

# *Attitudes and Behaviors of Caribbean Women and Men*

## *Toward Partner Violence and Sexual Relationships*

NIMHD Study Number: RFA-MD-11-002; Clinical Trials Study #: NCT02158962,  
UVI/IRB # 460913-4

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**CARIBBEAN EXPLORATORY NIMHD RESEARCH CENTER  
SCHOOL OF NURSING, UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS  
P20MD002286**



A tropical beach scene with palm trees, white sand, and turquoise water under a blue sky.

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A tropical beach scene with palm trees and turquoise water under a blue sky. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

## Overarching Study Background

- Health disparities among African American and African Caribbean populations
- Intimate Partner Abuse (IPA) is related to health disparities for women of color in the US
- IPA is a risk factor for a variety of physical and mental health problems in US based studies

A tropical beach scene with palm trees, a sandy shore, and clear blue water under a bright sky. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

## Overarching Study Background

- The USVI has the second highest rate per capita of HIV/AIDS of the states or territories in the US.
- Most of the women who are infected with HIV/AIDS in the USVI get it from a male partner.
- Women in the USVI who are abused were more likely to have experienced forced sex.
- Women in the USVI who are abused are more at risk for HIV/AIDS mostly because a lot of their partner's had other partners.

# Overarching Study Background

- Prevalence of IPV
  - **Affects 13 – 62% of women globally; lifetime prevalence most often estimated around 30% (Garcia-Moreno, 2006)**
  - **In US, 32.9% of women experience lifetime physical IPV, 18.6% rape and 44.6% other sexual violence, with 9.4% of women reporting lifetime partner rape (Black et al, 2011)**
  - **Using BRFSS data, 22.5% of women in the US Virgin Islands report lifetime IPV vs. 26.4% overall (18 states) (Breiding, Black & Ryan,2008)**
- **Gap: Prior to this study** no data on prevalence of IPA in US Virgin Islands among women in health care settings compared to mainland US
  - **No prevalence analysis specific to the USIV**
  - **No study of health consequences of IPA in USVI**



# Setting: USVI

- Unincorporated territory of the U.S. made up of 3 main islands (St. Thomas, St. Croix, St. John) and smaller islands
- Population (2011 est.) 109,574
  - **76% Black, 13% White, 11% other**
  - **Median household income: \$41,834**
  - **4.8 immigrants/1,000 pop**
- Most of population US citizens
- Official language: English



A tropical beach scene with palm trees and turquoise water under a clear blue sky.

## STUDY DESIGN AND METHODS

- Qualitative component to adapt components of an intervention study for *Caribbean women experiencing intimate partner violence* so that it is culturally appropriate.
- Qualitative data used to explain findings in a mixed methods methods approach.
- Focus group methodology and grounded theory analysis using concepts of culture and context were used to adapt intervention materials to the USVI context.

A tropical beach scene with palm trees, a sandy shore, and clear blue water under a bright sky. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# STUDY DESIGN AND METHODS

- Methods used successfully with abused women of African American and/or Hispanic origin in mainland settings but not yet in the US Virgin Islands
- Separate focus groups were conducted with three specific groups:
  - 1) abused women
  - 2) USVI men
  - 3) health care providers and a combination of domestic violence providers, community HIV/STDs prevention workers, and members of the judicial system.



A tropical beach scene with palm trees and turquoise water under a blue sky. The text 'SPECIFIC AIM 1' is overlaid in the top right corner.

## SPECIFIC AIM 1

- To combine and adapt the Sister to Sister and Empowerment Interventions for a US Virgin Islands context
  - Conducted focus groups with abused women and with men on each island as well as with health care providers , governmental, judicial , domestic violence, social and education systems and service providers.
  - Obtained input on adapting the content of a combined risk reduction intervention for women in the USVI
  - **Determined how best to conduct the intervention to be culturally appropriate.**

A tropical beach scene with palm trees and turquoise water under a blue sky. The title 'INTRODUCTION AND CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION' is overlaid in large, bold, blue capital letters.

# INTRODUCTION AND CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION

- **Definition of focus group and purpose**
- **Who will be participating in the focus groups**
  - **Focus groups on both Islands of St Thomas and St Croix**
- **What will happen during the focus groups**
- **How long will the focus group last?**
- **What happens to information shared in the**
- **Risks and Discomforts**
- **Voluntary**
- **Privacy (HIPAA) Disclosure**
- **Confidentiality**
- **Questions**
- **Consent to Participate**

A tropical beach scene with palm trees, a sandy shore, and clear blue water under a bright sky. The title 'Procedures, Data Collection and Analyses' is overlaid in white text on the right side of the image.

# Procedures, Data Collection and Analyses

- **All focus group sessions were conducted by experienced co-investigators or consultants skilled in leading group or individual sessions on sensitive topics**
- **Represented a mix of local and off island investigators familiar with the ethnography and social and cultural contexts of the islands.**
- **Sessions were audio recorded to facilitate data analysis.**
- **Focus group data were analyzed using Atlas.ti and NVivo software to facilitate ability to rapidly code the data and better understand the most useful conceptual models for adapting the interventions for use with Virgin Islander women**
- **A constant comparative method of data analysis was used until data saturation was reached.**

A tropical beach scene with palm trees and turquoise water under a clear blue sky. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# Women's Focus Groups

Themes underlying attitudes, perceptions and experiences of partner abuse identified by women emerged and included

- 1) Female vulnerability and male dominance/control in relationships
- 2) Perceptions of community silence on topic of partner abuse and stigmatization
- 3) Lack of community resources and
- 4) Resistance to safe sexual practices by abusive partners and increased STI/HIV risks.



# Women's Focus Groups

## Description of participants

### **Theme: Female vulnerability /Male dominance**

“That’s the top one for abuse. That there and jealousy and suspicion. To me that should be the top for the list because that the two most common ones that really cause abuse in the relationship. Them two stuff; jealousy, suspicion and lying. That should be on the top”

### **Cycle of Abuse (DOVE)**

“Which on the one hand, I understand that, but on the other hand, that’s me, while being in the program you know, women have to be, you know like empowered so when and if that does happen, because face it, we are in a small island so things do go around. You know they have that confidence and that power to deal with it the appropriate way. Break the cycle. You know? And I think that’s what this program is all about; trying to break the cycle at one point or the other.”

“And then another problem also is most women think that abuse is only physical abuse. It’s not only physical abuse; verbal, physical, emotional, there are a lot of different types of abuse. Most people only think that it’s just they hit you. That’s not the only kind of abuse “

A tropical beach scene with palm trees, greenery, and a clear blue sky over the ocean. The title 'Women's Focus Groups' is overlaid in large blue font.

# Women's Focus Groups

## IPV information/Danger Assessment

“I think it will empower women. I think it will give women the strength if they never had the strength to walk out of an abusive relationship. I think you know that would motivate them. That will show them facts that they can do better being away from an abusive relationship. I think that would be one of the good outcomes.”

## SAFETY PLANNING

“For me even if you are not involved maybe in an actually fighting abusive relationship, maybe it would maybe just verbal, still you are educating yourself. You really educating yourself and if somebody else you know, might even be involved or starting to get involved in a relationship like that”

“Like your cellphone. Like say me and you, ok you always have a lock on my phone and my boyfriend don't have a lock on it. He will be like why I don't have lock to your phone. And if you give him the lock for your phone, he will search through everything, your pictures your messages, your contacts. Yeah. Like that. If you know you going to have a phone, make sure you keep it organized and clean and if everything out of the way to avoid situations and avoid problems.”



## WOMEN'S FOCUS GROUPS

### Theme: Community Silence

#### Stigmatization:

*“Yeah. Ahm. I don’t know. Like for me it doesn’t matter. But for some people they might be like, you know, maybe they don’t want to identify themselves with abuse. You know?”*

“See the Islands so small that everybody know everybody. I know her. I know him. I think that’s how it’s spreading (HIV). Everybody feel comfortable with everybody and just do stuff without using protection or whatever. So that’s where all of that comes from. Because we all feel so safe with somebody. Yeah, like no problem.

Community Silence on the topic makes it difficult to stir up support and demands for additional resources.

A tropical beach scene with palm trees, a sandy shore, and clear blue water under a bright sky.

# Women's Focus Group

- Victim Blaming

*“To me, I feel like every girl out here, they does dress to just get attention how they want. The way how you dress, is the way how the man does treat you in the street. Then how you act in the street, is how the man will treat you. So you going act like a lil’ \_\_\_ that’s how you will get treat. So most of these girls out here, how they does move is how they getting treat. If they choose to downgrade they self to man and do whatever man, have them doing whatever, it’s their fault.”*

**Such comments indicated that socially when women dress provocatively they are asking for something sexual to happen.**

**This issue needs to be engaged....no woman ever deserves to be sexually assaulted no matter how short or tight her clothing.**





# Women's Focus Group

## Theme: Lack of Community Resources:

*“Only the people them who have money or have private insurance to go to private doctors. But beside Medicaid now, everybody going to the hospital, the clinic”*

*“And then another problem also is most women think that abuse is only physical abuse. It's not only physical abuse; verbal, physical, emotional, there are a lot of different types of abuse. Most people only think that it's just they hit you. That's not the only kind of abuse. Need help for emotional and psychological abuse”*

*“We got to wrestling. Someone calls the police. Cause most likely, I am not going to be able to do it because he is beating me. The police are supposed to arrive, and they are supposed to investigate what happened. Ask around. Ask the neighbors. Even though most likely the neighbors aren't going to speak up either. And after they get that part done, well before they get that part done, they have to take him out of the house. Usually, they don't even do that. They leave them inside of the house and they would just say as she said, if we have to come back one of you guys are going to get arrested.”*

A tropical beach scene with palm trees and turquoise water under a blue sky.

# WOMEN'S FOCUS GROUPS

- **Theme: Resistance to safe sexual practices by abusive partners**

“It will be hard for her. Well it going be hard for the person who in an abusive relationship to say no, tell a partner no you can't have sex because like I say, she don't have no say.”

- Reducing STD/HIV risk in IPA relationships

“She can't have no control over it and if she run away, come back. Because ain't no way she could hide to protect herself. Because anybody who want sex or who aggressive like that ain't going put on no condom. He feel like ok, I could do what I want to do. I want have sex with you bareback I will have sex with you Bareback”.

- Condom use and safe sex practices

“Well the other problem is the abusers usually aren't, not even the abusers, guys in common. They don't like condoms. They don't like condoms”.

A tropical beach scene with palm trees, a sandy shore, and clear turquoise water under a blue sky. The title 'WOMEN'S FOCUS GROUPS' is overlaid in large blue letters.

# WOMEN'S FOCUS GROUPS

Conflicts around having sex (partner drinking, forced sex, unprotected sex, etc.)

*“That’s when the forced sex is likely to happen when you might be forced into it or you just submit to keep the peace”*

*“Exactly. And that’s another thing. Another problem is sometimes they force you, but then again sometimes it’s just that they are rough and when that happens the woman usually back off completely. They don’t want to have sex with their partners. And even if we try to talk to them, it’s still going to be a problem. It is always going to be an argument.*

Support for Programs for abused women

*“To me I feel like our Police Department in..... is crap. Sorry to say. They don’t do nothing about this situation, but just want to arrest two people, so I feel like it don’t make no sense to call the police to do anything about the situation, because they don’t do nothing but give you a piece of paper and say ok here.*

*“They wouldn’t really do anything about the problem. They need to actually step up and say, you know what? This needs to stop. This is wrong. She is a lady or what not and just even though they don’t carry him down to the precinct? They need to scare them or do something. They don’t do anything.”*

A tropical beach scene with palm trees, a sandy shore, and clear turquoise water under a blue sky. The text 'MEN'S FOCUS GROUPS' is overlaid in white at the top right.

# **MEN'S FOCUS GROUPS**

## **Themes Emerging**

- 1. Upholding gender expectations**
- 2. Fearing loss of control**
- 3. Deflecting responsibilities**



# MEN'S FOCUS GROUPS

- Description of Participants
- **Themes: Gender Norms/Expectations**  
Many factors influencing violence against women in the US Virgin Islands

## **Masculinity and cultural influences**

*“I’m the man. I’m in control. You can’t be bossing me to do too much around”*

## **Justifying violence**

*“ But the attitude is that it is like an ownership between the two of them. You can tell them where to go, who to talk to, where not to, what time to be home at night, etc. But I think a lot of the violence occurs without thinking it is a snap instant response when sometimes they are pushed to a breaking point and a lot people don’t know where their breaking point is”.*

A tropical beach scene with palm trees, a sandy shore, and clear blue water under a bright sky. The title 'MEN'S FOCUS GROUP' is overlaid in large blue letters on the right side of the image.

# MEN'S FOCUS GROUP

## Theme: Upholding Gender Expectations

- Justifying violence

“There are some cases where a male would say women dressing up sexy like she's asking for it and there are a number of cases you can see them a lot in S Thomas where they are dressing up like that on purpose.....because you see this everyday .....biggest word describing it is flirting....And that is what instigate mostly everything that has to be involved with a man fighting a girl or the man fighting the other man and the girl. “

A tropical beach scene with palm trees and turquoise water under a clear blue sky. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

## Theme: Gender Expectations

*“Some women feel like they have to get control over men....Some women really dominate a man. I think the most I could ever do to a woman is push her. But I don't think I could close my fist or open my hand and hit a woman, cause I never saw that from my father. That's where it goes back to a father figure”.*

A tropical beach scene with palm trees, a sandy shore, and clear blue water under a bright sky.

## Theme: Gender Expectations

- Sexual Health.
- Reducing the risk of STI's and HIV by prevention activities such as condom use, getting tested for STI's and HIV as a responsibility of men?

*“...nobody wants to get that test. I mean some people find it insulting, I mean let's say we go out right and I thinking we getting close to the time where we going to have sexual intercourse I can't tell you “Hey let's go get an HIV test”. She going take it as an insult. She going be saying “Boy you thinking I have AIDS?”*”



A tropical beach scene with palm trees, a sandy shore, and clear blue water under a bright sky.

# Theme: Gender Expectations

- Sexual Health

*“You're out there with a girl and the girl asks if you have a condom, you should ask the girl the same thing. If the girl really wants to protect herself she would actually have it too just in case the guy don't have it”*

*“It will be hard for she, but say it's somebody who not in a, well ok. Well it going be hard for the person who in an abusive relationship to say no, tell a partner no you can't have sex because like I say, she don't have no say”*

A tropical beach scene with palm trees, a sandy shore, and clear blue water under a bright sky. The title 'MEN'S FOCUS GROUPS' is overlaid in large blue letters on the right side of the image.

# MEN'S FOCUS GROUPS

## **THEME: LOSS OF CONTROL**

Things men can do to reduce the risk of a women being hurt (physically, emotionally, sexually) during domestic violence altercations

“I don't care if she hit you 20 times whatever. It's wrong. Now I think it's ways around that. I think if I was ever in the predicament, I think the most I could ever do to a woman is push her. If I can't push her I might slam her on the ground. I know I think I'm going to hold her. But I don't think I could close my fist or open my hand and hit a woman; cause I never saw that from my father. That's where it goes back to; a father figure. I see my mother cuss my father numerous of times. But did I ever once see he ever hold up his hand? No. So that's why I always come back to that”

A tropical beach scene with palm trees, a sandy shore, and clear blue water under a bright sky.

## Theme: Deflecting Responsibility

- **Deflecting responsibility: “...they push a man to his limits.” 922)**
- **Or**
- **“don’t push his buttons.”**
- “I’ve seen this already before and its not a pretty thing. Like the man would be trying to move away leave the argument and the woman would still come at the man, in his face, and he trying to get away from it, trying to leave the situation and she provokes him and provokes him till he does something he doesn’t want to do ”

A tropical beach scene with palm trees and turquoise water under a clear blue sky. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

## Theme: Deflecting Responsibility

*“Woman just provoke us to do the things we don’t want to do. Like we control ourselves but they just saying like I want you to do this. I want you to do, like they just begging just saying why haven’t you done this yet on the first step? Like why have self-control the first time. Because if you see him give you a break on the first two why you going go for the third time? Because you do want something to happen right?”*



# Fear/Control

*“I’m the man. I’m in control. You can’t be bossing me to do too much around.”*

*...”But you know what I think it could be? Some men just don’t want to get hurt. Because in life the best feeling in the world is being in love but the worse feeling in the world is getting your heart crush...So to protect myself...That’s why they have multiple girls...”*

*“I done hear a lot of people say, they isn't want to be tested, why? Because they are afraid of the outcome.....the fear of getting a disease or having a disease.”*

Male participants described attitudes as underpinnings to subsequent violent responses and sexual behavior decisions



# DISCUSSION

- These findings demonstrate the complex ways culturally-framed norms intersect with sexual health behaviors.
- Results from this qualitative research provided the basis for our researchers and practitioners to develop a culturally sensitive intimate partner violence empowerment program for abused African Caribbean women in the USVI.
- Using concepts of culture and context we adapted intervention materials to the USVI context that have been used successfully with abused women of African American and/or Hispanic origin in mainland USA settings but not yet in the US Virgin Islands.
- The USVI is unique due to its position as a U.S. territory infused with the cultural expectations of a Caribbean island.

A tropical beach scene with palm trees, a sandy shore, and clear blue water under a bright sky. The title 'RECOMMENDATIONS' is overlaid on the right side of the image in a large, bold, blue font.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- Essential that community attitudes and cultural contexts that promote prevention are highlighted
- Education, practice and policies that reduce tolerance and acceptance of intimate partner abuse and other acts of violence and subsequently decrease the risks physical and mental health consequences including STDs and HIV/AIDS for African Caribbean and African American women
- Strengthening and re-establishing cultural beliefs and that support self-respect, self-worth and self pride among women and men

A tropical beach scene with palm trees and turquoise water under a blue sky.

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# THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION



**THE CARIBBEAN EXPLORATORY RESEARCH CENTER OF EXCELLENCE  
SCHOOL OF NURGINS, UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS,  
IN CONJUNCTION WITH CASE WESTERN UNIVERSITY,  
JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY, & WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY**

