



## CPS Paper

### **Sexual abuse and unwanted pregnancies amongst women and girls in Malawi during the Covid19 pandemic**

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#### **Brief Description**

The preponderance of violence against women and girls in humanitarian crises and displaced women is well established, but the Covid19 pandemic movement restrictions has shed more light on how vulnerable women and girls are to violence and sexual abuse within the confines of their own homes (WHO, 2021).

From the feminist perspective, the inferior position occupied by women in society is a key contributor of violence rendered to them (Renzetti, Edleson, & Bergen, 2001; Sharma, 1997).

Increased levels of teenage pregnancies were reported during the first wave of the Covid19 pandemic (March to July) compared to the same period in 2019.

However, the extent of the impact of the Covid19 pandemic on sexual abuse and unwanted pregnancies on women and girls in Malawi has not been investigated.

This study uses data on reported cases of rape and defilement from the Malawi Police and the number of women accessing post abortion care services from DHS2 to investigate the impact of the Covid19 pandemic on sexual violence and unwanted pregnancies for women and girls in Malawi.

DHS2 is an open-source project that is coordinated by the HISP Centre at the University of Oslo and is used by more than 73 countries worldwide to assess population health.

This is the first study to use the Malawi DHS2 data to analyse the trends in the post abortion care.

The quantitative data is complemented by qualitative data obtained through key informant interviews with professionals from the Malawi Police and District hospitals to follow an explanatory mixed methods design (Creswell and Clarke, 2011).

Descriptive statistical and graphical analysis is used for the quantitative data and the Braun and Clarke Thematic Analysis method is employed in the analysis of the data from key informant interviews. Findings reveal huge regional variations in the percentage change of the reported cases of rape and defilement and the number of women and girls accessing post abortion care services during the Covid19 pandemic compared to the period before.

The percentage change in defilement cases ranges from -13% in the Eastern region to 17% in the Northern region and the percentage change in rape cases was -31% in the Southern region and 6% in the Northern region.

The percentage of women accessing post abortion care services declined in most of the regions.

The general perspective of key informants was that there was a rise in cases of rape and defilement and the number of women with unwanted pregnancies during the Covid19 pandemic period.

The declines captured by the quantitative data were attributed to under reporting caused by school closures, movement restrictions, staffing challenges; reduced number of women terminating their pregnancies despite experiencing unwanted pregnancies and reduced number of women and girls accessing post abortion care services.

Increases in reported cases were attributed to consistent awareness of and availability of services for reporting and treatment.

This study confirms that sexual abuse towards women and girls increases during periods of restricted movements but levels are likely to be underreported.

#### **Abstract**

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The preponderance of violence against women and girls in humanitarian crises and displaced women is well established, but the Covid19 pandemic movement restrictions has shed more light on how vulnerable women and girls are to violence and sexual abuse within the confines of their own homes (WHO, 2021). From the feminist perspective, the inferior position occupied by women in society is a key contributor of violence rendered to them (Renzetti, Edleson, & Bergen, 2001; Sharma, 1997). Increased levels of teenage pregnancies were reported during the first wave of the Covid19 pandemic (March to July) compared to the same period in 2019. However, the extent of the impact of the Covid19 pandemic on sexual abuse and unwanted pregnancies on women and girls in Malawi has not been investigated.

This study uses data on reported cases of rape and defilement from the Malawi Police and the number of women accessing post abortion care services from DHS2 to investigate the impact of the Covid19 pandemic on sexual violence and unwanted pregnancies for women and girls in Malawi. DHS2 is an open-source project that is coordinated by the HISP Centre at the University of Oslo and is used by more than 73 countries worldwide to assess population health. This is the first study to use the Malawi DHS2 data to analyse the trends in the post abortion care. The quantitative data is complemented by qualitative data obtained through key informant interviews with professionals from the Malawi Police and District hospitals to follow an explanatory mixed methods design (Creswell and Clarke, 2011). Descriptive statistical and graphical analysis is used for the quantitative data and the Braun and Clarke Thematic Analysis method is employed in the analysis of the data from key informant interviews.

Findings reveal huge regional variations in the percentage change of the reported cases of rape and defilement and the number of women and girls accessing post abortion care services during the Covid19 pandemic compared to the period before. The percentage change in defilement cases ranges from -13% in the Eastern region to 17% in the Northern region and the percentage change in rape cases was -31% in the Southern region and 6% in the Northern region. The percentage of women accessing post abortion care services declined in most of the regions. The general perspective of key informants was that there was a rise in cases of rape and defilement and the number of women with unwanted pregnancies during the Covid19 pandemic period. The declines captured by the quantitative data were attributed to under reporting caused by school closures, movement restrictions, staffing challenges; reduced number of women terminating their pregnancies despite experiencing unwanted pregnancies and reduced number of women and girls accessing post abortion care services. Increases in reported cases were attributed to consistent awareness of and availability of services for reporting and treatment. This study confirms that sexual abuse towards women and girls increases during periods of restricted movements but levels are likely to be underreported.