual murder” was mentioned in one case in Umuoba Road, Nigeria.
economic support, many view promiscuity, divorce or desertion by a husband as forms of abuse.

In many households across the study communities, physical violence against women appears to be widespread and considered part of everyday life. “A married woman gets beat just as a woman with cattle gets meat” goes a proverb shared by a middle-aged woman from the village of Urmral in the Kyrgyz Republic. In a number of the villages and slums visited by research teams, the women themselves do not consider domestic violence to be a serious form of mistreatment if it does not occur with great frequency. This, for instance, is the view expressed by a group of women in Umuoba Road, Nigeria. Similarly, according to an old woman from Mitti Kolo Peasant Association in Ethiopia, “It is sometimes necessary for husbands to beat their wives when they commit mistakes to correct them...it also improves love to be beaten and reconcile...it is also a sign of strong manhood....” In some communities, women are also reported to be vulnerable to violence from in-laws.

Selected cases of physical violence against men were reported in Brazil, Ghana, Jamaica, the Kyrgyz Republic and Malawi. In Tabe Ere, Ghana men point out that women who are physically stronger than their husbands do sometimes beat them. More typically, however, women do not respond to hardships by externalizing their frustrations with physical aggression. When a discussion group of women in Dock Sud, Argentina was asked whether they hit men when they don't have work, a woman responds negatively, adding, “Women get depressed...we're very different from them.”

Men and women also view any deviation from the accepted traditional gender norms and roles as acts of abuse. Women feel that unemployment whereby men cannot provide for the household is a form of abuse. In Kok Yangak, the Kyrgyz Republic people say there have been instances in their community of husbands who cannot provide financial support being beaten by their wives and forced out of the house. There are also many cases of men who feel abused if women do not perform expected duties around the home or when their wives go out to work and control decisions at home. In Bangladesh women mention that they find it difficult to take care of their domestic responsibilities when they return home tired after working for wages all day long. When the meals are not prepared well, or when the woman is too tired to massage the husband’s legs at night, the husband flares up and shouts at his wife and sometimes beats her up or denies her food. In such cases both the man and the woman feel abused.

**Causes of Domestic Abuse and Violence**

Sometimes women are hit because lunch is not ready when he gets home.

—A woman, Entra a Pulso, Brazil
It's because of unemployment and poverty that most men in this community beat their wives. We have no money to look after them.

— A man, Teshie, Ghana

In many societal contexts, domestic violence is supported by social norms. Both men and women talk about economic pressures and changing gender roles and relations as leading factors in domestic violence, but they also frequently mention alcohol and drug addiction, gambling, polygamy and promiscuity. Again, both men and women in many communities refer to violence against women as an accepted behavioral norm, especially when a woman fails to meet expectations of the man or his relatives.

Both men and women in many areas mention that, under economic stress, they have more arguments and there is verbal abuse directed at both men and women. From a discussion group of women in Dock Sud, Argentina flow these comments: “Men are less patient; they tell you to shut up when they don’t like something or when you want to give your opinion; they are easily angered all the time; if they are without work, they become nervous and take it out on you.” A discussion group of men from Chitambi, Malawi agree that while women may be better off today with their increased earnings, “we men are not happy because these women are taking advantage of us and they are being rude to us.”

Alcohol and drug abuse is also frequently mentioned. Indeed, as a participant from Bijeljina, Bosnia and Herzegovina describes, much of the physical violence against women occurs when husbands come home drunk: “Under the influence of alcohol a man…spends the money, and sometimes he beats his wife or abuses the children, which creates enormous insecurity and fear in a woman.” In addition to alcohol, people in Argentina and Brazil associate violence with increased drug use. A young woman from Nova Califórnia, Brazil remarks, “I think that it is the drugs that make them more aggressive.”

Women’s dependence on their husbands for social and economic support also makes them insecure; thus, many view promiscuity, divorce or desertion by a husband as forms of abuse. According to a group of young men from Freeman’s Hall, Jamaica, the occasions where quarreling among husbands and wives might lead to violence usually involve infidelity: “...only if the woman is not behaving herself [‘giving him bun’], then he would have to beat her.”

In some countries the tradition of the dowry (in India and Bangladesh) or a bride price (Ghana, Indonesia, Uzbekistan) can lead to continued abuse of women because of issues around how much dowry was promised or paid or the sense of owning a woman after “buying” her through bride price (see also box 6.2). A group of women from Ghana report that a girl child may be “tied with a string or rope and given into marriage” as payment for borrowed food or cattle from another family. In Ethiopia, telefa (abduction of women), which can result in rape and desertion or in some cases marriage by
force, is another form of traditional abuse, one that has long-term consequences for women.

In a number of the communities where women’s awareness of their rights is growing and they gain a measure of independence as they secure a livelihood, they are often becoming less tolerant of irresponsible behavior by men. When women argue, ask questions, or answer back, men feel threatened and insecure. In Russia, for instance, people report that it is typical that “the woman starts the quarrel, and the man gives back.” Many men describe the changing traditional roles and values as abuse against them. Men and women (especially older men and women) from several sites felt that women are now more disrespectful toward men—yet another change that has led to domestic conflicts and breakups. In Ekaterinburg, Russia women explain that “relations have become tougher, because there are more problems. There can be conflicts in the family because the woman makes more money than the man.” In Duckensfield, Jamaica a group of young women say that as women become more independent they become more intolerant of men’s weaknesses. This same group also indicates that some women are now demanding more from men sexually and become violent if the men fail to perform.

**Changes in Levels of Domestic Violence**

Physical violence against women exists in about 90 percent of the study communities where gender violence was discussed. The picture of trends in physical violence in homes over the last 10 years is mixed with strong regional differences (see figure 6.1). In 21 percent of communities, groups...
Figure 6.1 Global and Regional Trends in Domestic Violence against Women

**Global**
- Violence reported but trend uncertain: 32%
- Decrease: 30%
- Increase: 21%
- Same as before: 8%
- Violence rare or not present: 9%

**Latin America and the Caribbean**
- Violence reported but trend uncertain: 17%
- Decrease: 44%
- Same as before: 15%
- Violence rare or not present: 7%
- Increase: 17%

**Asia**
- Violence reported but trend uncertain: 23%
- Decrease: 41%
- Same as before: 3%
- Violence rare or not present: 18%
- Increase: 15%

**Eastern Europe and Central Asia**
- Violence reported but trend uncertain: 65%
- Decrease: 0%
- Same as before: 3%
- Violence rare or not present: 0%
- Increase: 32%

**Africa**
- Violence reported but trend uncertain: 30%
- Decrease: 29%
- Same as before: 10%
- Violence rare or not present: 10%
- Increase: 21%
report that physical violence has increased while another 8 percent report that physical violence is at the same levels as before. In another roughly 30 percent of the communities, people speak about the presence of violence, and often mention very high levels, but the discussion groups either disagree on trends or do not identify a trend. However, in 30 percent of the communities visited, discussion groups conclude that physical violence has declined over the last decade.

The extent of violence reported by both men's and women's groups is remarkable both because of the sensitivity of topic and because of the brevity of the researchers' visits with the communities. In many communities the world over, there is still a strong code of silence surrounding violence, with women deeply ashamed and sometimes blaming themselves for their husbands' wrath. In Ethiopia the researchers state that rural women "are not willing to provide information" on "husband-wife relations, violence against women, and conflict in the family" because the topics are too sensitive.

Similarly, the local researchers in the Kyrgyz Republic could not manage to raise the subject of gender violence in four of the smaller communities where everyone knew one another. Instead, they asked discussion groups to consider trends in the "abuse of women's rights on a household level." Although each of these communities reported the abuse of rights to be increasing, whether this encompasses physical violence cannot be determined and so these reports have been set aside with the others that lack information on the topic and are not part of this analysis. Kyrgyz researchers did discuss violence directly in Urmaral, where there are 164 households and the village is "quite transparent, and 'can be seen like on a palm of your hand.'" Discussion groups there reported violence to be absent or very rare, with the exception of one old woman who confided to the researchers that the women in her discussion group "don't want to talk about it because many of them are beaten by their husbands." Overall discussions about gender violence were often easier when people reported declines in violence than otherwise.

Where Physical Violence Has Decreased

Men know that we can survive without them, so they will treat us better, men are no longer "lord and savior."
—A young woman from Bower Bank, Jamaica

The beatings are now less compared to the problem years...
this is because a spouse can be taken to court and people [men] are afraid.
—A man from Nchimishi, Zambia

The biggest declines in physical violence against women are found in Latin America and the Caribbean, with 44 percent of the communities reporting decreases where violence was discussed. This is followed by Asia, 41 percent, and Africa, 29 percent, with no declines in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.
(see figure 6.1). As mentioned before, in Asia the sample was strongly biased to include only those communities with active NGO presence.

Dramatic declines in physical violence in cultures where traditional gender relations have been inequitable points to the importance of a mix of interventions to reduce physical violence against women in the homes. These findings establish that norms and values about what is tolerable behavior can change in relatively short periods, although deeper change may take longer. It is important to note that even in households where physical abuse of women may be declining, it is not accompanied by a similar decrease in other forms of abuse that women face within the household. Indeed, a large number of discussion groups across the study countries indicate that verbal and psychological abuse may actually be increasing. In addition, even while communities report overall declines from previous levels, violence may remain widespread. For example, in Ecuador, wife battering is mentioned in almost every discussion group by both women and men.

Group discussions in Latin America and the Caribbean identified a complex mix of reasons for declining physical violence in the homes. As unemployed men realize that they are dependent on women's incomes, the relationship often becomes less physically abusive. Discussion groups also frequently mention women's greater awareness of their rights through participation in women's groups organized by churches and NGOs and women's decreased tolerance of their husband's abusive behavior.

Women in this region mention a number of options for taking action against abuse, including fleeing to safe houses, filing complaints with women's police stations, seeking training and counseling, or even leaving abusive marriages. Fears of public humiliation and of being put behind bars appear to act as useful deterents to male violence against women in some communities.

In Bangladesh women speak of their growing empowerment as well as the contributions of NGOs. Groups of youth and the elderly in Madaripur, Bangladesh, for instance, attribute the decrease in violence against women to increases in literacy and enlightenment as well as livelihood activities. In the words of one young woman, "Women are more powerful than 10 years ago because of self-sufficiency coming from educational and economic empowerment." In Gowainghat women mention that with NGO support they have seen a reduction in the practice of dowry. In Khaliajuri, another community in Bangladesh, women explain that NGOs and the media have raised women's awareness of their social and legal rights. However, the women also point out that the local village institutions as well as the police and legal systems do not support them when they protest against polygamy and divorce in their village.

In Indonesia 8 out of the 12 communities visited report declining levels of violence against women. The reports from discussion groups in Waikanabu are typical. Both men's and women's groups agree that violence is coming down, with a comment from a women's group attributing the declines both to women's changing roles and to increased awareness "because
women have begun learning, been educated and had courage to oppose." The men's groups also credit frequent house visits by church elders, and women's growing role in bringing in extra income.

Scattered news about declining violence can also be found in Africa. In Doryumu, Ghana some men mention that they used to beat their wives, but not anymore as they realized that beating wives is not a good practice. A man from Mbwadzulu Village of Malawi indicates that violence against women has decreased because "in the past when you quarreled with a woman and if she reported to the political party, you were beaten.... We were not in freedom, I tell you." In three communities in Nigeria, discussion groups generally perceive that violence against women is declining, and the trend is linked directly to women's gains in economic power, education and awareness. However, women in the southeast say female genital mutilation, rape and ritual murder do occur as before, but violence at the household level has decreased. While four communities in Zambia report increased violence, the researchers summarize in their National Report a few factors that study participants think are helping to slow down and reverse the trend (see box 6.3).

While declines in violence were not reported by discussion groups in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, box 6.4 illustrates the case of a mother of five from Uzbekistan who reports that household conflict has "quieted down" after she took a job to help with economic difficulties.

There are a few observations from discussion groups that violence sometimes declines over time within marriages, and some of the reporting may reflect this tendency. From a men's group in Nchimishi, Zambia, "Women are often beaten by their husbands, especially the newlyweds. The husband is at this point trying to establish standards, i.e., showing the wife what he likes and what he does not like." Similarly, in Oq Oltyn, Uzbekistan the researchers report that violence is said to be higher among young families.

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**Box 6.3 Reasons for Declines in Physical Violence against Women in Zambia**

- Men have been so weakened by hunger that they do not have the strength anymore to beat their wives.
- Husbands do not want to beat and antagonize the breadwinner because they will go hungry.
- The Victim Support Unit of the Zambia Police is very active in defending women's rights, especially those that have been beaten by their husbands and those whose property has been grabbed by the relatives of their deceased husbands.
- People have been sensitized to the problem by churches and NGOs.
Where Physical Violence Has Increased

Women must take care of everything and, to top it all off, get beaten up every night if he comes home drunk.
—A woman from Dimitrovgrad, Bulgaria

Eastern Europe and Central Asia stands out as the region with the largest increase in violence against women, 32 percent, and not a single case of declines in or absence of gender violence was reported. Sharp economic decline and accompanying stress, breakdown of state institutions and lack of support to women have led to dramatic increases in violence in homes. Discussion groups from the region speak of greater conflict in the household, with verbal abuse not only of women but also of men. The heightened conflict sometimes compounds men's frustrations and violence. In Plovdiv, Bulgaria where discussion groups reported increased violence, one participant observed that people used to step in and break up fights when they heard “some noise” from their neighbors' homes, but “now nobody wants to interfere and there always are noise and quarrels anyway. It is quite normal now.”

Much of the research details specific accounts of wife-batterings. In a discussion group of men in Beisheke, the Kyrgyz Republic one admitted that he beat his wife every now and then, but says it is her own fault. What’s more, women from the group agreed with him: “We women start quarrels when there isn’t enough food or clothes, and our husbands are very well aware of these problems themselves. They don’t need our lecturing, so, when they ask us to stop and we don’t, they may hit us a couple of times.”

People also say that with the deterioration of the legal system in recent years, women’s rights have eroded and women have less protection than they had in a communist society. According to a woman from a discussion group

Box 6.4 Changing Fortunes and Role Reversals: Uzbekistan

At the beginning our life was good, but someone put the evil eye on us and everything started to go wrong. My father-in-law even threatened me with an axe, saying that my husband was a weakling, and my husband beat me after that. Just like that, with no reason. Times were hard for me then. In the morning I was supposed to bring my father-in-law warm water for his washbowl— neither too hot, nor too cold, and exactly at the right time. But I also had five children. So, I adjusted their feeding times so that it wouldn’t interfere with my father-in-law’s schedule. The poor kids cried, waiting for me to feed them. But at five in the morning I was expected to bring the warm water to my father-in-law. The chairman of the aulsovet [rural citizen assembly] failed to understand my problem and did not support me. Now everything has quieted down because of the financial problems at home. It’s me who is making money, and my husband cannot order me around.
in Kenesh, the Kyrgyz Republic where violence against women is reported to be increasing, “The state does not think about the women. The woman has to resolve her problems herself and it is very difficult to do now.” A Bulgarian female attorney with a local practice in Varna told the researchers:

There is no law which defends the wife, child, or husband in cases of domestic violence. From the prosecutor’s office they say, “This is not a problem of ours,” while the police find an excuse in saying that they cannot interfere in family affairs. Being afraid, the women refuse to sue the man who terrorizes them, while with Roma women this [filing complaints] is absolutely out of the question.

In Brazil women say that although they are becoming more proactive on violence, discussion groups in 6 of the 10 favelas visited report that violence against women continues to rise. There and elsewhere in the region women link this increase to alcohol and drug abuse stemming from greater male unemployment.

Where Violence Remains Widespread, but Trends Unclear

I cannot say that whether men beat their wives more in the war than now, but I personally know individuals who beat their wives when they come home drunk, and sometimes they beat the children. That is something that has always existed and always will.

—A young woman from Sekovici, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Violence remains widespread with unclear trends in 40 percent of the communities with regional variations. The distribution is as follows: 68 percent of these are in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 49 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 42 percent in Africa, and 40 percent in Asia. These figures include communities which report that violence is the same as before or that it exists, but they do not identify a trend. Some of the most extensive reports of violence against women come from Vietnam, but discussion groups there did not conduct a trend analysis. In a highland village of Lao Cai Province, a women’s group estimates that 70 percent of husbands subjected their wives to regular physical violence, and a great deal of violence is also alluded to, especially by children, in other communities visited in the country. A woman in one community confides, “Lots of women in this neighborhood are beaten by their husbands. Lucky for me my brother lives nearby, so if my husband starts coming after me I run to my brother’s house.” Parents, particularly in Latin America, also frequently mention the abusive behaviors and attitudes of children. In some cases, concerns are expressed about undue physical punishment of children as well as violence among siblings and children hitting their mothers and grandmothers. In Villa
Atamisqui, Argentina a discussion group of young women explains that “the role of the father in the house is to punish the children.” “The women also hit...” “The sons hit the mothers.” “The father teaches the children to hit their wives.” In Moreno, Argentina discussion groups spoke of terrible fighting in the home involving children, and they blame increased economic hardship and the harmful influences of alcohol and television.

The Opportunity and Challenge

To be able to pour your heart out to someone.... To know you have someone you can rely on.

—Participant, discussion group of men and women from Krasna Poliana, Bulgaria commenting on gender roles and responsibilities

In very many communities, traditional gender roles of men as providers and women as homemakers are changing, but the transition is proving difficult and highly uneven. With their roles uncertain, men and women express confusion and experience difficulty in establishing new interdependent partnerships. In Renggarasi, Indonesia women say they still turn to men to make decisions even though they have their own women’s groups for support: “We are still in doubt to make decisions, afraid of making mistakes or wrong decisions.”

The findings about the linkages between decreased violence, women’s increased economic roles and the benefits of supportive actions to reduce violence give hope. Activities that are specifically aimed at building awareness about gender inequities and improving gender relations have made a difference where they are available. In communities with NGOs that run gender awareness training and counseling programs, where safe houses and police protection exist, or where church members reach out to curb the violence, women speak of improvements in their lives. Without access to comparable support, men sometimes express resentment about so many resources targeted to women.

A particularly inspiring story comes from Leticia of Isla Trinitaria, Ecuador. During an interview with the researchers, Leticia credits a training program run by Habitat for changing her life. She shares that the gains are

...not only material...but also in knowing how to show love to my son and husband. This is happiness...now I am not a person who shouts and hits...now I talk and communicate...the best is when the father sits down with his son to have a conversation. Before, he [her husband] treated me badly, not physically but verbal abuse...now he respects me. He changed with me. Together we are changing. This is the result of the training...only because of the training.
When subsequently asked about what opportunities she sees, Leticia adds, “my opportunity is that I have free space, to decide for myself, no longer dependent on others. For me, this is a source of pride, my husband asking me [my advice]...now there isn’t this machismo...there is mutual respect...together we decide.”

To help reduce gender inequality and domestic conflict, there needs to be far greater attention to helping women and men in groups to work separately and together to come to terms with changing gender roles and identities.

Notes

1This chapter draws mainly on the findings from small group discussions of women and men on changes in women’s and men’s responsibilities and decision-making in the household, as well as on changes in domestic violence against women. In some cases, the researchers reported very tense discussions. In one community in Ecuador, discussion groups of men and women were reduced to shouting at each other after findings were shared.

2We found only one exception to this phenomenon in the Muslim community of Jimowa, Nigeria. It was reported that Jimowa women traditionally used to go out to sell their milk products. However, about 12 years ago a man from the village attended a religious meeting outside the village and came back with the message that the women should remain indoors, in purdah. Since then women have not gone out to sell. While the elderly women can step out, even the girls in the village are encouraged to stay at home.

3The analysis on trends in gender violence is based on 163 community and provincial (in the case of Vietnam) reports. The topic was not addressed at all or was only discussed in vague terms in an additional 61 reports (19 of which are from Sri Lanka, where the topic of gender relations was not addressed). The category “violence reported but trend uncertain” refers to reports that mention the presence of physical violence such as beating, kicking, biting, battering, slapping, hitting, etc., against women in the household, but do not provide information on perceptions of trends. In many reports discussion groups identify violence in the household in terms of fighting, quarrels, conflict, being ordered around, promiscuity, etc.; however, these activities were not considered indications of physical violence for purposes of this analysis. Some communities reported that there was no domestic violence. In addition, a very small number of reports conclude that domestic violence in that community is “rare,” “almost unheard of,” or “not common,” and these were added to the “violence rare or not present” category.

4However, this was not the case at the other sites in Bangladesh.