

Gun Safety in Somaliland: Mines Advisory Group Community Safety Phone Survey

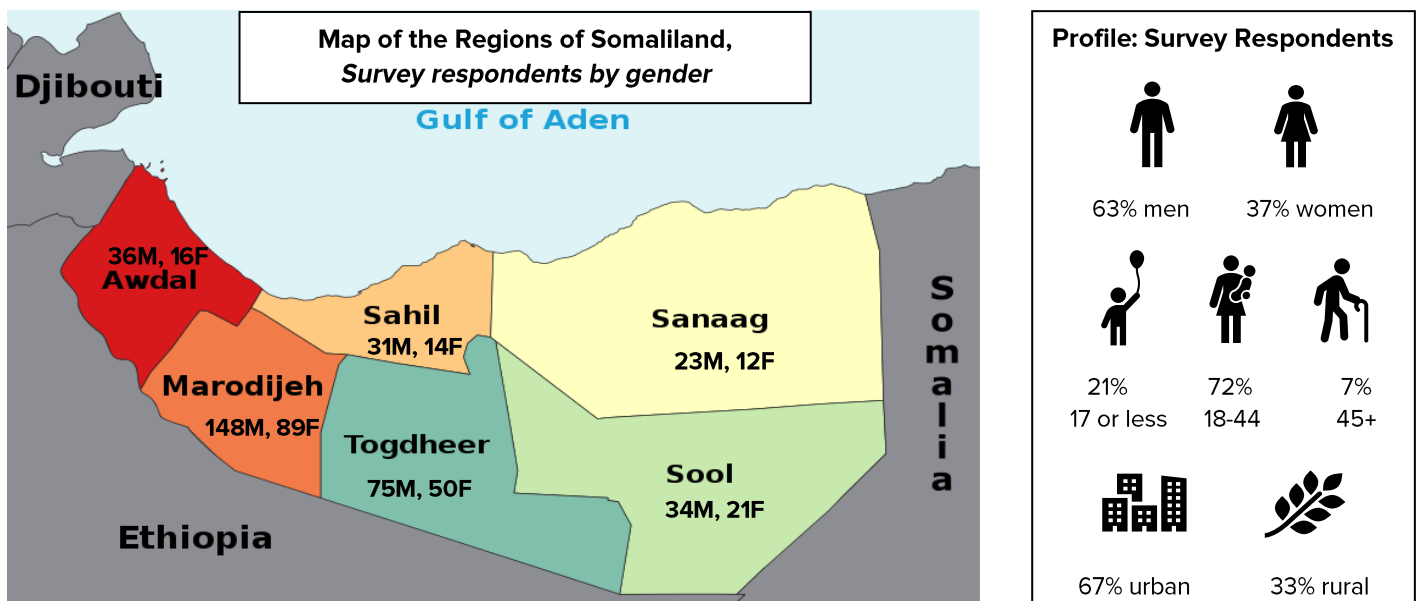


Anecdotally, there is a high rate of gun ownership and gun-related violent incidents in the five regions of Somaliland, with 2018 records from the Hargeisa Hospital reporting that gun incidents are the second leading cause of death for those admitted into the hospital,¹ but there has been very little recent research conducted on community safety issues.

In June 2021, with support from the German Federal Foreign Office, MAG Somalia conducted a telephone survey on individuals' knowledge, attitudes and practices related to gun safety in Somaliland. The survey collected 530 responses from men, women, and adolescent men and women throughout the country. The results of the survey will be used to adapt MAG's ongoing community safety programming, and form a springboard for future research into the impact of small arms and light weapons in the community in Somaliland.²

Methodology

MAG created and recorded a 13-question questionnaire in Somali with multiple choice options selected on the phone key pad. Viamo, a mobile services company, used a random-digit dialing method to call 10,927 numbers, of which 2,775 were answered. The survey included an introductory message explaining the purpose of the exercise and that consent to participate could be withdrawn at any time by hanging up the phone, after which users were required to press '1' to consent to take the survey. Of the 2,775 pick-ups, 571 people agreed to participate in the questionnaire, and 551 fully completed the survey.



Gun Ownership & Safety

MAG was interested to assess the level of household gun ownership in Somaliland, but reluctant to ask this potentially sensitive question directly through a pre-recorded call; instead, the question was framed indirectly, as "If there is a gun in your household, do you think it is stored safely?", with responses to the multiple choice selections "Yes, it is stored safely" and "No, it is not stored safely" used as an estimate for gun ownership. Using

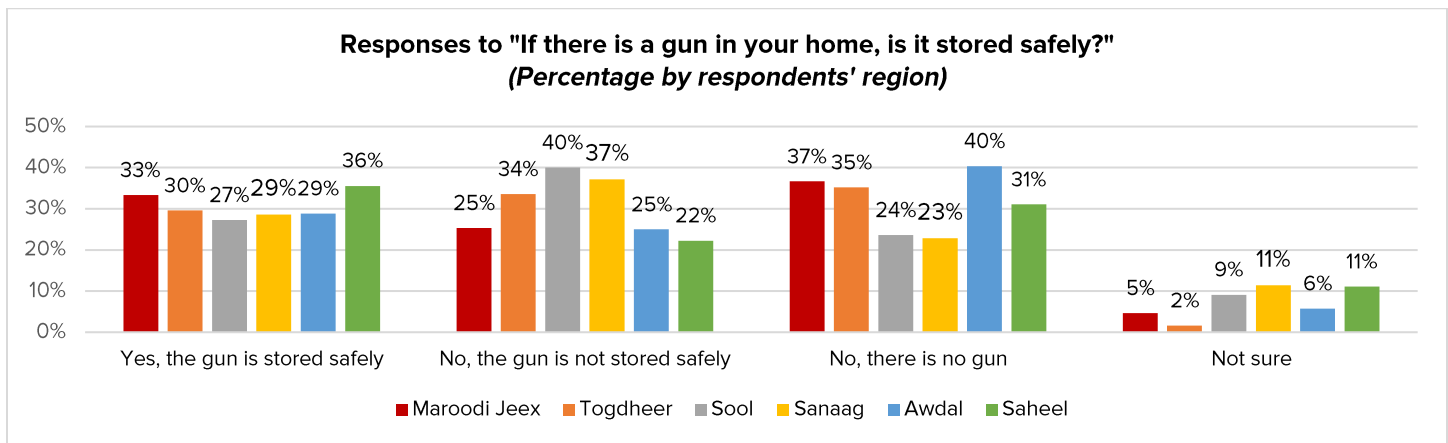
¹ Unpublished data, c/o Hargeisa Hospital, 2018

² MAG Somalia is grateful for the support of Auswärtiges Amt, whose generous support enabled this research, and the Somaliland Ministry of Interior for their support and partnership in MAG's community safety work and assistance in reviewing and approving the survey tool.

³ Map is c/o Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regions_of_Somaliland#/media/File:Somaliland_regions.svg

this limited methodology,⁴ the survey estimates that 60% of respondents have a gun in their home. These responses are 14 percentage points lower than was reported in the most recent small arms-related survey conducted in the country,⁵ which found that gun ownership in the country was about 74% - so we expect that our survey may underestimate the true rate of gun ownership, for potential reasons including: people are reluctant to answer this question over the phone, people did not understand the question – or it could be that gun ownership has truly declined in the past decade.

Interestingly, 65% of men responded with one of these two inferred gun ownership responses, versus 51% of women – without further demographic information it is difficult to know whether this means that perhaps men have guns that their female relatives are unaware of, or whether female-headed households are less likely to own firearms. More men (31%) than women (26%) felt that the guns in their home were not stored safely.

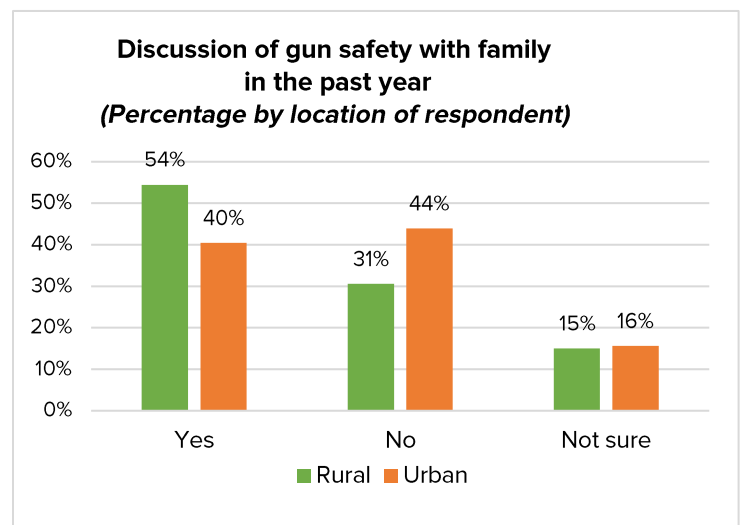


Firearm ownership also varied somewhat by region, with the lowest rate in Awdal, where 54% of people reported gun ownership, and the highest in Sool, at 67%. Gun ownership appears to be slightly more common among rural (63%) than urban (59%) respondents, but a significantly higher percentage of rural gun owners (40%) felt that their gun was stored safely compared with urban respondents (27%).

Less than half (45%) of respondents affirmed that they had discussed gun safety with their families in the past year, with the remaining respondents either saying they had not discussed the topic or were not sure. Rural people were more likely (54% vs 40% urban) to answer that they had discussed gun safety with their families in the past year.

Two-thirds of women responded either that they had not or were not sure that they had discussed gun safety, while 51% of men said that they had, indicating a gender gap in discussions of the topic.

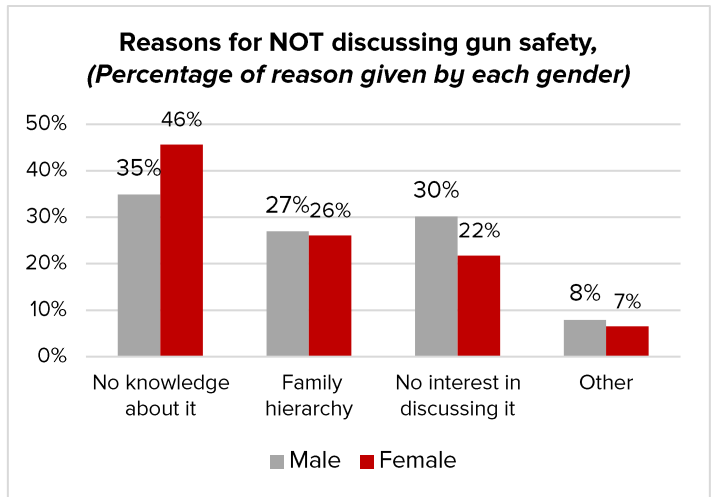
When those 218 people who answered definitively that they had NOT discussed gun safety were asked why not, they were given multiple choice options, either 1) they had no knowledge about the topic to be



⁴ When gun ownership is referenced within this report, it is based on this method, estimated from the gun storage question's responses

⁵ Danish Demining Group. (2009) Community Safety & Small Arms in Somaliland: Analysis and Recommendations.

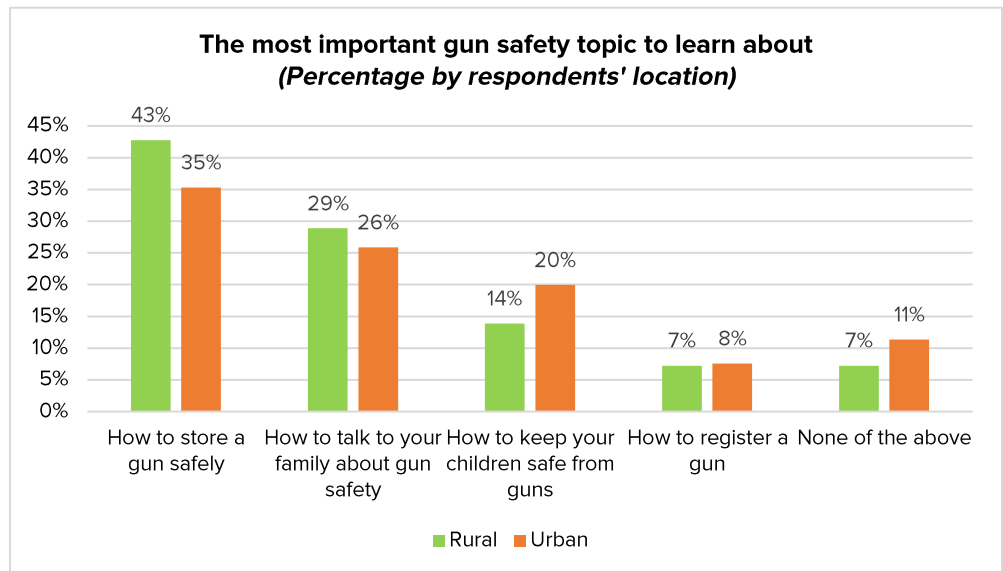
able to discuss it; 2) there was someone else in the household more suited to discussing the topic; 3) they had no interest in discussing it; 4) other. For both men and women, a lack of knowledge about the topic was the most common reason for not discussing it (45% of women respondents and 35% of men). “No knowledge” was also the most common response across gun ownership categories – even among those who reported that they definitely did not own a gun, more people said they did not discuss gun safety because they lacked knowledge (34%) than because they lacked interest (31%) possibly indicating an awareness of the topic’s importance in their family’s lives, regardless of the presence of a gun in the home.



Interestingly, “no knowledge” was the most common reason given for not discussing gun safety in all regions of Somaliland except that with the second-highest level of gun ownership (Sanaag) and the lowest (Awdal) – in both, “no interest in discussing it” was most commonly cited (by 38% of respondents in Sanaag and 44% in Awdal).

Gun Safety Knowledge

Respondents were asked what aspect of gun safety was most important for them to learn. Possible responses were: ‘How to store a gun safely’, ‘How to talk to your family about gun safety’, ‘How to keep your children safe from guns’, ‘How to register a gun’ or ‘none of the above’.

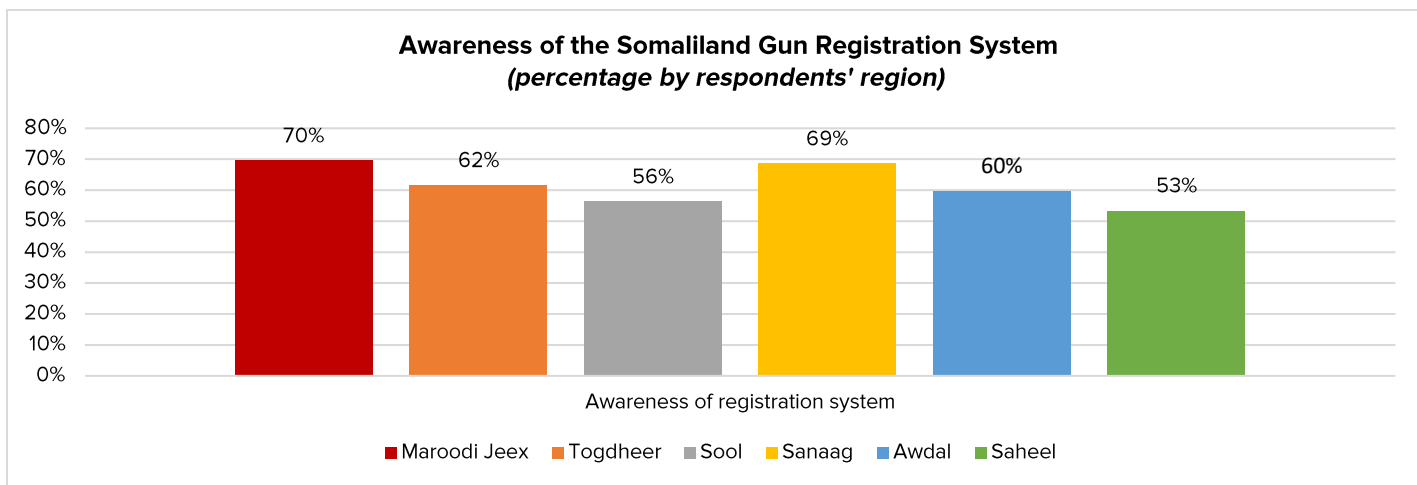


The responses to the question were consistent across ages, genders, and rural/urban locations, with respondents

agreeing that ‘how to store a gun safely’ is the most important, followed by ‘how to talk to your family about gun safety’, and ‘how to keep your children safe from guns’. Only 7% of total participants felt that ‘how to register a gun’ was the most important. Respondents who reported not having a gun in their household rated ‘how to talk to your family about gun safety’ as most important, while those who had reported that their gun was already stored safely still prioritized learning about safe storage.

Gun registration

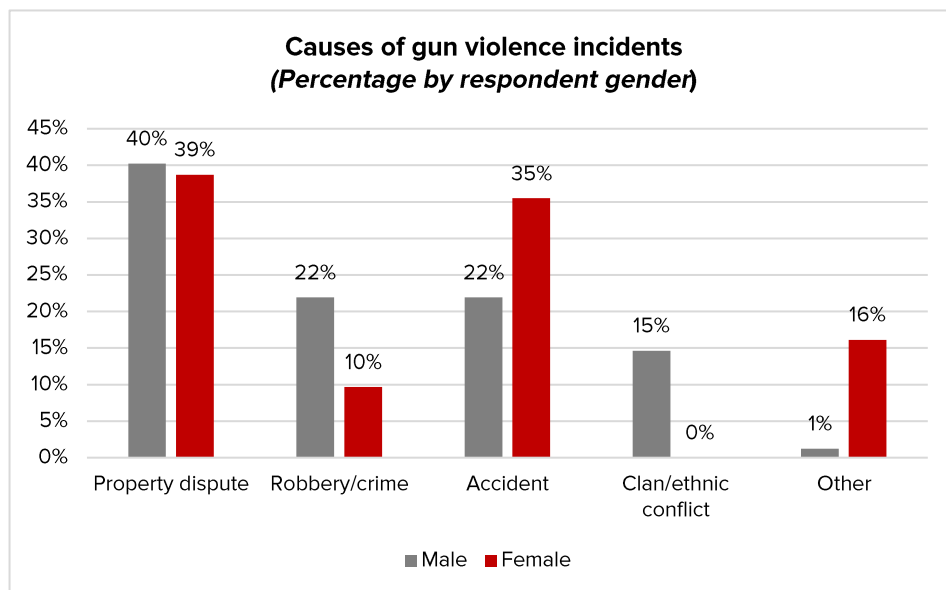
Respondents were asked about their awareness of Somaliland’s gun registration system. The responses were simple multiple choice (“yes”, “no”, “not sure”) so are unable to assess the depth of respondents’ knowledge. Over 64% of respondents (70% of men and 54% of women) reported that they were aware of the registration system. There was not a large difference between rural (63%) and urban (65%) respondents, and there was a greater than 50% awareness across all regions.



Community Gun Violence

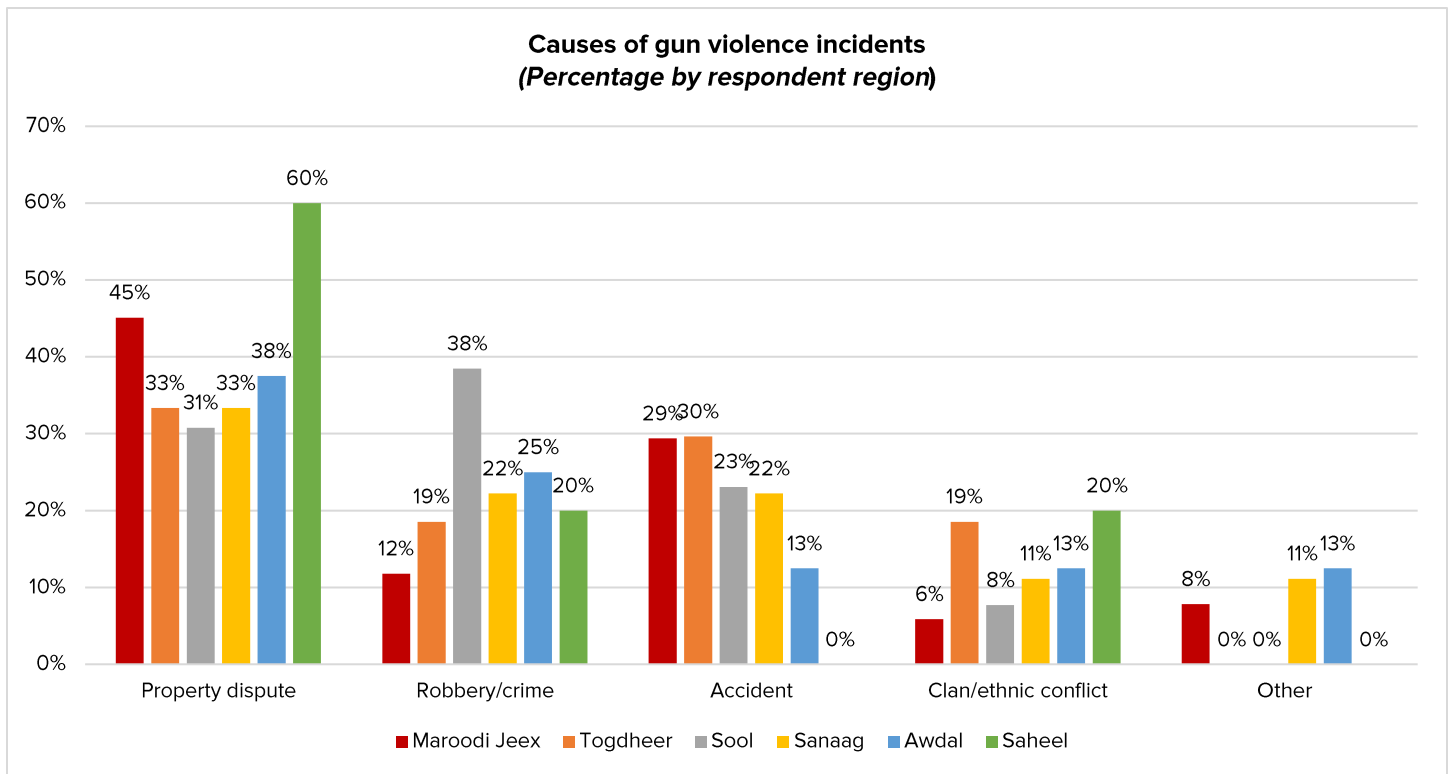
Most respondents (66%) had not heard about any gun-related incidents in their family or community, while 21% had heard of an incident and 13% were not sure. However, 28% of respondents age 17 or younger reported knowing of a gun violence incident – the highest percentage of any age group. Men were also 9 percentage points more likely (24% vs 15%) than women to have heard of a gun violence incident, and 27% of urban residents had heard of an incident compared to 18% of rural respondents, which may be reflective of the density of social networks among men and in urban environments.

The 113 people who reported having heard of a gun-related incident were asked a follow-up question about the cause of the incident. The most common cause of violence was property disputes (40%), followed by accidental shootings (26%), robbery/crime (19%), clan/ethnic conflict (11%), and other (5%). Property disputes were the most common cause of violence across ages, genders, and locations, but the reported rate was 10% higher in rural than urban areas (45% vs 35%), whereas ‘accidents’ were reported at a 9-percentage point higher rate in urban than rural areas (29% vs 20%).



Interestingly, 15% of men had heard of a clan or ethnic dispute, compared to no women, whereas women were 13 percentage points more likely to have heard of violence resulting from a gun accident – possibly reflecting the different types of information men and women learn and share in the public sphere.

Finally, there were considerable differences in the reported prevalence of gun-related incidents across regions, with respondents from Sahel reporting the highest rate (60%) of property dispute related violence, whereas Togdheer (19%) and Sahel (20%) reported the highest rates of clan or ethnic-related violence.⁶



Conclusions & Further Research

This research is a preliminary stage of what must be a more in-depth mixed-methods approach to explore more nuanced questions. These issues include the prevalence of gun ownership among male- vs female-headed households, the differing reasons why rural and urban households and people of different ages choose to own guns, and the ways that different people obtain information related to gun safety, weapons registration, and gun violence in their communities.

For MAG’s community safety program, these results, particularly those related to gun safety information, indicate that many people would be willing to discuss gun safety with their families, but lack the information to do so – a promising entry point for risk education interventions tailored to different demographic groups in the country. MAG has developed a gun safety risk education curriculum tailored to different ages and genders, and is currently piloting risk education sessions in communities in Togdheer, Sahel, and Maroodi Jeex regions. MAG is also launching a comprehensive radio campaign, airing across the country, which includes radio advertisements, call-in talk shows, and a narrative drama, to increase awareness about safe gun storage and weapons registration. The specific messaging for the radio campaign was developed based on the priorities identified from this survey.

In the future, MAG plans to work with the regional governments to increase local capacity for mobile weapons registration in rural and hard-to-reach areas, and to explore the possibilities of expanding Conflict Transformation training (currently offered to police personnel) to other community leaders, to enhance the capacity for conflict resolution and reduce violence in communities.

⁶ It is important to note that while respondents were asked specifically about incidents of violence within their own communities, ‘community’ may not always represent a geographical unit (and could be interpreted as clan or extended family), so incidents reported by respondents from a particular region may not necessarily have occurred there.