

# **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: THE EXPERIENCE OF VIOLATED GIRLS AND WOMEN**

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# Introduction/Background:

- Gender-based violence against girls and women is a problem of significant proportions that affects all societies to a greater or lesser extent (Feminists, 2002). Yet most people are unaware of the magnitude, causes and consequences of gender violence. The principle characteristic of gender violence against women is that it occurs against women precisely because of their womanhood; involves power imbalances where, most often, men are the perpetrators and women the victims. According to Lori et al (1994), for many women, gender violence begins in childhood and continues throughout their lifetime.

# Methods/Descriptions:

- In this study, the researcher adopted a qualitative approach where she used both closed and open ended structured questionnaire to collect primary source data while carrying out semi-supervised face to face interviews. The researcher also used quantitative approach to collect the respondents' social and personal data.

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# Results/Findings:

- The study observed that the majority of gender-based violated girls and women experienced psychological, physical and sexual torture that affects their personal growth, violated their human right and nullified their enjoyments as well as their fundamental freedoms.

# Definition:

- Gender-based violence against girls and women is any act of violence on girls or women by a man (men) that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private (United Nation, 2004).

# Nature of gender based violence experienced by the respondents

- Rape/attempted rape
- Conjugal rights denial in marriage
- Forced abortion in marriage
- Use of abusive language and denial of human rights by parents
- Infidelity leading to polygamy in marriage
- Denial of parental love and education to girl-child
- Lack of emotional and financial support due to the male partners alcohol abuse
- Being denied authority while women perform their responsibilities.
- Being demeaned by male colleagues at work
- Slapped by a man for eating while walking on the road in the context of discipline, and kneeling while serving, greeting or talking to an older man as culturally demanded based on gender difference.
- Arranged marriage to an elderly man in exchange of land and cattle
- Physical beating.

# Contributing factors to gender-based violence against women

- **Lack of assertiveness** when relating to perpetrators.
- **Women's inferiority complex**, low self esteem and fear of men.
- **Women's mode of dressing.**
- **Women lack submissiveness in relating to men**
- **Cultural and religious practices and expectations** that subordinate women's position in the society while placing men in hierarchical superior position in authority over women.

- **Alcohol and substance abuse**
- **Stress and marital conflicts:** Kenyan society upholds the image of a man as very masculine in his qualities, he is supposed to be brave, resilient, responsible and able to keep his emotions under control at all times. Intelligent, successful, adventurous and above all an achiever. Therefore those who fail to fit this image are considered weak by the society and in hard time men who are unable to fulfill their traditional role of provider resort to violence against women in their families (Kweyu, 2004).
- **Experiencing and witnessing violence as a child:** Men who witnessed their fathers hit and batter their mothers are more likely to batter as adults.
- **Poverty:** Poor women remain in abusive relationships and those who leave become homeless and in turn become targets of further acts of violence.
- **Unresponsive legal systems:** Women experience alienation from the legal process and are reluctant to make use of the legal system.



- **Consequences of Gender-based Violence against girls and women**
- Psychological torture
- Self blame
- Feeling hopeless for what they termed failure in marriage
- Lack of freedom to express one's views or suggestions in the running of their families.
- Poor health
- Being distanced from biological family members
- Loss of trust on male partner
- Abusive relationships often lead to death either of the abused women or the abuser.
- Loss of intimate relationship
- Children in abusive home who see their parent's anger and violence may grow up using violence to address and solve problems.
- Communication breakdown

- Children of violent families may feel tense, anxious and guilt because abusive partners often use their children's behaviour to start a fight.
- Women victims of gender-based violence are likely to suffer poor health, chronic pain, depression, suicide attempts or murder and pregnancy problems.
- Frequent hospitalization, absenteeism from work, lower productivity, poor concentration and excessive use of medical cover.
- Anxiety and somatic disorders, fear, and anguish
- Risk HIV infection and unwanted pregnancies which may lead to back street abortion
- Children may suffer emotional damage when they watch their mothers and/or sisters being battered or see their home break up leaving the female to head the household while struggling against increased poverty and negative social repercussions.
- Victims of gender violence may vent their frustrations on their children and other.

- **Positive effects of gender violence on some women**
- Gained resilience
- Became self reliant
- Assertiveness
- Patience and self control
- Make personal advancement and useful to the community

- **Social and Personal Data**

- Majority of violated women were married professional women who are dependent on their husbands.
- Women between 26 – 35 years of age experienced more violence than those between 36 -56 years.
- Respondents whose first born children were between 0 – 13 years experienced more violence than those with older children

- **Counselling implications**
- Client expectations: Violated women are referred for counselling by Advocacy and Lobbying institutions and some of them may have unrealistic expectations. Perhaps the woman had advice and guidance in the past and believe counselling will be similar to that. Counsellors may also be perceived as experts with vast expertise in all sorts of emotional problems, or even as magicians
- **Relationship:** As clients come to counselling in pain, with problems, with decisions, in crisis and in need of support, they need to relate to counsellors as a means of working on their concerns. However, establishing a counselling relationship especially with clients who have been violated in relationship and who has probably lost trust in others can be very challenging for a counsellor
- **Beliefs and Values:** Working a cross-culturally in therapy is challenging and demanding. Morality, cultural sensitivity, religious differences, human right, values based on clients and their cultural beliefs can confront directly and forcefully the counsellor's own beliefs and truth they hold about the world (Kareem and Littlewood, 2000).

- **Counter transference:** A male counsellor may be carried away on a female gender violated client's over emphasis on men's violence on women. Recognizing the manifestations of their counter transference reactions is one of the most essential abilities of effective counsellor. It is unrealistic to think that counsellors can completely rid themselves of any traces of counter transference or that they can ever fully resolve certain issue from the past. But they can become aware of the signs of these reactions and can deal with these feelings in their own therapy and supervision sessions.
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- **Referral:** Client referral need be made with the client's full consent. Where there are value conflicts between counsellor and client (for example, where the counsellor's religious practices does not consent the separation or divorce of Christian marriages), a referral is often the ethical alternative. Counsellors may also consult regularly with other professionals regarding issues of culture or specialization to determine whether or where referral may be necessary (Corey, 2001) However in my experience, the greatest challenge in referral is to be able to establish a referral network with other helping bodies and identify contact persons to avoid causing your client unnecessary inconveniences. Therefore a gender-violated client's needs may require diversities of humanitarian support and the counsellor should be in a position to know where and when to refer a client.

- For example, in Kenya, referral may be made to women's organizations that have focused on raising public awareness and other relevant support to victims of gender violence. Their provisions include medical services, legal aid and representation for cases of domestic violence, sexual violence, property rights and child custody. Among the leading institutions undertaking interventions to safeguard women's rights through public interest litigation, activism and collaborative advocacy efforts that target policy makers are Federation of Women Lawyers Kenya (FIDA Kenya), Nairobi Women's Hospital, Kituo Cha Sheria, Coalition on Violence Against Women (COVAW), Kenya Human Rights Commission and Women's Right Awareness Programme (WRAP) (UNAIDS, 2006).

# Recommendation:

- Fundamental decisions against gender-based violence against women and girls be made available (by policy makers) to both men and women at all levels and in all languages including vernacular if positive change are to be realized. Compulsory lessons on the women's right be introduced in schools at all levels. At the same time, schools must reinforce the equal worth and inherent dignity of human being, whether male or female. And information on human rights should be made available to all men and women including those at the grassroots. Laws and policies must be enforced and budgets allocated for their implementations and strict observation should be a must to all, failure to which disciplinary action should be taken against the culprit.