

Section 4: The nature of gender violence

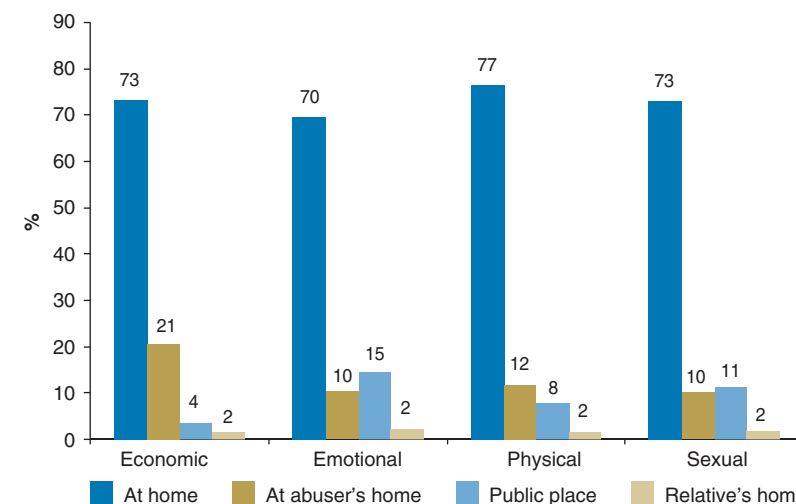
This text box summarises a victim's account of the physical abuse she suffered at the hands of her former husband. She gave this photo to the interviewers to take with them as evidence of some of the violence that she had experienced.



"My ex-husband and I lived for two years without a child. So from nowhere he started ill-treating me. He used to lock me up in the house for the whole day. Sometimes he could let me sleep outside the house naked in the cold. He could do this, I believe from his friend's influence. When I left him [at the house] one day, he came when I was bathing in the evening. I was alone and he came unnoticed and stabbed me in the back. As I tried to touch my back and look at who the person was, he stabbed me on the wrist and thigh. When I tried to look at the person, he stabbed my face. I cried and at this time I didn't feel any pain until I was brought to the hospital."

Respondents who experienced any form of abuse, were asked to recall the most serious incident (in the case of more than one), and to provide a number of details on the nature of the abuse. Specifically, questions were asked about: the perpetrator, where the incident occurred, any other people who might have been present at the time of the incident, whether they

Figure 7: Where the abuse happened (thinking of the most serious incident)

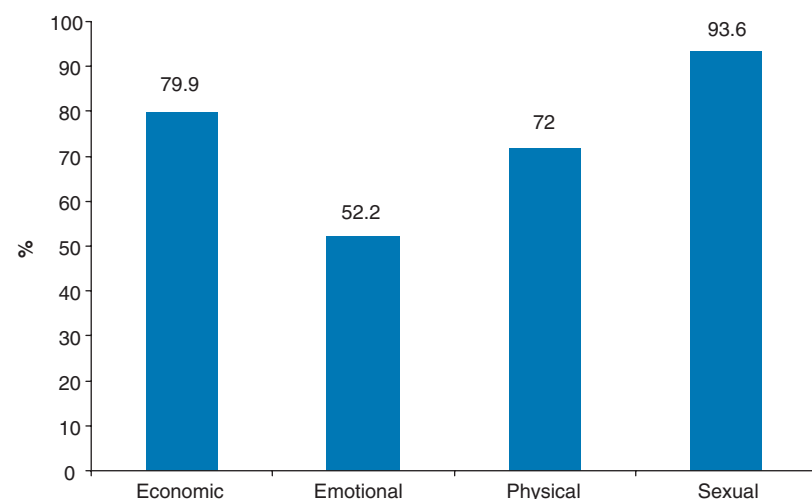


thought drugs and alcohol were being used at the time, and the effect the incident had on the respondent.

Respondents who had been victims of abuse were first asked about where the incident occurred. While reports were restricted to violence experienced at the hands of intimate partners, this does not necessarily imply that the abuse always happens within the home. However, this is the most likely scenario, with between 69.5% of those reporting emotional abuse, and 76.5% of those reporting physical abuse saying that the most serious incident occurred at home.

Another relatively common location was the abuser's home, suggesting that much of the abuse occurred within relationships in which the woman was not necessarily living with her partner at the time. In three of the four types of abuse, public places, either outdoors or indoors, were also common sites of abuse, with up to 14% of women who reported emotional abuse citing public places as the site of the most serious incident. Of note for the education authorities is that 16 women, who reported being victims of physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner, said this incident occurred at school.

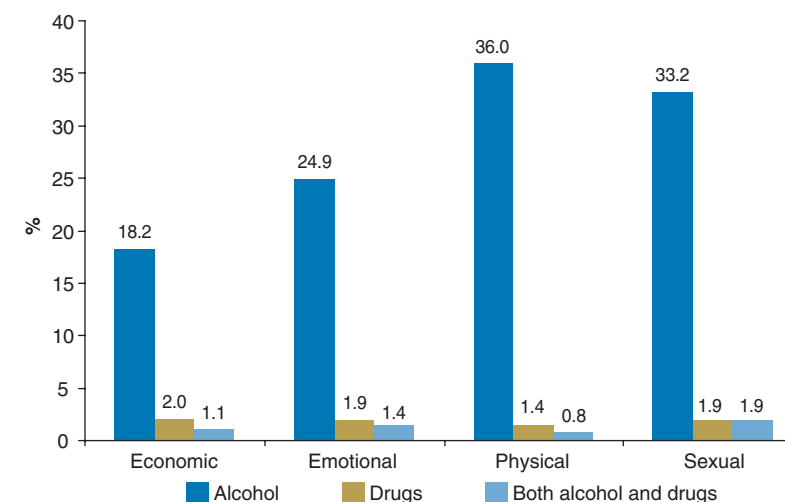
Figure 8: Percentage of women who were alone at the time of the most serious incident



Perhaps because most of the abuse occurred in the home, in the majority of cases, the woman was alone with the perpetrator at the time. This is also to be expected given the nature of abuse, with obvious exceptions such as public humiliation. While the majority (72%) of women who reported physical abuse were alone at the time, it is still somewhat surprising that a little over one quarter of the incidents occurred while others were present.

The use of alcohol is commonly associated with incidents of domestic violence and abuse. In Malawi, the trend remains the same. While not in the majority, intoxication was recorded in a significant percentage of abuse cases reported by women during the survey. This varied from 18% in the case of economic abuse, to more than one third (36%) of instances of physical abuse (Figure 9). This trend is to be expected, given that economic abuse tends to be part of an ongoing behavioural pattern that is likely to be evident regardless of the state of mind of the perpetrator, while physical and sexual violence is likely to be catalyzed by the intake of either alcohol or drugs. The use of recreational drugs in Malawi is probably low, thus explaining the low reports of perpetrators under the influence of drugs during the incident.

Figure 9: Percentage of incidents in which the perpetrator was believed to be under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs

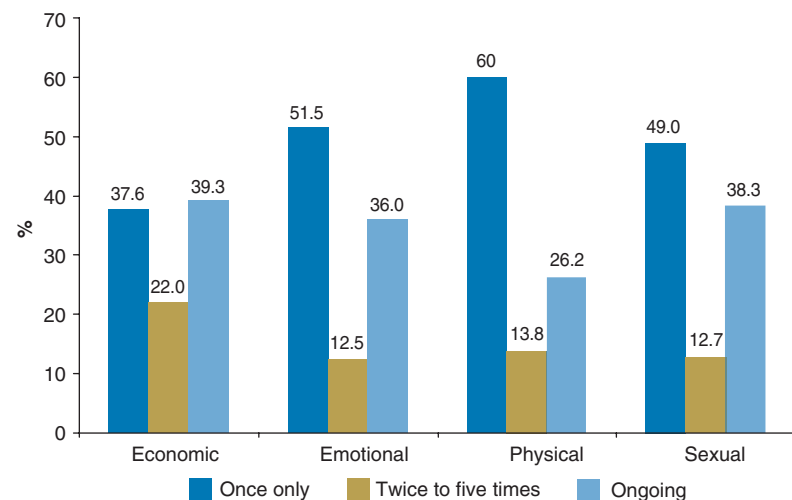


Abuse that occurs within the home often takes the form of a pattern consisting of several incidents, rather than just a single incident. The trend in Malawi was, however, a little different. With the exception of economic abuse, in which slightly more women reported that the abuse was ongoing (39%) than once off (38%), most women said their experience of intimate partner abuse was just a single incident.

This breaks the mould of abuse as an ongoing behavioural pattern, but may also reflect hesitancy on the part of women to speak badly of their partners – itself an important fact within Malawian culture. In total, only a little under two out of five women who were victims of sexual abuse said that it was ongoing; slightly fewer (36%) emotional abuse victims said this was the case; and one quarter (26%) of physical abuse victims reported that it was part of a larger pattern of abuse (Figure 10).

Despite the very small number of women who reportedly view the individual acts of abuse as acceptable, a significantly higher percentage did not view their experience as a crime. This emphasizes the divergence between what is considered acceptable within a relationship in terms of treatment and abuse, what people are willing to put up with, and what is

Figure 10: Duration of abuse



actually considered legally wrong. In more than one quarter (27%) of the sexual abuse reports, the women thought that what had occurred was not legally wrong, and could not be reported to the police, followed by just under one fifth (19.5%) of the emotional abuse incidents, and 17% of the incidents of physical abuse (Figure 11).

This perception is just one of the factors that will influence the reporting rate of incidents of abuse, both to the police or to anyone else. In an environment in which individuals may not have faith in the police and justice system, alternative points of reporting might include local and traditional leaders, or even counselling centres and clinics. However, when women do not perceive the abuse as being inherently wrong, or a violation of their rights, and rather as an extension of the rights of ownership of a man over his partner, they are unlikely to report the incident to anyone. Further, victims of abuse are often too embarrassed to report abuse, and do not consider it to be important enough to warrant reporting.

All these factors contribute to explaining the reporting rates of abuse presented in Figure 12. In the case of sexual violence, more than two thirds (68%) of the women have never told anyone about the incident, or incidents.

Figure 11: Percentage of abused women who thought what they had experienced was a crime

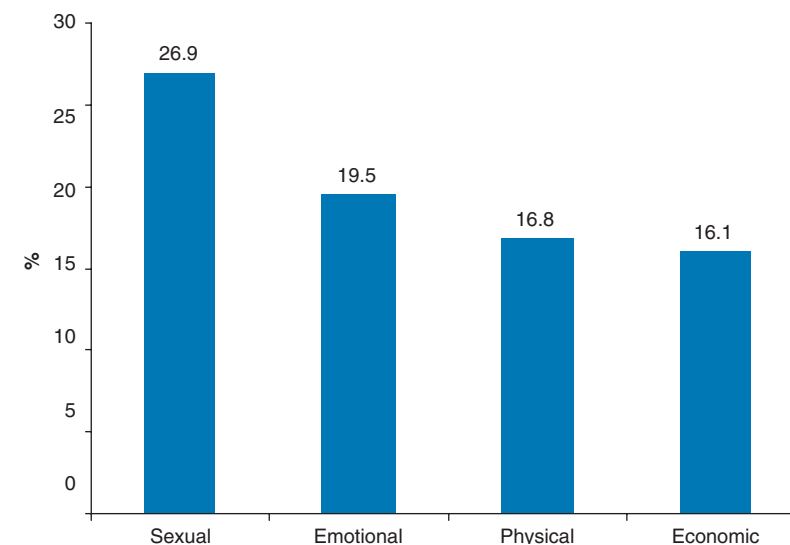


Figure 12: When abuse was reported (to anyone)

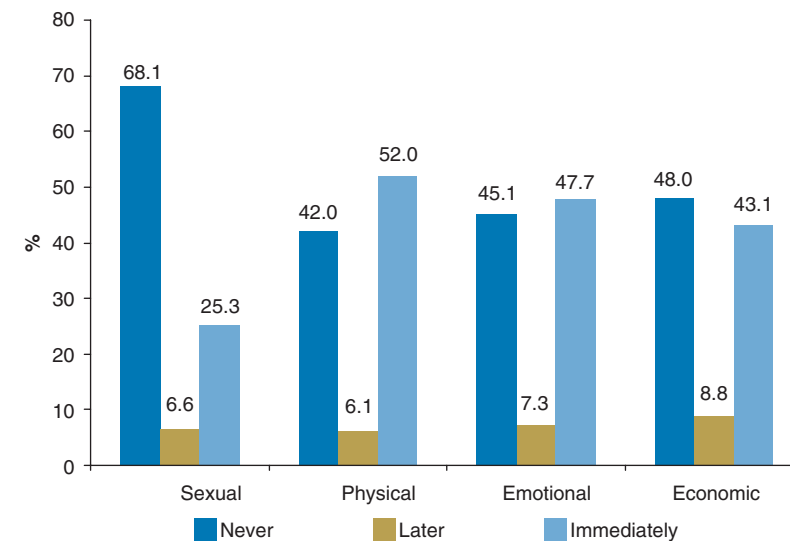
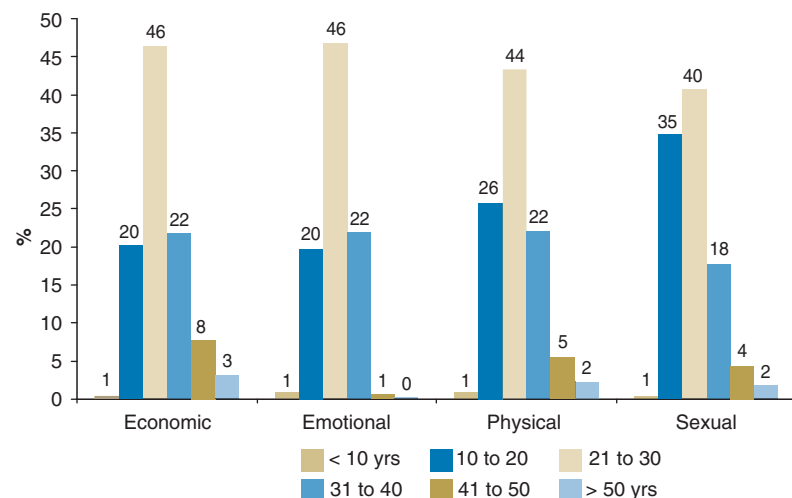


Figure 13: Age profile of abused women

In more than two out of five cases of physical abuse, no one was told. Importantly, in terms of taking action and gathering any evidence at least, when people were told of the incident, this tended to happen immediately after the incident (52%), rather than at a later stage.

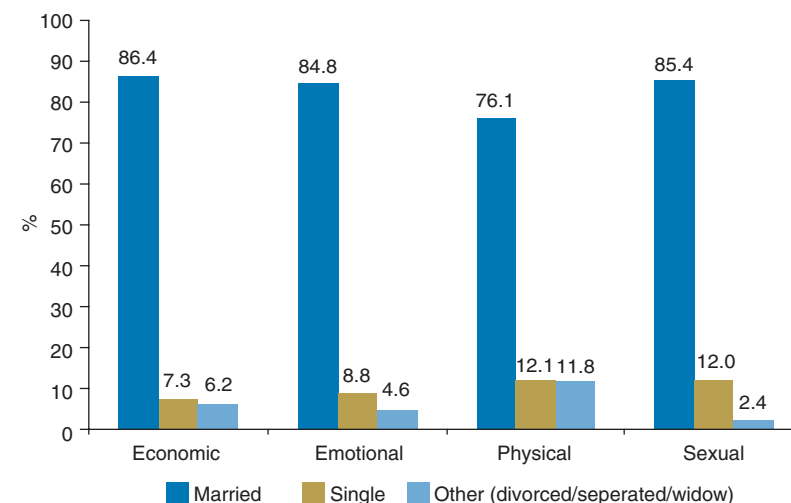
Reporting rates for emotional and financial abuse were lower, with less than one half (48%) of women reporting emotional abuse immediately, and even fewer (43%) reporting financial abuse immediately. A cross tabulation of these types of abuse revealed that it is when money was physically taken, or threats of physical harm made, that these cases of abuse were most likely to be reported to someone.

A profile of abused women and their abusers

Respondents were asked a series of questions about themselves at the time of the incident. When more than one case of abuse had happened, they were asked to refer to the most serious incident.

Women who are being abused

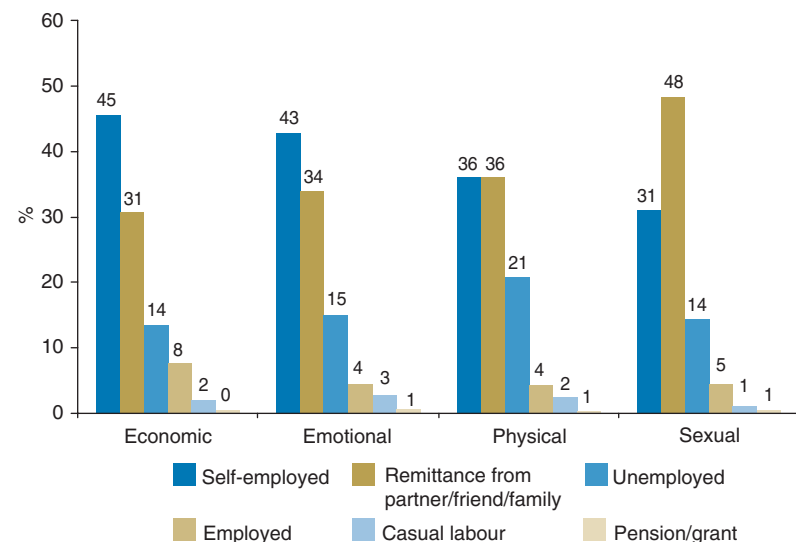
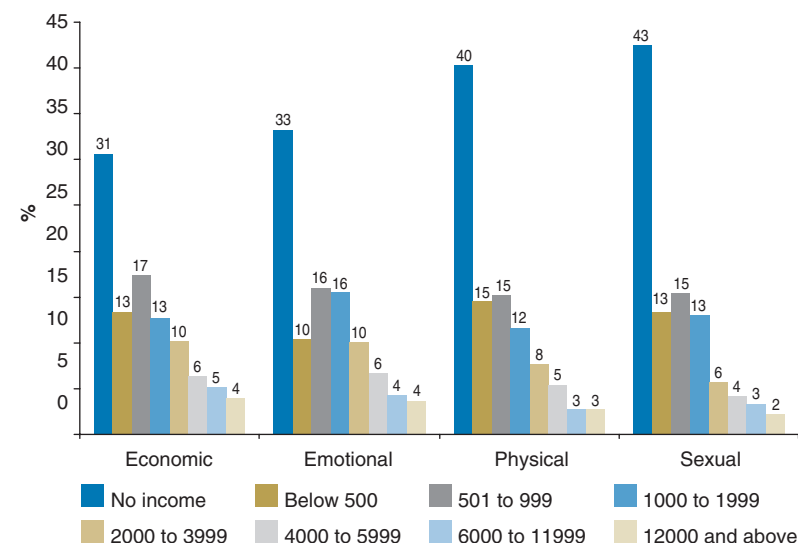
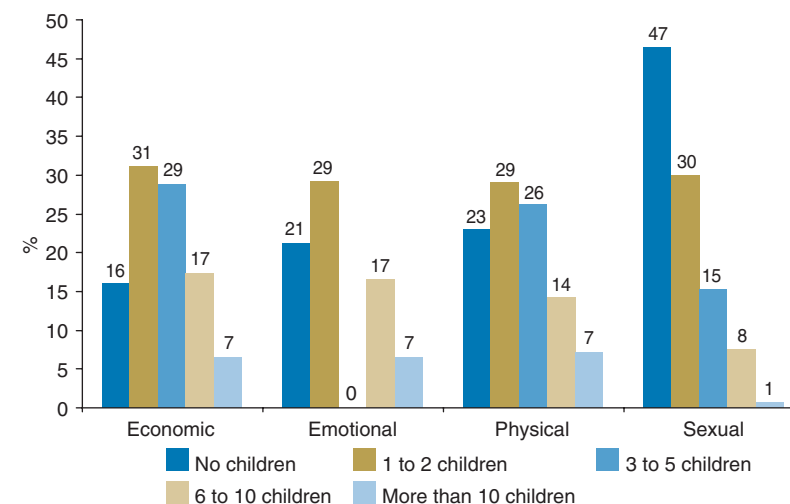
The sample of those women who had experienced some form of violence by their partner broadly correlates with the overall profile of the total sample.

Figure 14: Marital status of abused women

Across all categories of abuse, those between the ages of 21 and 30 years were the most likely to be victimized, while those older than 50 years were the least likely. Of note is that young women between the ages of 10 and 20 years were more likely to be victims of sexual abuse by their partner than any other types of abuse (Figure 13).

Most of the women who reported abuse were married, with married women constituting between three quarters (76%) of the sample of abused women in the case of physical violence, and more than four fifths (86%) in the case of economic abuse. While the difficulty of getting out of an abusive relationship is well recognized, this difficulty is exacerbated by the bonds attached to marriage, especially in a relatively conservative country like Malawi.

Abusive relationships are even more difficult to escape when one partner is dependent on the other for financial support or survival. The employment status of women who report abuse is thus an important variable for assessing the likelihood of ending such abuse. While those women who reported economic and emotional violence were most likely to be self-employed (46% and 43% respectively), those reporting physical and sexual violence were more likely to be dependent on remittances

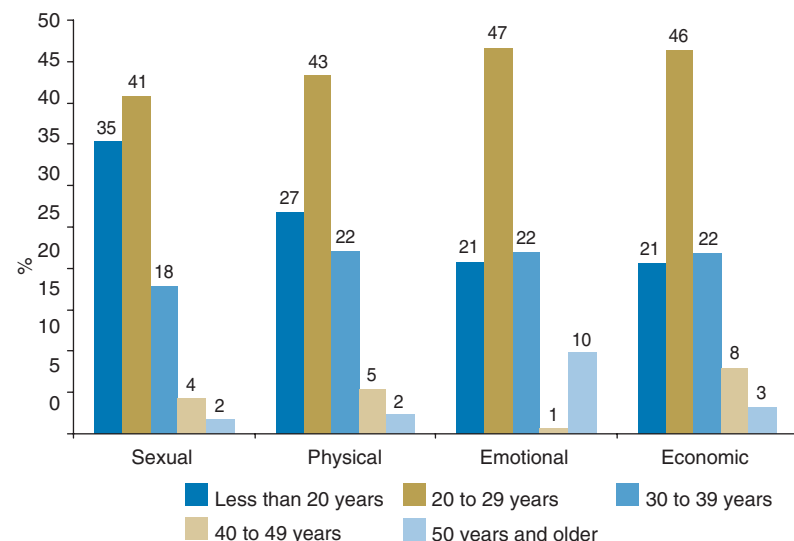
Figure 15: Employment status of abused women**Figure 16:** Average monthly income of abused women**Figure 17:** Number of children in the household

from friends, family or their partner (36% and 48% respectively). While dependency on their partner for money is one difficulty, being dependent on family for remittances can be equally problematic, as pressure from family members to remain in abusive relationships can be just as demanding.

The employment status of the respondent to some degree pre-empt the earning profile of the women. Given the high levels of dependency on remittances, and within an environment in which self-employment often refers to marginal subsistence activities such as making a living through micro and informal activities, the income reported by the respondents is unlikely to be sufficient to survive on.

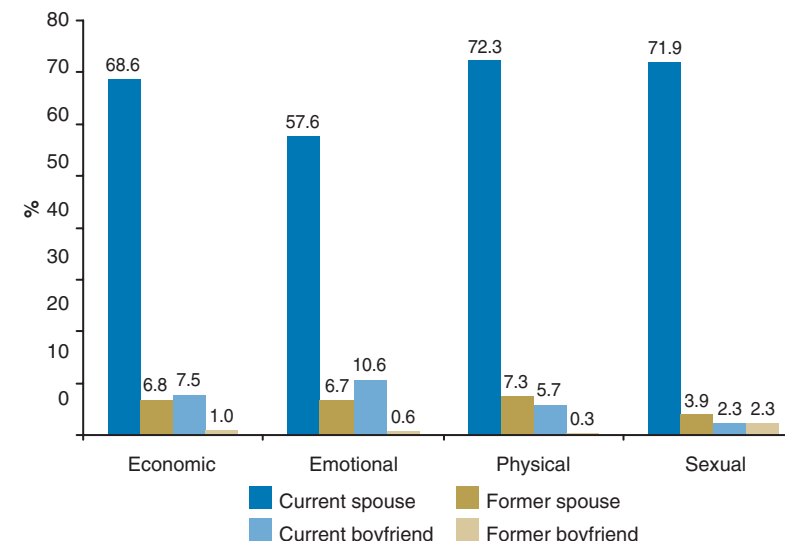
This indeed is the picture presented by Figure 16. Between three out of ten (31%) and two fifths (42.5%) of the abused women were unemployed, while those who were earning an income were most likely to earn only between MKw500 and MKw999 per month; an amount that is insufficient for household survival. In total, across all categories of abuse, roughly three out of five abused women earn less than MKw1,000 per month.

Such low levels of income further exacerbate the difficult position faced by the women when considering that they may have dependents

Figure 18: Age at which abuse first occurred

who need to be protected and supported as well. As Figure 17 illustrates, with the exception of those reporting sexual abuse, most of the women had between one and two children (31% in the case of women reporting economic abuse, 29% of those reporting emotional, and 29% of those reporting physical abuse). Most of the women, should they choose to somehow get out of their abusive relationship, would assume responsibility for their children as well, placing further pressure on an already untenable financial situation.

Much of the violence experienced at the hands of the women's partners also tended to be an ongoing experience, starting at a relatively young age. Most of the respondents, between two fifths (31%) in the case of sexual abuse and up to 46% in the case of economic abuse, report that the violence or abuse first started when they were between the ages of 21 and 30 years old. However, a significant percentage said the abuse started when they were even younger, with up to one third (35%) of those who were sexually abused reporting that it first started when they were younger than 20 years. This suggests that once a precedent is set, a pattern of abuse tends to emerge over a period of time.

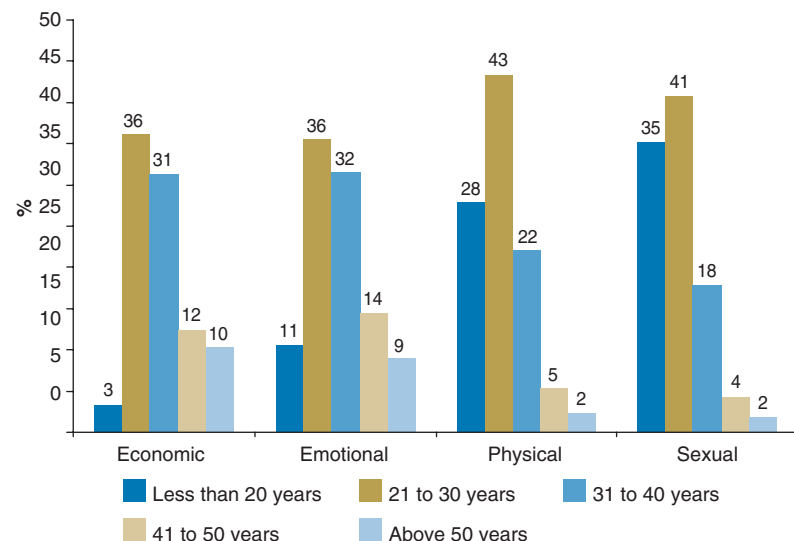
Figure 19: Relationship of perpetrator to respondent

Men who are abusing women

A limited number of questions were put to respondents to try and gain a superficial overview of the men who are responsible for intimate partner abuse in Malawi.

In the vast majority of cases across all types of abuse, the man responsible for the most serious incident was their current spouse or partner. This varied from more than half (58%) in the case of emotional abuse, to almost three quarters (72%) in the case of sexual violence. The second most common type of perpetrator was a current boyfriend; this category however accounted for a tenth or less across all categories of abuse (Figure 19).

The age profile tended to follow that of the profile of the women themselves, with the most common age for perpetrators being between 21 and 39 years. This age group accounted for between more than one third (36%) of the men perpetrating economic abuse, to 43% of the men inflicting physical violence on their partner. Of note is the much higher percentage of men less than 20 years who inflicted sexual abuse on their partner compared to the other types of abuse. This fact is of significance in developing awareness and anti-abuse campaigns, which clearly need to be targeting young men below the age of 20.

Figure 20: Age of men responsible for abuse

Issues of self-esteem and self-worth are related to abuse, both in the psyche of the abuser, and the abused. One of the most significant factors influencing the self-esteem of many men is their ability to fulfil the role of breadwinner, or financially support their family or wives. The increase in domestic violence in communities where unemployment is high is well documented in a range of literature. This may thus be an important factor in Malawi, where poverty is pervasive and employment is rare.

Figure 21 is therefore somewhat surprising, indicating as it does that in the case of women reporting economic, physical and sexual violence, their partner was employed. In the case of financial abuse, being employed does clearly put the abuser at an advantage over the abused, as power and control over income is a prerequisite for many forms of economic abuse. Similarly, various forms of emotional violence, such as threatening to commit suicide or other threats may be resorted to when other forms of control (such as over the family finances) are unavailable.

Figure 21: 'Was the perpetrator working at the time of the abuse?' (the most serious incident if more than one)