

Physical Violence Against Women in Eldoret Town, Uasin-Gishu County, Kenya: Challenges to Socio-Economic Development

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Abstract: *Physical domestic violence continues to be a global epidemic that hinders the socio-economic development of women. This paper anchors its discussion on the findings of a study that sought to investigate the influence of physical domestic violence on the socio-economic development of women in Eldoret Town, Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The study employed mainly random sampling. Using a case study research design, and by employing a random sampling procedure, the authors engaged 120 women (30 each from Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital, Ngeria Prison, Eldoret Prison and Eldoret Police Station) who formed the study sample. Data was collected using questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussion. The findings of the study indicated that physical domestic violence is a vice that affects women in the study area. Additionally, physical domestic violence has an adverse effect on the socio-economic development of women. The authors thus call for intervention measures by both the government and non-governmental organizations to disentangle women from the tentacles of physical domestic violence. This paper adds to the growing corpus on studies on violence against women. It is also a significant contribution to the field as it carries with it to new knowledge which is of paramount import to researchers and policy makers who seek to understand the relationship between physical domestic violence and the socio-economic development of women.*

Keywords: *Physical Violence, Domestic Violence, Women, Uasin - Gishu County, Socio-Economic Development*

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Violence against women is a worldwide problem. Freedom from the threat of harassment, battery and sexual assault is a concept that many have a hard time imagining because violence is such a deep part of many cultures and lives. Violence against women is woven into the fabric of society to such an extent that many of who are victimized feel that they are at fault. Thus, Gender Based Violence (GBV) can be described as any harm that is perpetrated against a person; as a result of power of inequalities that are based on gender roles. According to the United Nation Economic and Social Council [1], gender based violence is all encompassing, and although it may take many forms, it cut across all cultures disproportionately affecting women and children mostly.

Huch [2] observes that in the Middle East, 32% of women reported being physically abused during the year 1997. Violence against women and the girl-child at home and at work has taken an alarming trend and different dimensions [3]. It is equally a major threat to social and economic development in the Middle East. It is also the most widespread and socially tolerated way in which women and girls are denied their basic right [4]. Out of ten countries surveyed in 2005 by WHO, more than 50% of women in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and Tanzania reported having been subjected to physical violence by intimate partners with figures reaching 71% in rural Ethiopia. Only in Japan did less than 20% of women report incidents of domestic violence.

According to a survey carried out in 2003, studying 1000 Lao women, 17 percent reported surviving physical violence in the hands of their husbands. The most common factors influencing the violent behavior as described by women victims were: the violator was drunk (31%), money issues (13%) and work related problems (13%). Gender Resource Information and Development [5] further observes that the proportion of domestic violence against women is more likely higher than violence against women in general. They conducted a survey in 100 villages and found that among 39 women victims in general, there were 32 women victims' experiences of domestic violence.

In sub-Saharan Africa, in 1998, 66.7% of the surveyed women in Sierra Leone had experienced physical abuse at the hands of their partners. The preliminary report of the special rapporteur on violence against women [6] argues that women's vulnerability to violence is determined by their sexuality, resulting for example in rape or female genital mutilation (FGM), from their relationships to some men and from membership of

groups where violence against women is a means of humiliation directed at specific group (e.g. mass rape in conflict situations). Violence against women is reinforced by doctrines of privacy and the sanctity of the family, and by legal codes which link individual, family or community honour to women's sexuality. However, the greatest cause of violence against women is government tolerance and inaction. Its most significant consequence is fear, which inhibits women's social and political participation [7].

A study undertaken in Kisii District, Kenya, reported that 58% of women said they were beaten often or sometimes. Every day, we see images of male violence against women in the news, on TV shows, in the movies, in advertising and in our homes and workplaces. It is a fact of life for women of all ages, races and classes. Every form of violence threatens all women and limits their ability to make a choice about their lives. According to Villarreal [8], access to resources of production such as land, credit, technical know-how, knowledge, and technology transfer is strongly determined along gender lines, with men frequently having more access than women.

Violence against women and girls occur on a vast scale, with sexual violence playing a prominent role. Sexual violence often appears in literature but its definition is broad and the term is used to describe rape by acquaintances, or strangers, by authority figures (including husbands), incest, child sexual abuse, pornography, sexual harassment and homicide [9]. Sexual violence describes the deliberate use of sex as a weapon to demonstrate power over, and to inflict pain and humiliation upon another human being. Therefore, sexual violence does not only include direct physical contact between perpetrator and victim; it may also include such act of violence like threat, humiliation and intimidation [9]. The loss of homes, income, families, and social support deprives women and girls the capacity to generate income as a result of which they may be forced into transactional sex in order to maintain certain level of their livelihood / comfort (or those of their husbands or children), escape to safety, or to gain access to shelter or services (including the distribution of food). For a long time, domestic abuse, and other forms of violence against women have been considered private matters, best kept silent and in the family. Efforts to eliminate such abuses have been futile and when placed against "real issues," concern with gender specific violence is often still minimized as trivial [10]. However, in recent decades, domestic violence against women has emerged as one of the most widespread and frightening problems in the world. Although this violence varies widely in form and prevalence, it is virtually universal and usually results in severe physical injury for the victims who are women, at times resulting in death [11]. Consequently, it is increasingly being recognized as a major political, social, legal, economic and developmental problem. Whether domestic violence operates as direct physical violence, threat, or intimidation, it perpetuates and promotes hierarchical gender relations. It is manifested in several forms, but all serve to preserve male control over resources and power.

1.2 Critical Issues

Violence against women and girls is one of the most pervasive human rights violations, denying women and girl's equality, security, dignity, self-worth, and their right to enjoy fundamental freedoms. Physical domestic violence is a multifaceted problem that requires proactive mitigation strategies by the society, government, families and individuals. According to UNICEF [12], the issue of physical domestic violence is a major problem in the society in that the main victims - women and children - suffer from it "in places where they should be safest: within their families at the hands of somebody close to them; somebody they should be able to trust". Straus and Gelles [13] state that, in Kenya, about 1.8 million women are battered by their husbands each year. They further state that this figure is low because it does not include violence against women in neither dating nor cohabitation relationship. They also report that while spousal violence is high, abuse of female partners is a particularly serious community health problem. This not only demoralizes the dignity of women but also makes them lose many opportunities whereby they could have contributed to their well-being. In Eldoret Town, Uasin-Gishu County, physical domestic violence continues to be one of the major incidences/issues being handled by the chiefs and courts of law. To gain an in-depth comprehension of this issue, the authors of this paper carried out a study in a bid to understand the influence of physical domestic violence on the socio-economic development of women in Eldoret Town, Uasin-Gishu County, Kenya.

1.3 Purpose

The main purpose of the study, on whose findings the discussions in this paper are anchored, was to investigate the influence of physical domestic violence on the socio-economic development of women in Eldoret town, Uasin-Gishu County, Kenya.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

As diagrammatically presented in Figure 1, the independent variable comprised physical violence. On the other hand, the socio-economic development of women formed the dependent variable. Government policies

and Non-Governmental Organizations formed the moderating variables and harsh economic realities and intervening variables.

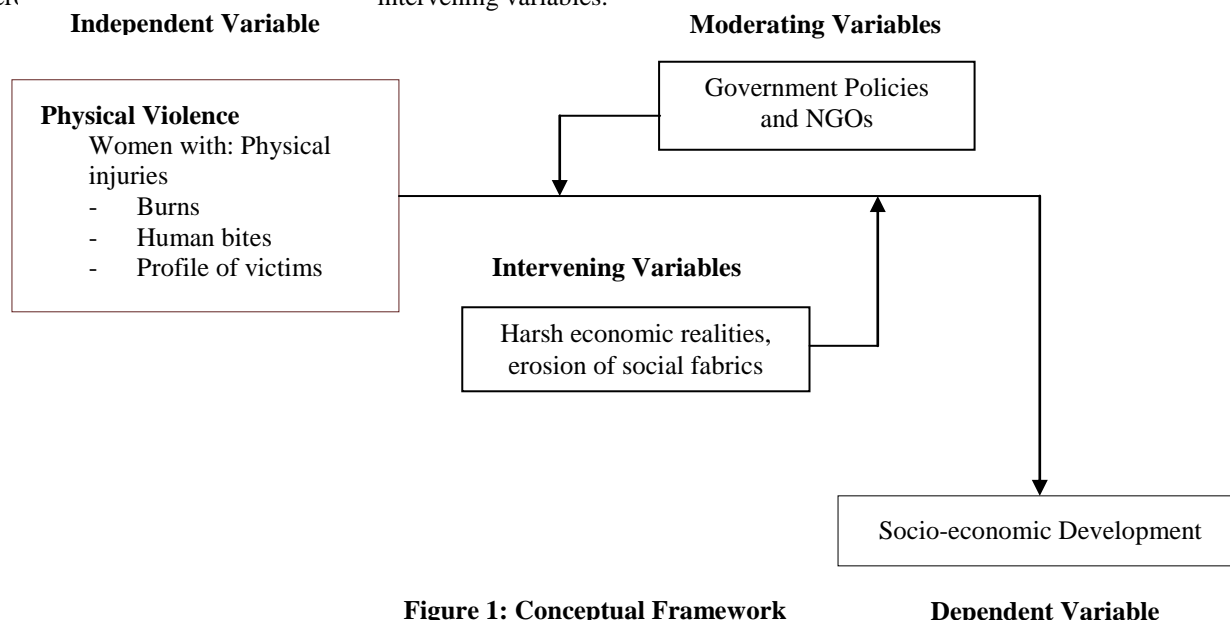


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

1.5 Review of Related Literature

1.5.1 Overview

Kenya is a developing country in the East African region with an estimated population of 40 million people [14]. As in many developing countries, a large proportion of this population comprises women and young people. Domestic violence and its impact on women’s physical, social and psychological well-being, has been recognized by the government of Kenya [15; 16]. The earliest government concern on the problem of domestic violence was voiced in 1968 when the Commission on Marriage and Divorce was set up. The Commission was charged with the responsibility of drawing up proposals for a new law on Marriage and Divorce which also included the problem of wife-beating since wife-beating is the most common form of domestic violence in Kenya. When the Bill was presented in parliament for discussion and enactment, it was strongly opposed by male parliamentarians and thus never become law [17]. The bill had sought to outlaw wife-beating. However, the government has recently enacted a Sexual Offences Act and promulgated a new constitution both of which protect women from all forms of gender-based violence. The government has also published a Domestic Violence Bill which is waiting for parliamentary debate. If passed, it will lead to an Act of parliament that proscribes all forms of gender-based violence.

As captured in Figure 2, abusive relationships tend to follow a cyclical pattern [18; 19; 20]. The changes between the various stages presented are subtle, and vary depending on the relationship and the nature of the abuse. In the beginning phase of the abusive relationship, some type of abuse occurs. This can be physical, sexual, or emotional. However, most often, it is subtle and in the form of verbal insults or accusations [19; 20]. Sometimes, though, the initial incident is physical. After the first episode of physical abuse, an abuser may not have to beat his partner to gain or maintain control. The threat of violence may be enough, because his partner knows he is capable of following through on his threats [21].

Following this initial incident there is a tension building phase [18; 19]. The abuse continues in this phase, and while it might be physical, it continues to be more subtle. Weiss [20] describes a woman who was boiling a pot of soup when her husband walked by and knocked her forward with his elbow, causing her to fall forward, burning her hand severely in the boiling liquid. Later on, he denied being in the kitchen at all. In this second phase, the abused partner may feel the need to keep the abuser calm, and she may feel as if she is constantly "walking on eggshells" [20; 19]. She may also feel that she is at fault for the abuse, and begin to believe that if she were only a "better partner" the abuse would stop. For example, the abused woman may start to imagine if she dressed differently, was a better cook, or was more agreeable, her partner would treat her better [20; 21; 22]. Building an abusive relationship takes time - if the abuse started occurring on the first date, far fewer women would stay in the relationships as long as they do. Survivors of domestic violence describe a "brainwashing" that occurs, which is difficult to quantify in empirical studies. Weiss [20] describes interviews with women in which they say the tension-building phase happened so gradually they almost did not realize it. They describe abusers who picked at their self-worth by making off-hand comments about their food intake, or their merit as a wife or a girlfriend, most being careful to temper these remarks by saying they were only looking out for their partner's

well-being. Eventually, the women begin to believe that their partners must be right in their critiques - after all, he was only looking out for their best interests [20].

The next stage is referred to as the explosion, and after the slow progression of the tension building stage it may not come as a shock (23; 18). In this stage, the abuse reaches a crescendo. Weiss [20] reports stories from women whose partners have attempted to push them from moving cars, brutally raped them, broken their noses, deliberately twisted their legs after painful knee surgery, or otherwise hurt them severely. One woman noted that, as severe as the beatings were, her partner always made sure to leave bruises on her arms, legs, and torso rather than her face, so that the marks could be hidden by clothing. In the making-up stage, the abuser may apologize for the abuse. He may promise that it will never happen again, or blame the abused partner for forcing him to hurt her [19]. Other common themes in this stage are the abuser claiming his victim is exaggerating the abuse, or even claiming that it never happened, as in the case of the man who pushed his wife toward the boiling soup. Often in this stage, the abusers apologize profusely and swear that they will change [20; 19]. The abused partner, whether or not she believes this claim, may be so relieved that the abuse has stopped for the time being that she accepts him saying he will change and stay with him.

Finally comes the calm, or honeymoon stage [18; 20; 19]. In this stage, the abused partner may begin to hope that her partner really meant it when he said it would never happen again. The abuser may give gifts up his partner, and treat her kindly for a period ranging anywhere from a few days to several months [18; 20]. Inevitably, the situation will again decline-into tension building, explosion, and so on. The specifics of these stages are as unique as the women that live them.

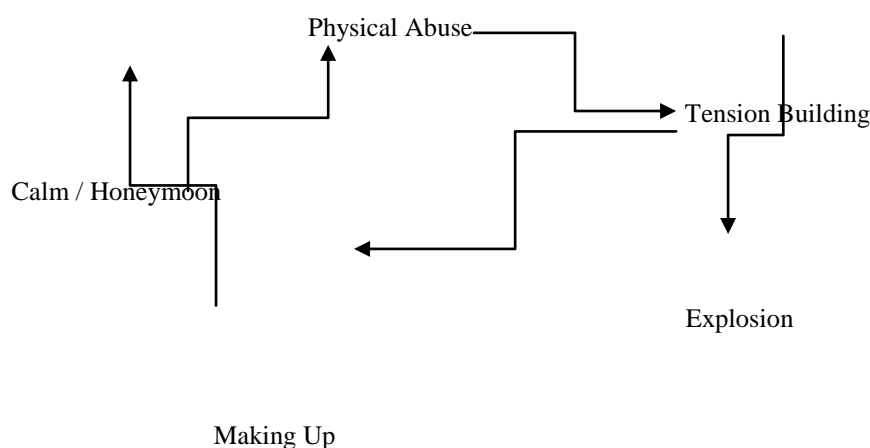


Figure 2: Violence Cycle

Source: Gluck [24]

1.5.2 Adverse Health Effects of Physical Violence

Apart from deaths and injuries, physical violence by an intimate partner is associated with a number of adverse health outcomes [25]. Several health conditions associated with intimate partner violence may be a direct result of physical violence e.g. bruises, knife wounds, broken bones, traumatic brain injury, pelvic pain etc. Other conditions are the result of the impact of intimate partner violence on the cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, endocrine and immune system through chronic stress [26]. Many of the physical injuries sustained by women seem to cause medical difficulties as women grow older. Arthritis, hypertension and cardiac diseases have been identified by battered women as directly caused and aggravated by domestic violence early in their adult lives. Medical disorders (e.g. hypertension) may be aggravated in victims of domestic violence since the abuser may not allow them access to medications [27]. In comparison with non-abused women, abused women have a 50-70 per cent increase in gynaecological, central nervous system (CNS) and chronic stress-related problems [28].

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a case study research design which is descriptive. This approach seeks to collect data without manipulating the research variables or the respondents in an attempt to assess the influence of physical domestic violence on the socio-economic development of women. Analysis of data generated from this study was mainly from snowball sampling; using both quantitative and qualitative tools. The snowballing sampling technique is a systematic non-probabilistic purposive sampling method that is very apt for qualitative research. Highly qualitative and exploratory studies call for a purposive non-probability sampling design, which

is not after the representativeness of samples. A purposive non-probability sampling design relies heavily on the availability of respondents, especially those who are difficult to locate.

2.2 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

This study used random sampling so as to give a chance to many individuals to be selected as sample representative of the population. The numbers representing the women were written on small pieces of papers and then rolled and placed in a small container and then shuffled each time before picking a woman so as to give an equal chance to be sampled. The total sample population for the study was 120 women. This was based on Mugenda and Mugenda's [29] formula for determining sample size when the target population is less than 10,000 respondents. It was calculated based on the target population of 175.

2.3 Data Collection Procedures

An introductory letter was requested for from the university to collect data. It indicated what the study was all about and why it was carried out. This enabled the respondents to agree to participate in the study. The data was collected using questionnaires which were administered to the sample population, and clarifications were made where necessary. The survey was created using suitable questions modified from research and individual questions formed by the researcher.

The questionnaire comprised of 29 questions which were related to the participant's perception regarding physical domestic violence. After validation of the questionnaire by the supervisors, the researchers distributed the questionnaires to the women. The respondents were assured of confidentiality of the survey sheets since their identities were not required. The women were given time to respond to the questionnaires and then the researchers collected the questionnaires the following day.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Age Distribution of the Respondents

The respondents were asked to state their ages and their responses were gathered and summarized as shown in Table 1.

Table 4.1: Age of Women

Response	No of women	Percent
18-25	26	21.7
26-33	38	31.7
34-41	30	25.0
42-49	17	14.2
50-above	9	7.5
Total	120	100.0

As shown in Table 1, majority 38 (32%) women were aged between 26 and 33 years, 26 (22%) women were aged between 18 and 25 years, 30 (25%) women were aged between 34 and 41 years, 17 (14%) women were aged between 42 and 49 years while 9 (8%) women were 50 and above years old. This implies that respondents were well distributed in terms of their age.

3.2 Dimensions of Domestic Violence and Resolution Mechanisms

From the quantitative data obtained from the study, it was clearly established that majority of women experience domestic violence in one way or another during the course of their life time. The most common and frequent form of violence experienced by the respondents was physical abuse. Table 2 shows that 26 (21.7%) women reported experiencing physical violence almost on a daily basis, 28 (23.3%) women reported being rarely abused, 64 (53.3%) women frequently experienced violence and 2 (1.7%) women did not respond whether they were being abused or not. This indicates that while a huge percentage of women experience physical violence, most of them do not want to come up and express their views on domestic violence. This could be attributed to the fact that they fear exposing their family members will lead to discords which may eventually break their families.

Table 2: Frequency of Physical Violence

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Daily Basis	26	21.7
Rarely Abused	28	23.3
Frequently Abused	64	53.3
No Response	2	1.7
Total	120	100

In addition, an analysis of the data collected revealed that most of the households lacked a proper way of resolving arising disputes within the family; instead they went physical and in the long run women suffered the most because of their physical weakness. Only 38 (31.7%) respondents reported to resorting to dialogue as a way of resolving family disputes. A majority (82; 68.3%) of the respondents resolved their disputes physically (see Figure 3).

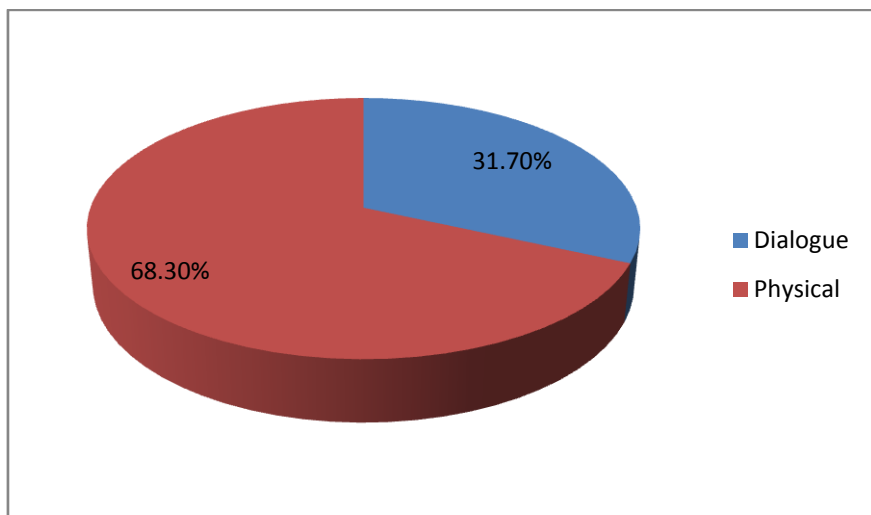


Figure 3: Ways of Resolving Family Disputes

3.3 Physical Violence and Socio-Economic Development of Women

Issues related to physical abuse were gathered. Physical abuse took various forms, including direct assaults on the body resulting in severe injuries requiring significant medical intervention. Weapons were used in a number of cases and in others there was the threat that weapons could be used. Forms of physical abuse included a wide range of behaviours: driving dangerously in the car, smoking in the house when the woman has a serious respiratory condition, the destruction of property, abuse of pets in front of family members, physical assault of the children, women being locked out of the house on cold nights and left outside until the morning, and sleep deprivation. This made some of the women to be absent from work which greatly interfered with their livelihood.

Physical violence took a number of forms including kicking, biting, strangling and even killing. Women who experienced physical violence had a lot of challenges since most of them had to be hospitalized and even disabled. This greatly affected women's livelihood since they could not go about their daily chores. In turn, physical violence resulted in muzzling the socio-economic development of women since they lacked resources needed for daily survival. Consequently, the cyclic nature of violence was perpetuated since economic dependence on the partner was a critical obstacle to leaving the relationship, caring for their children and even improving their livelihood.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

Form the foregoing discussion, this paper concludes that physical domestic violence leads to a number of consequences including loss of life. Physical injuries include cuts, scrapes and bruises, fractures, dislocated bones, hearing loss and even vision loss. As such, the consequences of physical domestic violence result in increased use of health services by abused women. Consequently, this leads to an overburdening of the health care sector. Moreover, women who undergo physical domestic violence experience a crippling of their socio-economic development. This is because they not only live in fear of physical domestic violence, but their attempts to work towards their socio-economic empowerment are met by more violence and/or threats of the same. Threats of repeat violence, coupled with the need to keep the abuse private, also limits their interactions with the rest of the society.

4.2 Recommendations

This paper recommends that:

1. Public awareness campaigns be carried out with an aim to inform the public that domestic violence is harmful and against the law, and that sources of help exist;
2. Women should be encouraged to report physical domestic violence to relevant authorities

3. The government and NGOs should set up mechanisms aimed at empowering women at social and economic levels.

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