



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

HIDDEN VIOLENCE IN THE COMMONWEALTH

Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict 2014



About the RCS

The Royal Commonwealth Society is a network of individuals and organisations committed to improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens across the world.

Founded in 1868, the Society is constituted by Royal Charter (amended 2013) and as a charity. It is non-partisan, is independent of governments and is supported solely by public generosity.

The Society engages with its youth, civil society, business and governmental networks to address issues that matter to the citizens of the Commonwealth.

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Introduction

The Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict is the largest gathering ever brought together on this subject, with a view to creating irreversible momentum against sexual violence in conflict and practical action to impact those on the ground. This global focus is very timely and there is value in taking a look at this issue from a Commonwealth perspective. There is currently no active inter-state conflict in the Commonwealthⁱ, an association of governments and peoples built around shared language, institutions, challenges, aspirations and values, which often describes itself as a family. With 53 member states, a combined population of 2.2 billion (approximately 30% of the world's population), and a membership model predicated primarily on a country's commitment to upholding shared values and principles, including the protection and promotion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, the Commonwealth aspires to being an example of peaceful international relations.

Data from the comprehensive Uppsala Conflict Data Programⁱⁱ only flags up conflict having taken place in seven Commonwealth countries in the last five years. Yet, whilst currently having no inter-state conflict, the Commonwealth cannot claim that it does not experience violence. Armed militias such as Boko Haram in Nigeria provide stark evidence of ongoing violence and conflict within Commonwealth countries and consequent dangers of increasing state fragility. With the accompanying infographic map, The Royal Commonwealth Society has shown countries in the Commonwealth that have experienced conflict, which may be state-based, non-state, intra- or inter-state.

The Royal Commonwealth Society has therefore entitled this infographic 'Hidden Violence in the Commonwealth', to depict that outside the recognised forms of direct conflict, citizens of the Commonwealth experience high levels of violence in all its forms, whether sexual, physical, emotional or structural. The map contains data on modern slavery, intimate partner violence, female genital mutilation / cutting, and child marriage. Deep-rooted gender inequality is an important factor in the violence that the map shows, with the majority of violent acts perpetrated against girls and women. However, modern slavery, intimate partner violence and child marriage also affect men and boys. This briefing paper discusses these issues in more detail, provides more detailed information on the statistics that the map displays, and unpacks some of the questions that were raised during the research.

Female Genital Mutilation / Cutting

Female Genital Mutilation / Cutting (FGM/C) relates to practices involving the partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. FGM/C has devastating and long lasting health consequences for women and girls: it can cause severe bleeding and problems urinating, and later cysts, infections, infertility as well as complications in childbirth and increased risk of new-born deaths. As such FGM/C is a violation of the right to health, physical and mental integrity, freedom from violence, freedom from torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatments, and life (when the procedure results in death).

FGM/C is a practice which has deep-rooted cultural, social, and sometimes religious significance in many societies. It can be part of a coming-of-age rite, a preparation for marriage, a fulfilment of religious obligations, or a measure to preserve virginity. The practice is often supported or perpetrated by the family of the victim, and particularly mothers^{III}. For these reasons the practice is one that the international community must combat with sensitivity. The differing terminology highlights the sensitivity of the issue, with some deciding to call the practice female genital mutilation, emphasising the damage caused to victims, and others terming it female genital cutting, in an attempt not to alienate victims and perpetrators alike. The Royal Commonwealth Society has chosen in this research to adopt the terminology used by UNICEF – FGM/C^{IV}.

The map shows Commonwealth countries in which more than 10% of women aged 15 to 49 have undergone FGM/C. Sierra Leone (88%), Nigeria (27%), Kenya (27%) and Tanzania

(15%) all have prevalence above this threshold, according to data in UNICEF's State of the World's Children report 2014^V. Of particular concern is Sierra Leone with a prevalence of 88%. Within the Commonwealth the practice is also found in Uganda, Cameroon and Ghana, with estimated prevalence rates of between 1 and 4%; and within migrant populations in many other countries. Whilst statistical data is not available or reliable, there is anecdotal evidence to show that FGM/C is practiced in several other Commonwealth countries including India, Sri Lanka and Malaysia^{VI}. More information is needed on prevalence rates in these countries if a reliable picture of FGM/C is to be built. Finally, FGM/C and support for it often moves across borders as people do. Studies in countries where FGM/C is practiced by migrant populations have sought to provide estimates of the number of victims^{VII}, however more research needs to be done (particularly in Commonwealth countries such as the UK, Canada, Australia and South Africa) to understand prevalence within migrant populations and the links between migrant communities and countries of origin, to show where and how FGM/C takes place.

Although research and momentum on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting has grown, and the issue is being highlighted, it is still a hidden violence issue for several reasons. Cultural sensitivity has been used as a reason why the international community has not done more to tackle the practice. FGM/C reflects deep-rooted inequality between the sexes and gender divides, and is not generally an openly discussed topic amongst families. Most victims are children, with FGM/C practiced for the most part between infancy and age 15, and are therefore not usually able to speak out openly about the practice^{VIII}.

Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) refers to violence perpetrated by one spousal partner against another and can include physical, sexual and emotional forms of violence. 'Domestic violence', 'dating violence' and 'wife beating' all relate to IPV. As well as the obvious impact of IPV on the victims it can also have long-lasting consequences for children involved in a family where IPV occurs. Intimate partner violence is most often perpetrated by men against women and the World Health Organisation estimates that on average 30% of women globally who have been in a relationship report experiencing sexual or physical violence by their partner^x. However, it is important to note that men can be victims of sexual, physical and emotional abuse just as women can be perpetrators and it is not unique to one-man-one-woman relationships. IPV is a human rights issue, and can violate the right to life, to be free from torture or inhuman or degrading treatment, to respect for private and family life, and to the prohibition of discrimination.

The map shows the Commonwealth countries in which more than 10% of women are estimated to have experienced physical and / or sexual violence from an intimate partner. Based on data compiled by UN Women's End Violence Against Women Campaign^x the RCS has identified the following countries that meet this criteria: Jamaica (15.4%), Malta (16%), Nigeria (18.3%), Maldives (19.5%), Ghana (22.9%), Australia (27%), United Kingdom (28.4%), Malawi (31%), New Zealand (33.1%), Namibia (35.9%), Tuvalu (36.8%), India (37.2%), Mozambique (40%), Kenya (41.2%), Zambia (42.3%) Tanzania (43.6%), Samoa (46.1%), Uganda (50.5%), Cameroon (51.5%), Bangladesh (53.3%), Rwanda (56.4%), Vanuatu (60%), Solomon Islands (63.5%) and Kiribati (67.6%). South Africa and Antigua and Barbuda have also been included: although a combined statistic

for sexual and physical violence is unavailable, the estimated prevalence of physical intimate partner violence alone in both countries is above our threshold, at 12.5% and 30% respectively. IPV is widespread in the Commonwealth, and it is of grave concern that seven Commonwealth countries have a prevalence rate of over 50%. The fact that 27% of women in Australia, 28% in the UK and 33.1% of women in New Zealand have experienced sexual or physical Intimate Partner Violence shows that this is a problem that affects even the richest Commonwealth countries, and which cannot be ignored by any. The statistics are even more concerning when extremely low reporting rates of IPV are taken into account.

Although intimate partner violence is a widespread issue, it is also very much a form of hidden violence. Firstly, it occurs within the private sphere of the home, and within private relationships, making it difficult to research and sensitive to external intervention. Secondly, there are methodological questions about how intimate partner violence is defined, what types of violence are included, what age-range is included in a given survey and what forms of intimate partner relations are included^{xi}. Thirdly, as mentioned at the outset of this section, studies of intimate partner violence focus heavily on violence perpetrated by men against women and this leaves a gap in knowledge of intimate violence within LGBTI relationships, by female perpetrators and against male victims. Finally, despite the large amounts of available data for specific countries, compilations of information sorted by country still lack information on many countries, particularly in the Caribbean. These issues highlight the need for more systematic research which can shed light on the variety of forms of intimate partner violence and its practice in all Commonwealth countries.

Modern Slavery

Modern slavery refers to various forms of coercive servitude, which can include bonded labour, child slavery, early and forced marriage, forced labour, descent-based slavery and human trafficking. Not all forms of slavery are physically coercive but coerced servitude through fear or economic bondage can create a space in which sexual and physical violence is perpetrated with impunity. In all its forms, modern slavery is an affront to human dignity and a human rights violation. Yet it is a truly global phenomenon. In the age of globalisation victims of modern slavery can be trafficked across borders, and the proceeds of forced servitude moved around the world with comparative ease. Even beyond areas where slavery is highly prevalent the impact of – and therefore the duty to address – slavery can be found.

The map shows the Commonwealth countries within the 30 countries globally with the highest prevalence of modern slavery. Based on the Walk Free Foundation's Global Slavery Index (adjusted to exclude Child Marriage which we have addressed separately in this research) we have identified the following Commonwealth countries within this criterion: Pakistan (1.19%), India (1.13%), Sierra Leone (0.75%), Ghana (0.71%), Cameroon (0.71%) and Uganda (0.70%). The absolute number of estimated slaves for India and Pakistan are the highest globally with 13,956,010 and 2,127,132 respectively. In absolute terms Nigeria is the fourth worst country with an estimated 701,032 slaves, despite having a lower prevalence rate when calculated against the overall population. Bangladesh, Tanzania and Mozambique also have high prevalence in absolute terms in addition to the countries shown on our map.

Attempts to provide a global estimate of the prevalence of modern slavery are still in relative infancy but the Global Slavery Index^{xii} is an encouraging step. The US State Department's Trafficking in Persons Report^{xiii} is another useful resource for building a global picture of modern slavery, but it only addresses human trafficking. As with other forms of hidden violence, modern slavery can be an extremely difficult issue to examine and take action on. Aspects such as early marriage can take place in the context of family relations. Other aspects of modern slavery are organised by globalised criminal networks adept at avoiding detection and prosecution. The phenomenon of modern slavery is complex and thus requires multiple forms of research and government detection efforts in order to gain a true picture of its scale and the damage it causes. In addition to the problem of identifying modern slavery, research on the issue also falls short in terms of its coverage. Of particular relevance to the Commonwealth is the omission of many Small Island States in the Caribbean, Pacific and Indian Oceans. Given that we have identified several of these countries as having worrying levels of child marriage there is a strong need for more research into modern slavery in these countries. Recently countries across the Commonwealth have become more active in addressing Modern Slavery and research attempting to give a global picture of the issue is encouraging, however more work is needed to address slavery in countries which are more difficult for the international community to access.

Child Marriage

Child Marriage refers to girls married before they reach 18 years old, without meaningful consent, and in many cases against their will. Child marriage occurs in many countries across the Commonwealth, and is a result of a range of interrelated and complex issues, including gender inequality, poverty, negative traditional or religious practices, and failure to enforce laws. It affects children's and women's rights to health, education, equality, non-discrimination and to live free from violence and exploitation. Child marriage also exposes girls to sexual intimacy for which they are not physically ready. Evidence shows that for girls aged 15-19 worldwide, early pregnancy is the main cause of death; they are more vulnerable to pregnancy-related injuries such as obstetric fistula; and their children are more likely to die in their first year of life^{XIV}. Child brides are also unlikely to continue their education, and thus cannot learn skills and gain knowledge that could enable them to earn an independent income, lift their families out of poverty, or participate fully in political life.

The map indicates Commonwealth countries where the prevalence of child marriage is above 20%, based on data compiled in the UNICEF State of the World's Children 2014 report^{XV}. This data shows the percentage of women aged 20-24 years old who were married or in union before they were 18 years old. Data is based on Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and other national surveys, and refers to the most recent year available during the period 2005-2012. This data identifies twenty Commonwealth countries in which prevalence is above 20%: Bangladesh (65%), Mozambique (48%), Malawi (50%), India (47%), Sierra Leone (44%), Zambia (42%), Uganda (40%), Nigeria

(39%), United Republic of Tanzania (37%), Cameroon (38%), Nauru (27%), Vanuatu (27%), Belize (26%), Kenya (26%), Pakistan (24%), Guyana (23%), Solomon Islands (22%), Ghana (21%), Papua New Guinea (21%), and Kiribati (20%). The data shows that child marriage is not an issue that is confined to one region of the Commonwealth, but many. The Commonwealth also contains six of the top twenty countries in the world (as listed above) with the highest prevalence of child marriage, with India counting the highest number of child brides in the world.

Data on child marriage prevalence for a further ten Commonwealth countries features in UNICEF's State of the World's Children 2014 report, with prevalence ranging from 19%-4%: Lesotho (19%), Sri Lanka (12%), Tuvalu (10%), Jamaica (9%), Namibia (9%), Rwanda (8%), Trinidad and Tobago (8%), Swaziland (7%), South Africa (6%), and The Maldives (4%). This leaves 23 of 53 countries for which we have no data, many of which are Small Island States.

The data identifies child marriage as an issue that affects many Commonwealth countries, and that should thus be addressed by the Commonwealth as a priority. The Royal Commonwealth Society has been working on this, alongside partners Plan UK, since 2010^{XVI}. We have made progress in getting this issue recognised by the Commonwealth in communiqués following both the 2011 and 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings, but more needs to be done to eradicate child marriage.

Conclusions

It is evident that despite low levels of conflict, violence in the Commonwealth is extremely high, is not confined to one region, and negatively impacts upon the lives of billions of Commonwealth citizens. Much of the violence depicted is perpetrated against women and girls, and is rooted in deep gender-inequality. An issue that has been discussed within this document is a lack of statistical data for many issues and in many countries. With a high proportion of remote small island states, and of less economically developed states, data collection is more difficult in the Commonwealth. However, there are gaps in the data presented across many regions of the Commonwealth, and this is an issue that governments, non-governmental organisations and inter-governmental organisations need to address.

Although there is still more work to be done in identifying and addressing the nature and prevalence of Hidden Violence, encouraging steps have been taken across the Commonwealth and around the world. The Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict represents a great opportunity to make a stand on gender, social and conflict-related violence. As well as addressing sexual violence in conflict at a level which has not been hitherto accomplished, it is to the organisers' credit that the summit seeks to address the wider context of gender, security and violence. As this discussion paper shows, violence stretches across the world in a variety of complex and inter-related forms. By identifying, understanding and confronting this violence the Commonwealth and the international community can bring greater harmony to citizens around the world.

References

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^{iv}United Nations Children's Fund, 2013. Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A statistical overview and exploration of the dynamics of change, UNICEF, New York. Pp. 6-7. Available at: http://www.unicef.org/media/files/FGCM_Lo_res.pdf

^vIbid, p. 174-5.

^{vi}WHO et al, 2008. Pp. 29-30.

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^{xvi}See our joint briefing paper: The Royal Commonwealth Society and Plan UK, 2013. Empowering Girls: what the Commonwealth can do to end early and forced marriage. Briefing Paper October 2013, London. Available at: <https://thercs.org/assets/Research-/Empowering-Girls-What-the-Commonwealth-can-do-to-end-Early-and-Forced-Marriage-2013.pdf>



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