



Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a particular society considers appropriate for men and women. Gender roles and responsibilities are learned, change over time and vary within and between countries and cultures according to social, religious, historical, and economic factors. Gender constructs give rise to gender inequalities (i.e., the systematic favouring of one group over another in the access to opportunities, resources and services such as land, education, employment and political participation). In turn, such inequalities can lead to inequities between men and women including in health status and access to health care.

The study of women's status, and empowerment in particular, is important as it provides insight into their impact on demographic and health outcomes for women.

Education levels

In terms of basic education and literacy there is a gap between Solomon Islands men and women. Women have slightly lower levels of educational attainment, particularly in attainment of more advanced education.

Among women and men aged 15–49, 21 percent of women and 11 percent of men cannot read at all.

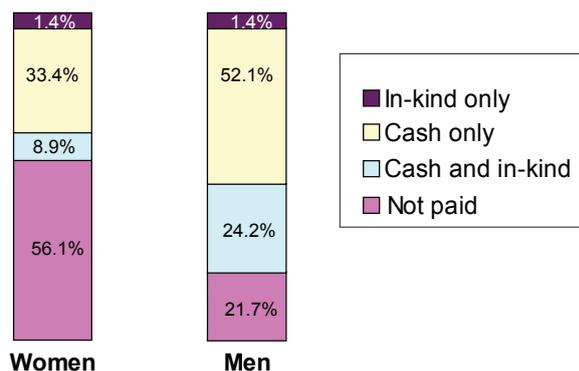
Employment

Like education, employment can also be a source of empowerment for both men and women. This is particularly important for women's empowerment where it puts women in control of income.

A much smaller number of currently married women (42.1%) than currently married men (87.1%) were employed some time in the year prior to the DHS, indicating a gender disparity in the employment sector.

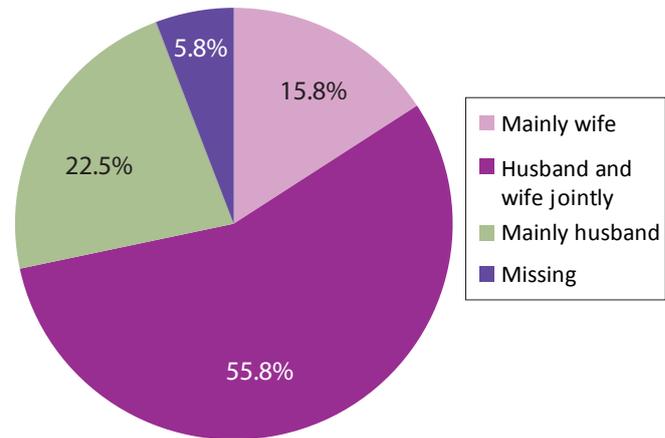
The economic vulnerability of women was exacerbated by the fact that more than half (56.1%) of those women who were employed were not paid, either in cash or in kind, for their work.

Employment and cash earnings of currently married respondents



The results show that women have a significant amount of control over how earnings are spent including their husband's earnings. Almost one quarter reported that their husband has sole control over how his earnings are spent.

Control over men's cash earnings Currently married women 15–49



Participation in household decision-making

Women were asked about their participation (i.e., having the final say either solely or jointly) in decisions on major household purchases and for daily needs, their own health care and visits to their family.

The majority of women in Solomon Islands participate in all four types of household decisions asked about. Only 6.4 percent of women in Solomon Islands do not participate in any of the four decisions. However, there is still room for improvement as more than 40 percent of women do not participate in all household decision making.

Only 28.1 percent of married women reported that they make their own health care decisions independently; and 16.6 percent reported that their husbands/partners make their health care decisions for them.

Only 19.8 percent of women reported that they had the main decision-making power regarding visits to their family and friends, while 7 percent of men reported that their wife has primary responsibility for this decision. This is significant, as controlling behaviour often takes on the form of limiting access to support networks and isolating victims, making those in violent situations particularly vulnerable.



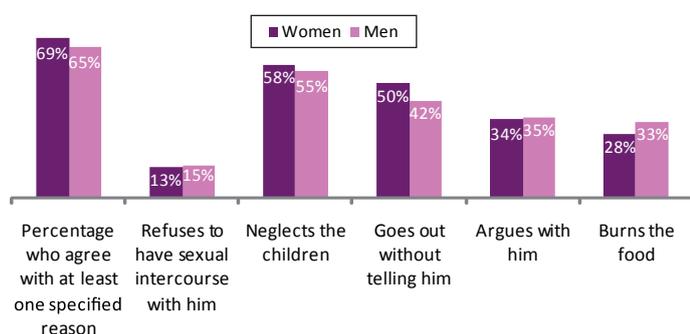


Attitudes towards violence against women

Violence against women has serious consequences for their mental and physical well-being. One of the most common forms of abuse worldwide is abuse by a husband or partner.

Sixty nine percent of women agreed with at least one of the reasons asked as justification for violence against women. It is worrisome that the majority of women believe that intimate partner violence is justified under some circumstances, indicating that women themselves generally accept subordinate status within a relationship.

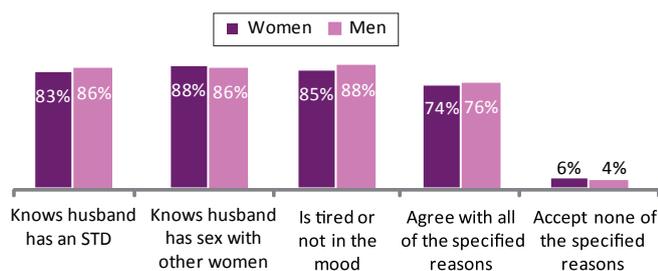
Justification of violence against women (age 15-49)



For both women and men the most commonly accepted reason for violence was neglecting the children.

Younger men were more likely to justify partner violence against women than older men, highlighting a need to include gender equality in education programs particularly for young men.

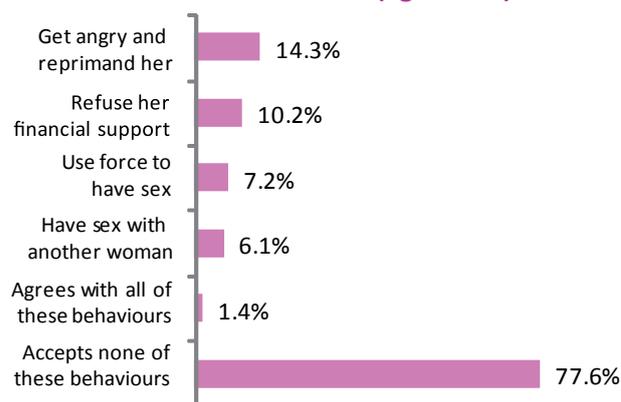
Attitudes toward a woman's right to refuse sex with her husband (age 15-49)



The majority of women report a high level of sexual autonomy, with three in four women agreeing with all of the reasons for a wife refusing to have sex with her husband, and only 6.4 percent not accepting any of the specified reasons for refusing sex.

Among men, 4.1 percent believed that women were not justified in refusing sex under any of the specified circumstances, which is lower than the number of women who did not accept any of the reasons, possibly indicating a greater respect for women's sexual autonomy than women have themselves.

Men's attitudes toward a husband rights when his wife refuses to have sex (age 15-49)



It is encouraging that a significant majority (77.6%) of men do not agree with any of these behaviours relating to a husband's rights.

Policy note:

Where women are financially dependent on men their control over their own lives and bodies can be greatly diminished. The high proportion of women not being paid at all for their work is particularly worrisome as domestic work such as caring for children, cooking and cleaning is also predominantly carried out by women, creating a double burden. It is encouraging that over half of the women reported joint control over household spending; however, there is still room for improvement with a quarter reporting to have no say in how their husbands' earnings are spent.

There is a clear need for women to be empowered regarding their own health. This should involve greater emphasis on health education and awareness for women and girls in both urban and rural areas, including information on both general and reproductive health issues, and on accessing health care advice, facilities and services.

Both women and men expressed that partner violence was justified under some circumstances, with younger men more likely to condone violence against women. Steps need to be taken to abolish the traditional attitudes held by both women and men which condone violence against women, limit women to stereotypical roles or are based on the inferiority of women vis-a-vis men. This could be accomplished through media campaigns, community awareness initiatives and inclusion of gender equality programs in educational curricula.

* For more information on gender and development see chapter 14 in the full 2007 SI DHS report.

