

# Domestic Violence in Urban Areas in Zimbabwe: a Case Study of Glen Norah (Harare)

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## Abstract

This study revealed that domestic violence is highly prevalent in Glen Norah and that it has sexual, emotional, psychological, economic, political and social dimensions. The main perpetrators of domestic violence are men; women and children are the main victims. The study also revealed that legislation is not widely adhered to and that most cases of domestic violence are not reported. Awareness and sensitisation programmes done by the state and non state actors are useful but cultural and economic factors hamper their usefulness. The main recommendations are that domestic violence should be criminalised, legislation should be tightened and victims should be supported and protected. Domestic violence is a threat to all forms of human development. Therefore it is everyone's duty to eliminate domestic violence.

**Key words:** domestic violence, urban, perpetrators, legislation, awareness, culture

## 1. Introduction

Globally, violence at micro, meso and macro levels presents huge social problems to humanity. Domestic violence is just one form of violence in human societies. This study focuses on analysing the prevalence of and responses to domestic violence in Glen Norah, Harare, with the aim of reducing and/eliminating domestic violence for sustainable human development. Authoritative research shows that worldwide, domestic violence is one of the most widespread violations of human rights and it is a consequence of structural power asymmetries in intimate and family relationships. Any person is a perpetrator or victim of domestic violence. However, women and children are the major victims and in most cases the perpetrators remain unpunished. Combating domestic violence is therefore increasingly becoming an international priority.

## 2. Orientation and problem statement

Domestic violence destroys human life and relationships all over the world. Its main victims are women and children. Domestic violence affects all nationalities, ethnic groups and cults across the entire social strata. It undermines social structures, hinders economic development, increases impoverishment and it is a burden for directly concerned as well as for national budgets. Hence domestic violence also inhibits any effective development work.

Statistics from Msasa Project (2005) reveal that thousands of women were offered counseling services in the year 2009 on issues related to domestic violence. According to the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development 98.9 % of domestic violence is perpetrated against women by men. Domestic violence is one of the most wide spread violations of human rights and the consequences of structural power asymmetries in intimate relationships and families. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (1999), in Germany one in four women suffer domestic violence at least once in their life; in Ethiopia almost 50% of all women are affected; in Russia 17 000 women die as a result of domestic violence every year; in India, every nine minutes a woman is abused by her partner and every 77 minutes a woman dies at the hands of her husband or family member because the bride prize has not been paid; in Uganda 70% of all men and 90% of all women consider wife battering as a legitimate means of resolving conflict; up to 71% of women questioned in a study conducted by the WHO on five continents stated that they have fallen victim to physical or sexual violence within their family at least once in their life; worldwide one third of all girls stated their first sexual contact was forced or violent; and in Columbia every six days a woman is killed by her present or former partner. All over the world there are 130 million women and girls who have suffered female genital mutilation. During war-as recent examples from Rwanda, Bosnia and Sri Lanka have shown again raping- the enemy's women are part of the tactics of war. The majority of the victims of trafficking are women and children. The most frequent aim of trafficking is that of sexual exploitation (United Nations, 1995).

According to a survey conducted by Msasa Project in 2004 in Zimbabwe one in every four women is kicked, beaten, slapped or hit; one in every 12 women is assaulted with a dangerous object or weapon; one in every married woman is forced by their partners to have sex; one in every five women is threatened with physical violence; one in every six women is prevented from getting a job or going to work; one in every 25 women is pushed, kicked or hit in the stomach whilst pregnant; and one in every six women's partner boasted about or brought home girlfriends.

### **3. Purpose of the study**

The overall aim of the study was to analyse the prevalence of and responses to domestic violence for sustainable human development.

### **4. Significance of the study**

The study is of importance to all individuals, groups and organisations in society because a clear understanding of domestic violence and the development and adoption of strategies will foster and sustain human development. Effective counselling practice will be developed through a closer analysis of the prevalence of and responses to domestic violence. The study may also help domestic violence survivors to increase their self confidence and gain control of their lives. It will go along to help survivors have foresight and see violence when coming and prevent it in future. The results of the study will encourage domestic violence victims to report and seek for counseling realising that they are not alone, strange or unusual. Also, findings from this research may inform the government on policy formulation and implementation. Social services, professionals such as the police, psychologists, social workers, teachers, health professionals' and the community at large will also benefit from the findings of the study on how to provide practical information and support in their respective areas.

### **5. Conceptualisation of domestic violence**

WHO (1997) sees violence as "the intentional use of threatened or factual bodily force or physical power against oneself or another person, against a group or community which leads directly or in all probability to injuries, death, psychological damage, aberration or deprivation". Domestic violence is any act of physical, sexual, psychological pain, economic deprivation or threat of such abuse against women, men and children by a person intimately connected to them through family relations or acquaintanceship. Domestic violence refers to any form or all violence that occurs between members of the same family or households. This also applies to boyfriend-girlfriend abuse. The violence results in injury, humiliation, destruction of property and sometimes death. Domestic violence can happen to anyone regardless of class or economic status (Msasa, 1999).

According to WHO (1997) domestic abuse often escalates from threats and verbal abuse to physical violence. Domestic violence may even end up in murder. The key elements of domestic abuse are intimidation, humiliating the other person and physical injury. WHO (1997) goes on to explain that domestic abuse is not a result of losing control. Domestic abuse is intentionally trying to gain control of another person. The abuser is purposefully using verbal, non verbal or physical means to gain control over the other person. In some cultures, control of women by men is accepted as a norm.

According to Herse, *et al* (1999) Domestic Violence destroys human life and relationships all over the world. More women die through wars and civil wars. Domestic violence affects all nationalities, ethnic groups and cults across the entire social strata. The former United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Anan (2001) feels that violence against women and girls is damaging to the entire society.

### **6. Study methodology**

Research methodology is about the approaches and techniques used in administering a research project. We wanted to use a full scale participatory approach, but because of financial constraints, we came up with what may be called a combination of some elements of participatory research and full scale descriptive survey research. Leedy (1980) defines descriptive survey research as the method of research that looks with intense accuracy at the phenomena of the moment and then describes precisely what the researcher sees. It focuses on defined population with respect to identified variables and thus provides answers to questions as to the who, what, when, where and how of a topic. The approach provides data on attitudes, feelings, beliefs, past and intended behaviour, knowledge ownership, personal characteristics, and other descriptive items. Descriptive survey, thus attempts to get a complete and accurate description of a situation.

### **7. Study subjects**

Subjects are the research participants; both the population and the selected sample of the population. Population

can be defined as the universe of people, places, or things to be investigated. A sample is a subset of the population that is intended to represent the whole population. This study covered 60 households. Purposive sampling was utilised to target head teachers, nurses, police officers, counselors, doctors, victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. To reach these people the researchers used a questionnaire with both closed and open ended questions.

### 8 Awareness and understanding of domestic violence

The overwhelming majority (92%) of the respondents indicated that they heard about domestic violence. The print and electronic media was cited as the major source of awareness. Some also said that they learnt about domestic violence from their neighbours. This shows that the information about the concept of domestic violence has filtered through most of the respondents. The awareness campaigns being conducted by government and nongovernmental organisations are having a positive impact in so far as the knowledge of domestic violence amongst citizens is concerned.

Seventy five percent of respondents felt that physical abuse constitutes domestic violence; seventeen percent of them indicated that economic abuse constitutes domestic violence; and eight percent of the respondents were of the opinion that sexual abuse constitutes domestic violence. This reflects that hearing about domestic violence is one thing while appreciating and understanding it fully is yet another. It emerged from the study that there is information gap. People must be educated on the fact that physical, emotional, sexual and economic abuses are all forms of domestic violence. It is not only physical abuse that can be conceptualised as domestic violence as most of the respondents felt. Awareness campaigns should impress upon the diversity of forms of abuses that constitute domestic violence. This will have a bearing on the clear understanding of domestic violence and the eventual reporting of cases of domestic violence. Table 4.6 below shows respondents' views of what constitutes domestic violence;

**Table 1-Components of domestic violence**

Form of abuse	Grand sample(N=60)	Percentage %
Physical	45	75
Economic	10	17
Sexual	5	8
Emotional	0	0

### 9 Perpetrators of domestic violence

The majority (80%) of the respondents indicated that most perpetrators of domestic violence are men; 8% felt that both men and women were equally responsible; and 5% indicated that women alone are perpetrators of domestic violence. This is in agreement with earlier study done by Msasa Project which revealed that 98% of the domestic violence perpetrators were men. Thus awareness campaigns to curb and control domestic violence should especially target men for they are the ones driving the prevalence and incidents of domestic violence to unprecedented levels. Since women were also cited as perpetrators of domestic violence, though marginally, awareness campaigns should encourage abused men to report cases of domestic violence perpetrated against them.

One officer in charge from Glen Norah Police Station said, "from the reports we receive, men are the worst, the most one being physical. We have witnessed cases of women with broken limbs, damaged eyes, swollen faces and damaged skulls. Most husbands beat their wives when they are drunk because they also abuse alcohol."

One male teacher suggested that "perpetrators of domestic violence are both man and women but mainly men. Most women have a tendency of reporting cases of domestic violence while males who are victims are shy to do so. We read in the newspapers that some men are beaten by their wives but because of our culture, they rarely report to the police. So it is in the light of this that I say perpetrators of domestic violence are men and women."

Another male respondent said "we must not hide behind the finger as men are the culprits when it comes to domestic violence. We beat our wives, deny them some freedom and think that if we are breadwinners then we must control our wives like we do children. We really need to mend our ways to combat domestic violence. Yes, there are some women who abuse their spouses but they are very few compared to men".

In light of the foregoing submissions, one would conclude that men are the major contributors of domestic violence. This confirms statistics from Msasa Project that reflect that 98% of domestic violence is perpetrated by

men. However, one would feel that this is so because there is gross under reporting by males who feel shy to approach a police station to report that they are being abused by their spouses. There is, therefore, need to conscientise and encourage men to report cases of domestic violence against them.

**Table 2- Perpetrators of domestic violence**

Perpetrator	Grand Sample(N=60)	Percentage %
Men	52	87
Both Men & Women	5	8
Women	3	5

### 10 Causes of domestic violence

The majority of respondents (80%) indicated that unfaithfulness or infidelity in marriage is the major cause of domestic violence. Lack of interspousal communication especially regarding household income was suggested by (13%) of the respondents as another contributory factor towards domestic violence. Seven percent felt that cultural norms promoted domestic violence. For example, the view that men are bulls and that they must graze around. It is also culturally acceptable that husbands must beat their wives. The research findings point towards greater need to strongly emphasise on faithfulness in marriage in awareness campaigns as a way of resolving disputes. Regarding men as bulls who should graze around promotes infidelity in marriages resulting in contracting the deadly HIV virus. This fuels domestic violence. It also emerged from the research findings that there is an information gap on the other causes of domestic violence such as stress, unemployment and delinquent children.

**Table 3- Causes of domestic violence**

Cause	Grand Sample(N=60)	Percentage (%)
Unfaithfulness	48	80
Finances	8	13
Culture	4	7

### 11. Can awareness and sensitization campaigns curb domestic violence?

One police officer vehemently agreed to the view that awareness campaigns will assist in preventing domestic violence. She said, "most people are falling victim to domestic violence because of lack of knowledge. We, as law enforcers champion community awareness campaigns so that people will know the dangers of domestic violence. We target especially men because they are the major perpetrators. We use radio campaigns, television campaigns, road shows, fliers and brochures."

### 12. Domestic violence legislation in Zimbabwe

Learned respondents like police officers, teachers, nurses, and counselors were aware of the existence of the Domestic Violence Act but they were largely oblivious of its provisions except that it is a criminal offence. The research findings revealed a knowledge gap and such a response to the concept of domestic violence calls for intense education on the Domestic Violence Act and its provisions.

It is important to note that most respondents, especially the uneducated, were not aware of the Domestic Violence Act, let alone its provisions. They indicated that domestic violence is an issue of concern in Zimbabwe but they were unaware of the fact that an Act was enacted by Parliament as a way of trying to curb it. This demands that the responsible authorities and stakeholders intensify their efforts to make the general public aware of the existence of the Domestic Violence Act and its provisions.

### 13 Marital rape

The majority of female respondents confirmed the existence of marital rape. One female nurse said, "if the wife is exhausted after a day's work and is not interested in having sexual intercourse, the husband should not force her because doing so will constitute rape. Men think that because they paid lobola they should have unbridled access to their wives even if the wife is not feeling well. That is not fair but rather barbaric, hence marital rape."

A male teacher indicated that, "rape involves forcing, one would want to have his way at the expense of the other. Failure to consider the feelings of your partner to the extent of forcing her to have sexual intercourse even though married is marital rape. Spouses need to communicate and be there for each other".

### 14. Ways of combating domestic violence in Zimbabwe

Most respondents indicated that awareness campaigns are the way to go to combating domestic violence in

Zimbabwe. A female nurse said, "awareness campaigns must be championed as people out there are not aware of what domestic violence is. They do not even know that domestic violence is a criminal offence. Educating them on the need to communicate to resolve conflicts amicably, consulting third parties such as counselors and pastors will go a long way in combating domestic violence.

One pastor said, "these things begin in the spirit. For those who are born again, the true Christians appreciate that to fight that which is spiritual you have to be in the spirit. Marriage as an institution is always fought by the devil. As such, it is important that people pray for their marriages, binding the devil and his demons not to attack their marriages and families. The devil is the cause of misunderstandings and conflicts in families and therefore he must be attacked spiritually."

## 15 Recommendations and conclusion

### 15.1 Summary of main findings

The majority (87%) of the respondents indicated that most perpetrators of domestic violence are men. The survey revealed that (80%) of the respondents felt that unfaithfulness in marriage is the major cause of domestic violence. Respondents agreed that awareness campaigns will go a long way in combating domestic violence. It also emerged that most people are not aware of the Domestic Violence Act let alone its provisions. The study revealed that the understanding of the concept of domestic violence is limited. Most people think that domestic violence is only physical in nature. They do not appreciate that it is also psychological or emotional, sexual and economic in nature. Socio-cultural norms and values, such as those regarding men as bulls and accepting wife battering as cultural that fuel domestic violence are rampant.

### 15.2 Recommendations

The following are recommendations on how to curb domestic violence:

- Awareness campaigns should be intensified. Information is power and once society is enlightened on domestic violence, its dangers and how to prevent it then its prevalence will be drastically reduced. The print and electronic media should be used for awareness raising as well as workshops and community outreaches. Emphasis should be on practicing what is preached.
- The Domestic Violence Act should be written in simple language so that people will easily understand its provisions. Its provisions should be summarised and published in Shona or Ndebele or other indigenous languages for the benefit of all. For the illiterate, radio talk shows and community outreaches in local languages should be intensified.
- Survivors of domestic violence should receive adequate counseling.
- Perpetrators of domestic violence should be rehabilitated through counseling as well
- The negative components of patriarchy that are oppressive of women should be eliminated.
- Culture of silence on domestic violence should be eliminated through continuous sensitisation and empowerment.
- Women should be economically empowered to reduce gender inequality and poverty.
- Reported cases of domestic violence should be thoroughly investigated to avoid those who would want to abuse the Domestic Violence Act to settle other scores.
- The state and non-state actors should work together to curb domestic violence.

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