

**THE EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE FAMILY IN KENYA
KENYA ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLORS
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**PAPER PRESENTED
BY
JONATHAN KIPROTICH CHEBOGUT
&
GODFREY KIPKORIR NGENO**

**DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICE - WARENG DISTRICT
P.O. BOX 65, MOI UNIVERSITY.**

Cellphone: 0722 297 003

- **BIOGRAPHY**

- Name of Author: JONATHAN KIPROTICH CHEBOGUT
- Date of Birth: 25th December, 1970
- Marital Status: Married
- Sex: Male
- Age: 40 Years
- Email: jonathankchebogut@yahoo.com
- Address: District Education Office - Wareng District
- P.o. Box 65, Moi University
- Cellphone: 0722 297 003

- **EDUCATION**

- | Year | Institution | Award |
|-------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 2009-Date: | Moi University: | PhD (ongoing) Educational Psychology |
| 2003-2005: | Moi University | M.Phil in Guidance & Counseling |
| 1990-1994: | Moi University | B.Ed Arts (Hons) |
| 1988-1989: | St. Patricks' H.S- Iten. | KACE Certificate |
| 1984-1987: | St. Patricks' H.S- Iten. | KCE Certificate |
| 1977 – 1983 | Kapkitony F.P.S. | CPE Certificate |

- **WORKING EXPERIENCE**

- | Year | Institution | Position |
|----------------------|---|---|
| 2009-Date: | Wareng District | District Centre for Early Childhood Education.(DICECE)Programme Officer |
| Sept 2008-June 2009: | Davis High School | Head teacher |
| 2005-August 2008: | Singore Girls' | Senior Head of Department
(Technical and Creative) |
| 2001-2003 | Kimwarer Sec School | Head teacher |
| 1999-2001: | Keiyo District | DICECE Lecturer |
| 1994-1998: | Kimuron Sec School | Teacher |
| • Ambition: | To be a reknown Researcher in Counseling and Psychology | |

Abstract

- In the past two decades, there has been growing recognition of the prevalence of domestic violence in our society. Moreover, it has become apparent that some individuals are at greater risk for victimization than others. Domestic violence has adverse effects on individuals, families, and society in general.
- Over 3 million children are at risk of exposure to parental violence each year (Carlson, 1984). Children from homes where domestic violence occurs are physically or sexually abused and/or seriously neglected at a rate 15 times the national average (McKay, 1994). Approximately, 45% to 70% of battered women in shelters have reported the presence of child abuse in their home (Meichenbaum, 1994). About two-thirds of abused children are being parented by battered women (McKay, 1994). Of the abused children, they are three times more likely to have been abused by their fathers.
- Domestic violence includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, and abuse to property and pets (Ganley, 1989). Exposure to this form of violence has considerable potential to be perceived as life-threatening by those victimized and can leave them with a sense of vulnerability, helplessness, and in extreme cases, horror. Physical abuse refers to any behavior that involves the intentional use of force against the body of another person that risks physical injury, harm, and/or pain (Dutton, 1992).

- The survey research design will be used to obtain the relevant information on the incidence of domestic violence in Kenya. Domestic violence is widespread and occurs among all socioeconomic groups. In a national survey of over 6,000 American families, it was estimated that between 53% and 70% of male batterers (i.e., they assaulted their wives) also frequently abused their children (Straus & Gelles, 1990). Other research suggests that women who have been hit by their husbands were twice as likely as other women to abuse a child (CWP, 1995).
- Studies of the incidence of physical and sexual violence in the lives of children suggest that this form of violence can be viewed as a serious public health problem. State agencies reported approximately 211,000 confirmed cases of child physical abuse and 128,000 cases of child sexual abuse in 1992. At least 1,200 children died as a result of maltreatment. It has been estimated that about 1 in 5 female children and 1 in 10 male children may experience sexual molestation (Regier & Cowdry, 1995).
- Physical abuse includes pushing, hitting, slapping, choking, using an object to hit, twisting of a body part, forcing the ingestion of an unwanted substance, and use of a weapon. Sexual abuse is defined as any unwanted sexual intimacy forced on one individual by another. It may include oral, anal, or vaginal stimulation or penetration, forced nudity, forced exposure to sexually explicit material or activity, or any other unwanted sexual activity.

Overview

- There has been growing recognition of the prevalence of domestic violence in our society. Moreover, it is apparent women and children are at greater risk than others. Domestic violence has adverse effects on individuals, families, and society in general.
- Domestic violence includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, and abuse to property (Ganley, 1989). Exposure to this form of violence has considerable potential to be perceived as life-threatening by those victimized and can leave them with a sense of vulnerability, helplessness, and in extreme cases, horror. Domestic violence includes violence perpetrated by intimate partners and other family members, and manifested through:

- **Physical abuse** refers to any behavior that involves the intentional use of force against the body of another person that risks physical injury, harm, and/or pain (Dutton, 1992). Physical abuse includes pushing, hitting, slapping, choking, using an object to hit, twisting of a body part, forcing the ingestion of an unwanted substance, and use of a weapon. Physical abuse such as slapping, beating, arm twisting, stabbing, strangling, burning, choking, kicking, threats with an object or weapon, and murder. It also includes traditional practices harmful to women such as female genital mutilation and wife inheritance (the practice of passing a widow, and her property, to her dead husband's brother).

- **Sexual abuse** is defined as any unwanted sexual intimacy forced on one individual by another. It may include oral, anal, or vaginal stimulation or penetration, forced nudity, forced exposure to sexually explicit material or activity, or any other unwanted sexual activity (Dutton, 1994).
- ***Psychological abuse*** which includes behaviour that is intended to intimidate and persecute, and takes the form of threats of abandonment or abuse, confinement to the home, surveillance, threats to take away custody of the children, destruction of objects, isolation, verbal aggression and constant humiliation.
- ***Economic abuse*** includes acts such as the denial of funds, refusal to contribute financially, denial of food and basic needs, and controlling access to health care, employment, etc.

- **Prevalence of Domestic Violence**
- Domestic violence is widespread and occurs among all socio-economic groups. In a national survey of over 6,000 American families, it was estimated that between 53% and 70% of male batterers (i.e., they assaulted their wives) also frequently abused their children (Straus & Gelles, 1990). Other research suggests that women who have been hit by their husbands were twice as likely as other women to abuse a child (CWP, 1995).

- Over 3 million children are at risk of exposure to parental violence each year (Carlson, 1984). Children from homes where domestic violence occurs are physically or sexually abused and/or seriously neglected at a rate 15 times the national average (McKay, 1994). Approximately, 45% to 70% of battered women in shelters have reported the presence of child abuse in their home (Meichenbaum, 1994). About two-thirds of abused children are being parented by battered women (McKay, 1994). Of the abused children, they are three times more likely to have been abused by their fathers.
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- Domestic violence has been a long-standing problem in Kenya, particularly in rural areas. This is deeply engrained beliefs about gender roles and marriage which have encouraged the practice. There has been drastic increase of numbers affected from about 299 in 2006, then to 412 in 2007, then in 2008 then it went to had another 400 and over.
- In a patriarchal society, domestic violence is actually recognized as one way of disciplining one's wife. In fact, even the society socializes you as a woman to anticipate this discipline. It is so deeply inculcated in many peoples' minds. Experts are divided over statistics that show domestic violence is on the rise - and what they mean.
- According to the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey, 39 percent of the women surveyed said they were abused by a husband or partner. But a 2008 report by the Federation of Women Lawyers of Kenya, or FIDA, says almost 75 percent of women they surveyed reported being beaten.

- **Symptoms of Domestic Violence**
- More than half of the school-age children in domestic violence shelters show clinical levels of anxiety or posttraumatic stress disorder (Graham-Bermann, 1994). These children are at risk for delinquency, substance abuse, school drop-out, and difficulties in their own relationships.
- Preschool and kindergarten, do not understand the meaning of the abuse they observe and tend to believe that they "must have done something wrong." Self-blame can precipitate feelings of guilt, worry, and anxiety. Young children do not have the ability to adequately express their feelings verbally. Consequently, the manifestation of these emotions is often behavioral. Children become withdrawn, non-verbal, and exhibit regressed behaviors such as clinging and whining. Eating and sleeping difficulty, concentration problems, generalized anxiety, and headaches are common.

- The pre-adolescent child has greater ability to externalize negative emotions since they verbalize. They exhibit sleep problems, eating disturbance and nightmares. They also show a loss of interest in social activities, low self-concept, withdrawal or avoidance of peer relations, rebelliousness and oppositional-defiant behavior in the school setting. It is also common to observe temper tantrums, irritability, frequent fighting at school or between siblings, lashing out at objects, treating pets cruelly or abusively, threatening of peers or siblings with violence. They seek to gain attention through hitting, kicking, or choking peers and/or family members. Incidentally, girls are more likely to exhibit withdrawal and run the risk of being misunderstood as a child in need of support.

- Studies have shown that 1/5 to 1/3 of all teenagers involved in dating relationships are regularly abusing or being abused by their partners verbally, mentally, emotionally, sexually, and/or physically (SASS, 1996). Between 30% and 50% of dating relationships can exhibit the same cycle of escalating violence as marital relationships (SASS, 1996).

CAUSES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- There is no one single factor to account for violence perpetrated against women. Experts also disagree on the reasons for the recent increase in reported cases.

More women are coming forward because more are aware that violence is wrong and that it's more than just physical, and more believe that it is acceptable to walk away from an abusive situation. Other experts say domestic violence is occurring in more households because poverty and alcoholism are increasing.

- Several complex and interconnected institutionalized social and cultural factors have kept women particularly vulnerable to the violence directed at them, all of them manifestations of historically unequal power relations between men and women.

- Factors contributing to these unequal power relations include: socioeconomic forces, the family institution where power relations are enforced, fear of and control over female sexuality, belief in the inherent superiority of males, and legislation and cultural sanctions that have traditionally denied women and children an independent legal and social status.
- Lack of economic resources underpins women's vulnerability to violence and their difficulty in extricating themselves from a violent relationship. The link between violence and lack of economic resources and dependence is circular. The threat and fear of violence keeps women from seeking employment and compels them to accept low-paid, home-based exploitative labour (Schuler, et.al. 1996).

- Women lack economic independence hence has no power to escape from an abusive relationship. The reverse of this argument also holds true in some countries; that is, women's increasing economic activity and independence is viewed as a threat which leads to increased male violence. This is particularly true when the male partner is unemployed, and feels his power undermined in the household (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 1992),
- Studies have also linked a rise in violence to the destabilization of economic patterns in society. Macroeconomic policies such as structural adjustment programmes, globalization, and the growing inequalities they have created, have been linked to increasing levels of violence in several regions, including Latin America, Africa and Asia. (UNICEF, 1989)

- The transition period in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet
- Union – with increases in poverty, unemployment, hardship, income inequality, stress, and alcohol abuse has led to increased violence in society in general, including violence against women. These factors also act indirectly to raise women's vulnerability by encouraging more risk-taking behaviour, more alcohol and drug abuse, the breakdown of social support networks, and the economic dependence of women on their partners. (UNICEF, 1999).
- Cultural ideologies – both in industrialized and developing countries – provide 'legitimacy' for violence against women in certain circumstances. Religious and historical traditions in the past have sanctioned the chastising and beating of wives.

- The physical punishment of wives has been particularly sanctioned under the notion of entitlement and ownership of women. Male control of family wealth inevitably places decision-making authority in male hands, leading to male dominance and proprietary rights over women and girls.
- The concept of ownership, in turn, legitimizes control over women's sexuality, which in many law codes has been deemed essential to ensure patrilineal inheritance. Women's sexuality is also tied to the concept of family honour in many societies. Traditional norms in these societies allow the killing of 'errant' daughters, sisters and wives suspected of defiling the honour of the family by indulging in forbidden sex, or marrying and divorcing without the consent of the family. By the same logic, the honour of a rival ethnic group or society can be defiled by acts of sexual violence against its women.

- Experiences during childhood, such as witnessing domestic violence and experiencing physical and sexual abuse, have been identified as factors that put children at risk. Violence may be learnt as a means of resolving conflict and asserting manhood by children who have witnessed such patterns of conflict resolution.
- Excessive consumption of alcohol and other drugs has also been noted as a factor in provoking aggressive and violent male behaviour towards women and children.
- A survey of domestic violence in Moscow revealed that half the cases of physical abuse are associated with the husband's excessive alcohol consumption.
- The isolation of women in their families and communities is known to contribute to increased violence, particularly if those women have little access to family or local organizations.

- On the other hand, women's participation in social networks has been noted as a critical factor in lessening their vulnerability to violence and in their ability to resolve domestic violence.
- These networks could be informal (family and neighbours) or formal (community organizations, women's self-help groups, or affiliated to political parties (Sen, 1999).
- Lack of legal protection, particularly within the sanctity of the home, is a strong factor in perpetuating violence against women. Until recently, the public/private distinction that has ruled most legal systems has been a major obstacle to women's rights. Increasingly, however,
- States are seen as responsible for protecting the rights of women even in connection with offences committed within the home.

- In many countries violence against women is exacerbated by legislation, law enforcement and judicial systems that do not recognize domestic violence as a crime. The challenge is to end impunity for the perpetrators as one means of preventing future abuse.
- Investigations by Human Rights Watch have found that in cases of domestic violence, law enforcement officials frequently reinforce the batterers' attempts to control and demean their victims. Even though several countries now have laws that condemn domestic violence, "when committed against a woman in an intimate relationship, these attacks are more often tolerated as the norm than prosecuted as laws....In many places, those who commit domestic violence are prosecuted less vigorously and punished more leniently than perpetrators of similarly violent crimes against strangers (The Human Rights, 1995).

- **Consequences**
- There is a growing recognition that countries cannot reach their full potential as long as women's potential to participate fully in their society is denied. Data on the social, economic and health costs of violence leave no doubt that violence against women undermines progress towards human and economic development.
- Women's participation has become key in all social development programmes, be they environmental, for poverty alleviation, or for good governance. By hampering the full involvement and participation of women, countries are eroding the human capital of half their populations.

- True indicators of a country's commitment to gender equality lie in its actions to eliminate violence against women in all its forms and in all areas of life.
- Domestic violence against women leads to far-reaching physical and psychological consequences, some with fatal outcomes.
- While physical injury represents only a part of the negative health impacts on women, it is among the more visible forms of violence. The United States Department of Justice has reported that 37 per cent of all women who sought medical care in hospital emergency rooms for violence-related injuries were injured by a current or former spouse or partner(US Department of Justice, 1998).

- Assaults result in injuries ranging from bruises and fractures to chronic disabilities such as partial or total loss of hearing or vision, and burns may lead to disfigurement.
- The medical complications resulting from FGM can range from haemorrhage and sterility to severe psychological trauma.
- Studies in many countries have shown high levels of violence during pregnancy resulting in risk to the health of both the mother and the unborn foetus. In the worst cases, all of these examples of domestic violence can result in the death of the woman murdered by her current or ex-partner.
- Sexual assaults and rape can lead to unwanted pregnancies, and the dangerous complications that follow from resorting to illegal abortions. Girls who have been sexually abused in their childhood are more likely to engage in risky behaviour such as early sexual intercourse, and are at greater risk of unwanted and early pregnancies (Heise, 1994).

- Women in violent situations are less able to use contraception or negotiate safer sex, and therefore run a high risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS (Daily Nation, 2000).
- The impact of violence on women's mental health leads to severe and fatal consequences. Battered women have a high incidence of stress and stress-related illnesses such as post-traumatic stress syndrome, panic attacks, depression, sleeping and eating disturbances, elevated blood pressure, alcoholism, drug abuse, and low self-esteem. For some women, fatally depressed and demeaned by their abuser, there seems to be no escape from a violent relationship except suicide.

- Children, who have witnessed domestic violence or have themselves been abused, exhibit health and behaviour problems, including problems with their weight, their eating and their sleep (Jaffe et al., (1990).
- They may have difficulty at school and find it hard to develop close and positive friendships.
- They may try to run away or even display suicidal tendencies.
- **Mitigation measures**
- For some children and adolescents, questions about home life may be difficult to answer, especially if the individual has been "warned" or threatened by a family member to refrain from "talking to strangers" about events that have taken place in the family.

- **Referrals;** the appropriate school personnel could be the first step in assisting the child or teen in need of support. When there is suggestion of domestic violence with a student, consider involving the school psychologist, social worker, guidance counselor and/or a school administrator (when indicated). Although the circumstances surrounding each case may vary, suspicion of child abuse is required to be reported to the local child protection agency by teachers and other school personnel. In some cases, a contact with the local police department may also be necessary. When in doubt, consult with school team members. Referrals for counseling (e.g., family counseling) outside of the school should be made to the family as well.

- **Desire to talk;** provide children with an opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings if they are able to talk. In addition to talking. It could be helpful for adults who work with teenagers to encourage them to talk about their concerns without insisting on this expression.
- **Encouraged to write, draw, or paint;** these are all viable means for facilitating expression in younger children.
- **Listening;** in a warm, non-judgmental, and genuine manner is often comforting for victims and may be an important first step in their seeking further support.
- **Individual and group counseling** should be considered at school if the individual is amenable. Providing a list of names and phone numbers to contact in case of a serious crisis can be helpful.

- **Key areas for intervention include:**
- Advocacy and awareness raising
- Education for building a culture of nonviolence
- Training
- Resource development
- Direct service provision to victim survivors and perpetrators
- Networking and community mobilization
- Direct intervention to help victim survivors rebuild their lives
- Legal reform
- Early identification of 'at risk' families, communities, groups, and individuals.

- Basically there are five underlying principles that should guide all strategies and interventions attempting to address domestic violence:
 - Prevention
 - Protection
 - Early intervention
 - Rebuilding the lives of victim-survivors
 - Accountability

- **Research Findings**

- The research was conducted among twenty families randomly selected in Kapkitony sub location, Keiyo South District. The data collection was done using interviews, observation and document analysis. Domestic violence is a tricky issue and many people shy off from revealing the issue in order to protect dignity and family status hence indirect questions were used and reports available in the assistant chief's office. The study found out that domestic violence still exists within the family with 70% affirming its existence.

- It was also found out that domestic violence is caused by poverty (50%) alcoholism (35%) income inequality (5%) and cultural beliefs (10%). Violence still exists and very few people report it and those who report are unwilling to provide details since they fear ridicule. The affected persons suffer psychologically, physically and emotionally. There is need to provide counseling services and create awareness on the impacts of domestic violence. Lack of secrecy by community leaders negates reporting as most affected people are women and girls. The study recommends that sensitization of the community should be in order to alleviate domestic violence.

Recommendations

- Women need to be empowered through education, employment opportunities, legal literacy, and right to inheritance.
- Human rights education and information regarding domestic violence should be provided to them because this is a matter of their absolute rights.
- Educational programmes that equip girls with self-esteem and negotiation skills, and enhance participation of girls in leadership roles should become part of the school curriculum.

- Adolescent boys need positive role models and clear messages from the men in their families and society in general that violence against women is not acceptable and that they will be held accountable.
- Support services need to address associated behaviour patterns such as drug and alcohol problems or the risky sexual behaviour in which adolescent girls and boys may indulge as a result of being victimized themselves.
- Children need to be identified as victims of domestic violence, and their safety has to be ensured. This requires ensuring the safety of their mothers and making childcare facilities available to women in shelters.

- Appropriate programmes should be developed by the community and the state to assist children to recover from the violence and abuse they have suffered and/or witnessed.
- The local community therefore needs to be mobilized to oppose domestic violence in its midst. Actions taken by local people may include greater surveillance of domestic violence situations, offering support for victim-survivors, and challenging men to stop the violence.
- Traditional cultural practices, such as FGM, that violates women's integrity need to be re-examined and challenged.
- Creating awareness about the impact of domestic violence on communities conveys the importance of preventing such violence against women and children.

Conclusion

- Violence against women and girls continues to be a global epidemic that kills, tortures, and maims – physically, psychologically, sexually and economically. It is one of the most pervasive of human rights violations, denying women and girls' equality, security, dignity, self-worth, and their right to enjoy fundamental freedoms.
- Violence against women is present in every country, cutting across boundaries of culture, class, education, income, ethnicity and age. Even though most societies proscribe violence against women, the reality is that violations against women's human rights are often sanctioned under the garb of cultural practices and norms, or through misinterpretation of religious tenets. Moreover, when the violation takes place within the home, as is very often the case, the abuse is effectively condoned by the tacit silence and the passivity displayed by the state and the law-enforcing machinery. There is need for counseling in order to assist those affected to overcome the stress.

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