

## The gendered impact of corruption: *Who suffers more – men or women?*



Photo: Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security

What supports the claim that corruption causes more suffering for women than men? By distinguishing between indirect victimisation and direct victimisation, it is reasonable to assume women suffer more, and differently, than men. A review of the scarce evidence on the direct impacts of corruption qualifies this claim to some extent. Nevertheless, a general reduction of gender inequalities can address the root causes of the gendered impacts of corruption. Anti-corruption programming should include an analysis of differences in gender exposure and vulnerability to corruption, while gender programmes would benefit from an anti-corruption lens.



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The story reflects the sad reality in many refugee camps around the world. It is a typical example of the extortion of sexual favours, and, more often than not, the victims are women and girls. But do examples like this allow for the generalization that overall women suffer more from corruption? Academic research on this issue is scarce and relies mostly on plausible arguments and anecdotal or context-specific evidence. The literature suggests a greater vulnerability of women. However, a complete analysis should take into account other characteristics beyond gender, such as income levels, type of society, or urban vs. rural contexts.

Why is corruption thought to cause greater suffering for women than men? Individuals can be direct or indirect victims of corruption. Many corrupt practices do not have direct victims. The harm arises from their negative externalities, for example poor quality schools due to corrupt administrators. However, when corrupt payments or favours are extorted, someone is hurt directly. Bribes or favours can be extorted whenever a public official or an agent has discretionary power to either arbitrarily

### The gendered reality of corruption impacts

Looking beyond monetary exchanges when analysing corruption is crucial – as shown in this sexual extortion scenario:

*A teenage girl at a refugee camp in Sierra Leone applies to the camp administrator for the food, soap, and medicine she's entitled to and needs to survive. He falsely tells her that "your name is not on the list" but, instead of demanding money – the classic corruption scenario – he demands sex and she has no choice but to comply. (Gitlin 2015)*

deny a due service or to impose an undue cost. Which gender suffers more is an empirical question. The available data is scarce and yields some surprising results.

## Women as direct victims of corruption

The likelihood of women becoming *direct* victims of corruption – usually through extortion – can be explained either by the level of exposure to corruption risk or by gender characteristics. Whether men or women have a higher risk of becoming victims of corruption depends on two questions:

1. Which gender is more exposed to corruption risk? This usually depends on who in the household has more direct contact with the public administration, or lacks political or social protection from abuses.
2. What gender-specific characteristics intrinsically increase the vulnerability to corruption?

The first question is a statistical matter and reflects existing social, economic, political, or legal gender inequalities. The second question is strictly defined by gender. In this context, it cannot be stressed enough that corruption is not restricted to money changing hands. Sexual extortion and sexual favours – or voluntary quid pro quos – are also common forms of corruption.

If in a society a certain activity is typically a male responsibility, men will in principle be more vulnerable to corruption linked to that activity. In *absolute* terms it is more likely that men rather than women will be victimised. For example, who is more likely to be exposed to extortion by traffic police? The answer presumably relates more to who is more likely to be driving, than their gender.

However, women may still be *proportionally* more vulnerable. This would be reflected in a higher percentage of women being victimised, compared to men. Evidence from the private sector in Uganda suggests that even though the sector is male dominated, women are disproportionately more targeted by corrupt officials (Ellis, Manuel and Blackden 2006).

In such cases, the higher relative vulnerability of women demands an explanation beyond exposure. Are women considered easier victims? What explains this perception? Do women have less power because of gender inequalities in access to education, justice, and employment opportunities? Do women lack protection from social networks, as suggested by a survey in Sri Lanka (TI Sri Lanka 2014)?

Looking at the health and education sectors (see e.g. UNDP 2014) can help clarify some of the gender differences in relation to direct victimization from corruption:

- Pregnancies and the responsibility for the healthcare of their children mean that women spend more time in the health system, increasing their exposure to being extorted (TI 2010). Many of them do not have money to pay bribes, and end up excluded from the services – or are forced to resort to sexual favours. Pregnancy is defined by gender.

Caring for children's health depends on existing gender patterns and inequalities.

- In education, gender vulnerabilities involve three roles: students, teachers, and parents.<sup>1</sup> For students, sexual extortion and favours – such as sex for grades – is common in some countries (see relevant chapters in Heyneman 2009). The teaching profession is dominated by women in primary education, except in Sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, (UNESCO 2010) where they are vulnerable to sexual extortion by superiors and during selection processes. In Honduras, official and social audits revealed that there was a practice extorting sex in exchange for teaching positions (Transformemos Honduras 2010). Mothers often take care of any dealings with their children's schools, and may be more exposed to extortion of bribes for school admission, etc.

Similar patterns appear in other sectors such as justice or water. The informal sector is usually dominated by women (ILO 2002). As a result, they are more exposed to being extorted by public officials who are charged with controlling the related activities.

There are many areas with high corruption risks where women are the majority and become more exposed to corruption in absolute terms. Women may also be disproportionately victimised for sexual extortion and favours, or targeted by corrupt officials target for other reasons. The effect may be compounded if both logics apply at the same time.

## Women as indirect victims of corruption

Even though corruption does not always affect someone *directly*, its externalities usually *indirectly* affect third parties, including the general population, taxpayers, specific professions, or communities. It is challenging to assess the indirect effects of corruption, and whether women suffer disproportionately. Nevertheless, there are arguments that support the assumption that women do suffer more from the indirect effects of corruption.

First, corruption undermines economic development and perpetuates or aggravates poverty. According to data from the United Nations, the majority of the poor are women (70% according to the 1995 Human Development Report). Even though the estimate has been questioned (Chant 2008) because poverty indicators are measured at household level and are not disaggregated by gender, the basic fact that there are more women than men among the poor is likely to be true. Hence, it is plausible to argue that women suffer more than men do when corruption hinders development.<sup>2</sup>

Second, the poor are more dependent on public services that are often depleted by corruption (GTZ 2004). Corruption in public procurement and contracting usually results in either higher prices or lower quality services, or both. Since women are likely to have less income, the relative impact of higher prices is greater for them than for men. This circumstance adds a further complication to the challenges in the education

and health sectors: corruption may drain resources for public services that women depend more on than men.

Third, political and grand administrative corruption may perpetuate gender inequalities such as discrimination against women with respect to resources, participation in politics,<sup>3</sup> and access to high-level positions in public administration. With data from European countries, Sundstrom and Wängnerud (2013) show that the level of corruption and government ineffectiveness has a significant and negative effect on how many women get elected as local councillors. Male-dominated decision-making can have even wider consequences as fewer resources may be allocated to government policies and programmes that benefit women.

Finally, estimates say that more than 80% of the victims of human trafficking are women and girls sold as slaves or prostitutes, forced into marriages, or used for organ trade (GTZ 2004). Corrupt police, custom officers, and politicians in the countries of origin, transit, and destination facilitate such illegal activities. Even though the corrupt deal does not *directly* involve the women as parties, they undeniably suffer the most harm.<sup>4</sup>

## What does the (scarce) data tells us?

Assessing quantitatively the indirect impacts of corruption according to gender is a daunting task. However, regional barometers provide useful data that can shed light on the issue of direct victimisation. Both the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) and the Afrobarometer,<sup>5</sup> contain questions on victimisation and experience of corruption.

The results are interesting, as they seem to contradict some of the arguments and evidence discussed previously. The evidence from Latin America and Africa shows that if there

are any gender differences at all, it is that a higher proportion of men report having paid bribes (see Figure). In both regions, this fact is particularly evident for police corruption, but in Latin America, it also applies to courts, hospitals, clinics, and local governments, and in Africa to water and sanitation, and documents and permits. For Latin America, Seligson (2006) explains this observation by the differences in exposure: men make greater use of many public services.

However, the results of these barometers should not be over-emphasised. There are other, less optimistic explanations for the lower victimisation rates of women. For instance, due to gender inequalities in access to labour markets, many women cannot afford to pay bribes for necessary basic services (TI Sri Lanka 2014; TI 2014; UNIFEM & UNDP 2010). Even if they wanted to pay a bribe, they could not afford it. In addition, despite the evidence from the private sector in Uganda presented above, women's lack of resources may make them less interesting targets for public officials who extort bribes (Iskandarian 2008). Perhaps more importantly, the survey questions only ask about monetary bribes. As a result, the data is blind with respect to the prevalence of other practices of which women are more likely to be the victims, such as sexual extortion.

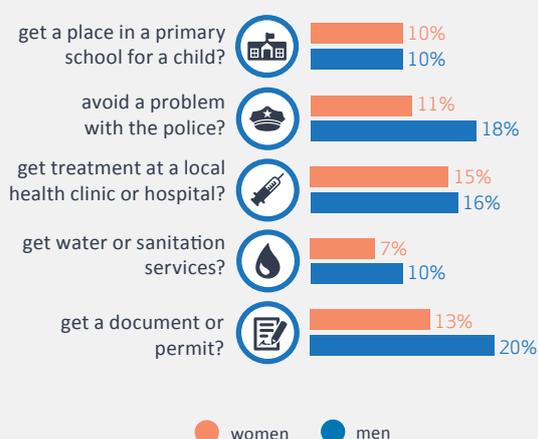
## Implications for policy and programming

Plausible arguments and convincing anecdotic and context-specific evidence show that in some situations women suffer more from corruption than men; gender indeed seems to matter. In particular, it is probably safe to assume that women are more vulnerable to sexual extortion. Also, the evidence generally shows that the gendered impact of corruption is related to societal gender roles, inequality, and discrimination. Women's disadvantages in many areas of social life result in

## PERCEPTION AND VICTIMISATION BY GENDER

### AFRICA

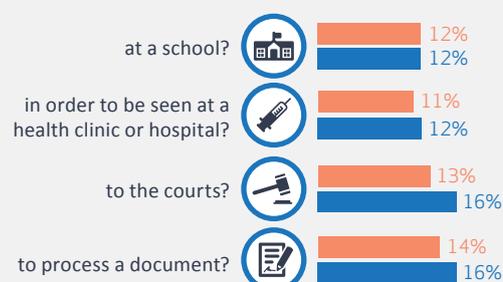
*In the past year, have you had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favor to government officials in order to:*



Source: Afrobarometer (round 5) & Latin America Public Opinion Poll 2012. To facilitate comparison with LAPOP, the data from the Afrobarometer have been coded "yes" and "no", and the relevant question has been rephrased accordingly.

### LATIN AMERICA

*In the past year, have you had to pay a bribe:*



*In the past year, have you been asked to pay a bribe:*





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greater vulnerability to corruption compared to men, who may enjoy more power, better protection, and access to countervailing strategies, including the justice system.

However, the scarce quantitative empirical evidence tends to show that more men than women are affected overall, at least for direct victimisation. It is important to underscore that the available data does not capture indirect effects of corruption – which probably has a greater overall impact. Also, the data reflects only what is reported in the surveys and may not capture sexual extortion, or reflect existing inequalities and cultural factors driving the relationship between men and women. To conclude that women suffer more from corruption may however be too broad a generalisation, based on existing quantitative evidence. It is clear, however, that women suffer in particularly heinous ways.

Overall, the question is far from being resolved and calls for careful and independent academic research beyond anecdotal evidence. A necessary step towards a better understanding of the issue is to carefully review existing quantitative survey information, which will be done in a U4 Issue Paper in 2015. In addition, more gender specific data on corruption and governance should be collected,

and complement with qualitative and experimental research.

For development cooperation, the evidence reviewed here is an additional argument to continue supporting partner countries in promoting equal rights and opportunities to women. Such policies also address some of the root causes of the gendered impacts of corruption.

The arguments in this Brief can also motivate gender-sensitive anti-corruption programming, and corruption-sensitive gender programming. The latter can help find strategies to break corrupt power structures that impede equal opportunities for men and women. Corruption-sensitive gender programming can also minimise embezzlement and biased attribution of development funds destined to areas that women's welfare depend on. Gender-sensitive anti-corruption programming, in turn, can improve anti-corruption policies for different purposes according to gender – especially to address sexual or quid pro quo abuse. Therefore, the design of anti-corruption policies would benefit from including a gender perspective at the diagnostic stage. In particular, policies should include specific strategies to reduce women's exposure to opportunities for sexual extortion.

## Endnotes

1. See also U4 Expert Answer "Gender, Corruption, and Education" <http://goo.gl/Yi2s85>
2. Support for this argument is available in Transparency International (2010), UNIFEM and UNDP (2010), and GTZ (2004).
3. In 2014, the worldwide average proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments was just 20.3% (World Development Indicators).
4. TI (2011), UNIFEM and UNDP (2010), or GTZ (2004).
5. Latin American Public Opinion Project <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/> and Afrobarometer <http://www.afrobarometer.org/>

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