There has been an increasing attention to domestic violence against women, in both developed and developing countries, since the 1990s. The United Nations defines domestic violence as “any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (United Nations 1993). An increasing amount of research has highlighted the health and psychological burdens, intergenerational effects, and consequences of such violence (United Nations, 2006). Violence can take many forms, including physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and psychological abuse. It can have devastating consequences on the short- and long-term health and well-being of the women affected as well as their overall quality of life (Hutchins and Sinha, 2013).

One third of women all over the world suffer from domestic violence by intimate partner. This is considered as a hidden problem in most of the women do not reveal about their sufferings due to reasons such as culture, fear of reprisal, and concern over children, shame and internalizing the violence. It is also an ever increasing burden to the health care services, social and economy of the country.

Domestic Violence during pregnancy which is a common occurrence leads to many negative pregnancy outcomes including miscarriages, still births and maternal deaths. Also, Domestic Violence in one generation can influence the behaviour of the next generation by a process of learned behaviour. When children are exposed to violence between their parents, boys learn violence as a means of achieving control and eventually have a greater chance of being a perpetrator. On the other hand girls learn to accept violence as an inevitable helplessness and have a higher chance of being survivors in adult life.

The health sector in Sri Lanka has responded favourably by addressing Domestic Violence in the areas of prevention as well as in the response to the survivors, in an effective manner. Gender and Women’s Health Unit of the Family Health Bureau (FHB) is the nodal agency at National Level responsible for addressing Domestic Violence in the health sector. The programmes which focus mainly on prevention of Domestic Violence, response and care for survivors of Domestic Violence are implemented by Family Health Bureau.

Key Findings

• **Prevalence of domestic violence:** In Sri Lanka, 17 percent of ever-married women age 15-49 have suffered from domestic violence from their intimate partner.

• **Forms of domestic violence:** Two percent of ever-married women who suffered from domestic violence, experiences in any form of domestic violence daily.

• **Differentials of domestic violence:** Prevalence of domestic violence by an intimate partner increases with the age of the women. Urban residents also reported the highest percentage of domestic violence (20 percent). Kilinochchi and Batticaloa districts have the highest level of domestic violence (50 percent). Ever-married women who belong to the lowest wealth quintile and those with primary education reported the highest percentages in domestic violence (28 and, 30 percent respectively).

• **Support for domestic violence:** Among women who suffered from domestic violence, only just over one fourth of women (28 percent) have sought help, with three fourth of them (75 percent) seeking help from their family members, 27 percent from friends or neighbors and only 18 percent seeking help from the police. Half of the ever-married women age 15-49 (50 percent) indicated to know about the Sri Lanka Women Bureau to combat violence, while 26 percent mentioned the midwife and Women Help Line.
Affirming the important and specific role that the national health system should play in responding to domestic violence, Family Health Bureau has taken a few significant steps forward in various aspects such as setting up of domestic violence care centres called “Mithuru Piyasa” at hospitals, which are dedicated to provide emotional and medical support to survivors of Domestic Violence. They are operated by the hospital staff working in the out patients’ department. The staff at Mithuru Piyasa are given a training conducted by FHB. The location for the centre in the hospital is selected based on several criteria to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the clients while ensuring the easy access and proper referrals. Family Health Bureau provides the logistic support to hospital administration on selecting the venue and with.

Many programmes are implemented for capacity building of health staff such as in basic, in-service and postgraduate courses on domestic violence. Inclusion of a module on domestic violence in the curriculum of Medical Undergraduates on the responsibilities of a Medical Officer in responding to Domestic Violence is one such programme.

Also, an action plan for health sector to response on Domestic Violence has been developed by the Ministry of Health Sri Lanka, in order to streamline its’ response, inclusive of prevention, responding to survivors and addressing perpetrators on domestic violence in an effective and a responsive manner using a survivor centered approach which is institutionalized within the existing structure of the Ministry of Health and it is sustainable. Coincidently the Ministry of Women’s Affairs developed a national plan to address sexual and domestic violence in Sri Lanka.

To study the level and characteristics of domestic violence or violence perpetrated by an intimate partner, a module with questions on women’s experience of domestic violence in the last 12 months was included in the 2016 SLDHS questionnaire for the first time in Sri Lanka. In accordance with the World Health Organization’s guidelines for the ethical collection of information on domestic violence, only one eligible woman per household was randomly selected for this module; the module was not implemented if privacy could not be obtained; the respondent was read an additional consent statement at the start of the interview using the domestic violence module, informing her that the questions could be personal and reassuring her of the confidentiality of her responses (WHO 2001).

### 13.1 Level of Domestic Violence

The domestic violence set of questions was administered to 91 percent of the eligible ever-married women age 15-49. For seven percent of them the questionnaire was not implemented due to lack of privacy or because security concerns. Two percent of eligible women rejected to answer the questions of the domestic violence module because of privacy concerns or other reasons (Figure 13.1).

The prevalence of domestic violence by an intimate partner increases with the age of the woman, going from 13 percent among ever-married women age 15-19 to 19 percent among the oldest 45-49 women. A similar pattern is observed by age among those rejected to answer the questions on the module.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 13.1 Summary on domestic violence by age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of women who suffered no violence from intimate partner, experienced any of the violent behaviors mentioned, experienced any type of violence daily, rejected to answer questions on domestic violence and who requested help for domestic violence according to age groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No violence from intimate partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced any violent behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing any type of violence daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejected to answer on domestic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of women</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 13.2 presents the percentage of ever-married women age 15-49 by experience of domestic violence by their intimate partner, experience of daily domestic violence, and percent who requested help for domestic violence according to background characteristics.

Among the eligible ever-married women, 17 percent indicated to have suffered from domestic violence from their intimate partner during the 12 months preceding the survey. Furthermore, 13 percent of all the women who suffered from violence, declared to have suffered violent behaviors by an intimate partner on a daily basis and violence increases with the age of the women. Among all women who have experienced domestic violence, only twenty eight percent (28%) sought help to escape from violence (Table 13.2).

More women from the urban sector have experienced violence (20 percent) compared to women living in the other sectors (16 percent of the rural and 17 percent of estate counterparts). Experience of violence by the intimate partner among ever-married women varies according to the districts of residence: in Batticaloa and Kilinochchi, the districts with the highest prevalence, half of the women indicated to be affected by violence from their intimate partner. Figure 13.2 shows clearly the highest domestic violence prevails in Northern and Eastern provinces. In contrast, in Hambantota, Anuradhapura and Monaragala, the districts with the lowest prevalence, less than eight percent indicated to be affected by domestic violence by an intimate partner. Experience of domestic violence declines with the educational level, excluding the educational category “No education”. The survey results suggest that there is a negative relationship between the prevalence of physical violence and household wealth (the lowest wealth quintile has a significantly higher prevalence of domestic violence than women in the other four quintiles).
Table 13.2 Summary on occurring domestic violence by background characteristics

Percentage of women age 15-49 who have not experienced any violence from intimate partner, experienced at least one violence, and percentage of women who have experienced in daily violence among women who suffered, from violence and percentage of women who requested help for domestic violence among women who suffered from violence according to background characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background characteristic</th>
<th>No any violence from intimate partner</th>
<th>Experienced at least one violence</th>
<th>Number of women</th>
<th>Experienced any form of violence daily</th>
<th>Requested help for domestic violence</th>
<th>Number of women Who suffered from violence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>86.7</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>83.6</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>1,130</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>83.5</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>2,335</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>3,364</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>3,720</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>3,056</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>2,856</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>2,582</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>82.6</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>13,403</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>2,140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estate</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>643</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombo</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>1,625</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gampaha</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>1,564</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalutara</td>
<td>90.9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>968</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kandy</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>1,117</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matale</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuwara Eliya</td>
<td>83.5</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galile</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>818</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matara</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hambantota</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>-14.9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaffna</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>443</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mannar</td>
<td>76.8</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vavuniya</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matara</td>
<td>68.3</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiliocolachi</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batticaloa</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>493</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ampara</td>
<td>72.6</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>669</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trincomalee</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurunegala</td>
<td>87.7</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>1,481</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puttalam</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anuradhapura</td>
<td>88.2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>907</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polonnaruwa</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>-32.5</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badulla</td>
<td>88.7</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moneragala</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>-32.3</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratnapura</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>1,016</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kegalle</td>
<td>86.7</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No education</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passed Grade 1-5</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>1,121</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passed Grade 6-10</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>7,351</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>1,334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passed G.C.E.(O/L) or equivalent</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>3,682</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passed G.C.E.(A/L) or equivalent</td>
<td>87.6</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>3,438</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree and above</td>
<td>86.4</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>788</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wealth quintile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>3,062</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>3,351</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>84.5</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>3,501</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>3,473</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>3,241</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 15-49: 82 16.6 16,629 12.6 27.8 2,762
13.2 Types of Domestic Violence and Frequency

Table 13.3 presents the frequency of domestic violence by the types of violence suffered by ever-married women age 15-49 from their intimate partner. The domestic violence module used in the 2016 SLDHS collected detailed information on the types or forms of violence and the frequency with which they occurred during the 12 months before the survey. The most predominant type of violence identified was “belittled or seriously offended you” with three quarter of women who suffered from domestic violence (75 percent), followed by “Slapped, beaten, or thumped you” (45 percent), and “pushed or shoved you” with 33 percent (Fig 13.3). The frequency with which the domestic violence happens varies from 13 percent indicating a daily occurrence to 48 percent among those who indicated “monthly” and to 67% who reported that violence occurred less often.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of violence</th>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Less often</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Slapped/Beaten/Thumped</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pushed/Shoved</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried to Strangulate</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dragged/Pulled</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beat with an object</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burned</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevented leaving home</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced to have sex</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belittled/Seriously offend</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>75.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any type of violence</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13.3 Percentage of ever-married women age 15-49 who have experienced various forms of violence in the 12 months preceding the survey, committed by their intimate partner
13.3 **HELP SEEKING TO STOP THE VIOLENCE**

Ever-married women who responded to be affected by domestic violence from their intimate partner were asked if they asked for help from anybody and if yes, who provided them with the help or advice. Only 28 percent of the women suffering from domestic violence asked for help, and the majority (75 percent) did that from “Parents/brothers/sisters/relatives”. Another 27 percent went to “friends/neighbors”, followed by the “Police” with only 18 percent (Fig 13.4).

**Figure 13.4 Women Help Seeking from Institute/ Person**

![Bar Chart](chart.png)

The person/institution from which help was sought appears to be negatively associated with age of the woman. Thus, the percentage of those seeking help from “parents/brothers/sisters/relatives” is higher among younger women. However, among those who went to the “police”, higher percentages are observed among the older women(30-49), rural sector, those with lower levels of education and those from poorer quintiles. These findings are of singular importance to inform the development of policies and programs geared to support women affected by intimate partner violence in the household.
### Table 13.4 The person/institute that provided help/advice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background characteristic</th>
<th>Person/institute</th>
<th>Number of women who requested help</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Parents (Brother/Sister/Relation)</td>
<td>Friends (Neighbour)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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### 13.4 Knowledge of service providers

All ever-married women were asked about the organizations they knew which provide services to combat violence against women. From Table 13.5 and Figure 13.5, shows that the “Sri Lanka Women Bureau” was mentioned by half of the women, followed by the “Women help line” and “Midwife” (26 percent each), the “Legal Aid Commission” (18 percent), and the “Department of Social Services” (17 percent). Also mentioned but with lower percentages were the “Mithuru Piyasa” (13 percent), and the “MOH” (10 percent).
The “Sri Lanka Women Bureau” was better known by older women, those living in the urban and the rural sector, with higher levels of education and with greater household wealth. The knowledge of the “MOH”, as an institution providing services to combat violence against women, follows a flat pattern by background characteristics. The knowledge by district follows distinct patterns for each one of these available institutions and as such deserve a separate analysis. The district with the highest levels of knowledge by organization is as follows:

“Sri Lanka Women Bureau” observed in Matara (72 percent),
“Women help line” observed in Anuradhapura (61 percent),
“Midwife” observed in Kegalle (50 percent),
“Legal Aid Commission” observed in Anuradhapura (53 percent),
“Department of Social Services” observed in Vavuniya (48 percent),
“Mithuru Piyasa” observed in Galle (25 percent), and
“MOH” observed in Moneragala (25 percent).
The figure 13.6 clearly shows that the estate sector people have less knowledge on formal organizations or specific people to stop violence. The category “Other” has recorded the highest percentage (37%) for estate sector. One fourth of people in the estate sector knows about midwife to stop violence. Half of the people in urban and rural sectors aware about the Sri Lanka Women’s Bureau.

### Table 13.5: Knowledge on service providers

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<th>Background characteristic</th>
<th>Person/Institute</th>
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<th>Number of women</th>
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