

# Domestic Violence among Adolescents and Young Women in HIV Prevention Research in Tanzania: Participant Experiences and Measurement Issues

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## BACKGROUND

Under-representation of women under age 18 in HIV prevention trials may inhibit their access to future prevention technologies. Various factors may affect young women's HIV risk and their ability to adhere to trial procedures including domestic violence.<sup>1,2</sup> Community formative research (CFR) and a mock clinical trial (MCT) were conducted in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, to examine the challenges of recruiting and retaining young women in HIV prevention trials.

## STUDY OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the feasibility of using the Women's Experience with Battering (WEB) Scale with a screener question to assess domestic violence among Tanzanian young women.
2. To examine the associations between screening positive on the WEB Scale and selected socio-demographic characteristics, HIV risk factors, and MCT study retention factors.

## METHODS

The CFR included 23 qualitative interviews with younger (age 15-17) and older (age 18-21) married and unmarried participants. For the MCT, 127 participants completed the baseline assessment. All participants were sexually active and MCT participants were also HIV-negative and not pregnant at baseline.

Ethical approvals were received from Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences, the National Institute for Medical Research, and FHI 360's Protection of Human Subjects Committee.

### Women's Experience with Battering Scale

The WEB Scale captures the chronic vulnerability of women's experiences with battering as opposed to just the physical markers of violence.<sup>3</sup> We were interested in whether and how abused young women are affected in terms of their HIV risk and their ability to participate in an HIV prevention trial. Studies typically administer the WEB Scale for women with a sexual partner. For this study, not all participants had a regular sexual partner; therefore, the following screener question was administered in order to determine who should complete the scale: "Thinking about your current situation, is there anybody you live with or spend time with who makes you afraid? This could be a sexual partner, a parent or family member, or a close friend." If "yes," participant stated her relationship to this person and was administered the WEB Scale.

## RESULTS

### Community Formative Research

Participants experienced high rates of domestic violence, including controlling behavior. Married women discussed violent experiences with their husbands while unmarried participants discussed these experiences with both partners and relatives.

All married participants (N=8) reported partner violence and controlling behavior, but only four had WEB scores positive for battering. For example, a married adolescent who scored positive for battering reported being scared of her husband who beats her if she goes somewhere without telling him. From the qualitative data, apparent reasons for non-battering scores included believing beatings were normal and not

reporting being afraid of their partner (required for WEB administration).

One married adolescent who was negative for battering said her husband gets angry when she goes out without permission and he beats her (while pregnant) if she is not home when he expects her. She states, "Since we started our relationship, it was so many times (that she has been beaten) I can't even count because his kind of love is based on fighting; if you wrong/offend him just a little he will obviously beat you."

Another married young woman who scored negative for battering said she fears her husband and had received beatings in the past. However, she stated their quarrels are rare and their conflict is normal even though she has limited mobility and she experiences forced sex with him.

Among unmarried participants (N=15), none scored positive on battering, but six experienced forced sex by a partner and five mentioned physical abuse by relatives. An unmarried participant who was negative for battering said that her father beats her for coming home late. She recalled an event in which she experienced vaginal discharge, thought it might be an STI and needed money for services. She states, "...my mother sent me to the shop to buy something. She gave me money. After some time, I came back and told her that I lost the money. That is how I got the money for transport and hospital services." When asked how her mother reacted to this news, she responded, "She beat me. She told me that I was not careful. I let her beat me as much as she wanted because I really needed that money."

### Mock Clinical Trial

Among 127 MCT participants, 16% were scared of someone, all but one scored positive for battering (15%), only 10 were married and most perpetrators were relatives. People that participants were afraid of included parents (n=6), other relatives (n=11), a sexual partner (n=1) and a friend (n=1). Table 1 highlights that the WEB Scale captures non-physical aspects of battering. Table 2 shows participant characteristics associated with battering experiences.

## CONCLUSIONS

The WEB Scale, and use of a screener, may not adequately capture all violence experienced by young women. Married young women experiencing violence may be less likely to participate in trials. Familial violence reported by younger, unmarried adolescents was unexpected and has implications for parental roles in study recruitment. More nuanced violence screening and safety measures should be part of adolescent HIV clinical trials.

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## REFERENCES

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- 2) Maman S, et al. HIV-positive women report more lifetime partner violence: findings from a voluntary counseling and testing clinic in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. *AJPH* 2002;92(8):1331-7.
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**TABLE 1.** Descriptive statistics for each WEB Scale item among all participants who responded "yes" to screener question: are you afraid of someone? (N=20)

WEB Scale Items	Agree (%)
1) He/she makes me feel unsafe even in my own home.	70
2) I feel ashamed of the things s/he does to me.	55
3) I don't do anything to go against his/her wishes because I'm afraid of him/her.	95
4) When I am in front of him/her, I feel like I react in a fixed way to a fixed situation.	80
5) I feel like s/he keeps me prisoner.	60
6) He/she makes me feel like I have no control over my life, no power, no protection.	70
7) I hide the truth from others because I am afraid not to.	45
8) I feel owned and controlled by him/her.	70
9) He/she can scare me without laying a hand on me.	85
10) He/she has a look that goes straight through me	65

**TABLE 2.** Bivariate correlations between experiences of battering and characteristics of participants (N=127)

	Experienced Battering N=19	Did not Experience Battering* N=108	P-Value
Baseline Variables	%	%	
Age 15-17	47	24	0.036*
Does not live with either parent	47	33	0.24
One or both parents have died	42	38	0.76
Relationship status: married or regular partner	90	93	0.64
Age at sexual debut was 16 or younger	47	34	0.27
First sex coerced or forced	47	41	0.59
Last sex coerced or forced	21	6	0.042*
2+ lifetime partners	63	64	0.95
Ever concurrent partners	16	17	1.00
Ever exchanged money/gifts for sex	16	14	0.73
Ever pregnant	21	38	0.16
Feels at risk of HIV a little or a lot	79	79	1.00
Did not use condom at last sex to prevent STIs	53	53	0.99
Never used family planning	37	18	0.07
Moderate or severe depression (PHQ9)	42	26	0.16
Low self-esteem (Rosenberg)	5	10	0.69
Follow-Up Variables			
Study retention: missed 1 or more visits Experienced an incident SRH outcome (pregnancy, HIV or STI)**	90	69	0.07
Experienced an incident SRH outcome (pregnancy, HIV or STI)**	14	16	0.86

Abbreviations: SRH = sexual and reproductive health; STI = sexually transmitted infection.

\*Includes those who said "no" to screener question and those who said "yes" but scored negative for battering.

\*\*N=74; HIV and STI data from month 4 visit; not all have had chance to follow-up yet.

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