



Division for the Advancement of Women



"Violence against women: a statistical overview, challenges and gaps in data collection and methodology and approaches for overcoming them"

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Violence against women: The Ghanaian case

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Introduction

The women's movement worldwide succeeded in putting the issue of violence against women as one of the priorities of the world's agenda. International conventions like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the African Charter on people's rights have been ratified and efforts are being made by African countries gradually to translate the provisions into concrete programmes and services. In 1985 the Commonwealth Ministers responsible for Women's Affairs identified violence against women as a source of concern within commonwealth countries. Since then the issue has been appearing on several agenda of the Secretariat. As a result, some commonwealth nations seem to have made some good progress towards confronting various forms of violence against women in their respective countries. In 1995 the Beijing platform for Action referred to violence against women as "a matter of concern to all states and which should be addressed". Although Ghana has not been static in this area, there is still the need for more concrete action, based on consistent research, which would ensure that Ghanaian women can effectively exercise their rights alongside men in all spheres of economic, social, cultural and political life.

Rationale of the study.

In Ghana, like many African countries, the status of women today has been determined by the kind of girlhood they have had. Traditional values, cultural norms as well as socializing processes, all appear to bestow a low status on the girl child and low status on Ghanaian women. For effective integration of Ghanaian women into the mainstream of the development process, it is necessary to identify and plan to eliminate or at least reduce the incidence of acts and situations which are dehumanizing and/or militate against the status and productive roles of Ghanaian women. One set of such dehumanizing factors derives from various forms of violence against women.

In 1997 violence against women was identified as priority area for research in Ghana because despite the fact that there have been many anecdotal and somewhat pathetic stories of Ghanaian women being violated in various forms, there was lack of evidence to substantiate these allegations. Empirical data was therefore needed nationwide to serve as convincing grounds for policy makers in order to enforce already existing laws to curb violent acts perpetuated against women. The empirical data can also point to the need for new laws to safeguard the rights of women and girls. It will also provide basis for appropriate punishment for perpetrators of violent acts against women, particularly in areas of rape and defilement of girls.

Thus a national survey was carried out by Dr Pappoe and myself, under the auspices of the National Council on Women and Development. It was sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) whilst the proposal development was facilitated by seed money from the World Health Organization.

Conceptual Definition Adopted for the Study

The conceptual definition adopted for the national study identified with the Declaration on the “Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Women”, which defined the term “violence against women” as *“any act of a gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”*

The declaration specifies some problem areas that could be considered under violence against women to include the following:-

- Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation.
- Physical and sexual violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, educational institutions and elsewhere; trafficking in women and forced prostitution.
- Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetuated by the state, where it occurs.

Scope of the study

Ghana, located along the coast of West Africa, is a typical hot and humid tropical country. With a population of 18.2 million inhabitants at the time of the survey, it comprises large number of ethnic groups giving rise to a mosaic of sub-cultures in the country. Interestingly, for most of the groups certain aspects of the traditions have close similarities and the essential elements are virtually the same. Females constitute about 51% of the country’s population and are an important human resource base of the country. The sex ratio was 102.2 in 1960, 98.5 in 1970 and 97.3 in 1984. In view of the woman’s central role in production and reproduction, her importance both as an agent and beneficiary of socio-economic development and change has attracted the attention of policy makers. All obstacles in the way of women, therefore, must be identified and either removed completely or minimized.

In 1997 when the survey started, there was a marked absence of documentation, very little literature, limited data statistics and information in general to indicate the depth of violence that women and children experience. This was compounded by a situation of profound ignorance of its consequences. Violence against women as an issue was exceptionally difficult to deal with publicly in Ghana due to cultural, social and legal practices of burying or ignoring the problem or considering it a private matter. Existing information, mostly anecdotal from case histories, from legal perspectives and newspaper accounts show a high incidence of women abused in intimate relationships, child abuse in the family and abuse of elder dependants and sexual harassment at the work place. With these in mind, the study adopted the following objectives:

Objectives

- Study and document, what constitutes ‘violence against women’ within the Ghanaian society and from the perspectives of Ghanaian men and women.
- Identify existing forms and nature of violent actions against women, girls and children.
- Determine the incidence and prevalence of various forms of violent acts against women.
- Establish the causes and/or factors and situations, which contribute to the incidence of violent acts against women.
- Determine the effects and the consequences of the various forms of violent acts against women and girls, their families and the community at large.
- Study and analyze legal and other existing measures by state institutions, to manage and redress forms of violence against women in Ghana.
- Determine the extent to which women and girls, affected by violent acts, are willing to be helped as well as identify the nature of help required.
- Make recommendations for interventions to eliminate various forms of violent acts against women and girls and/or minimize the negative consequences of such acts.
- Create and increase awareness within the population, among both men and women, regarding the existing forms of violent acts against women in the Ghanaian society.
- Disseminate, as widely as possible, any information obtained from the research.

Methodology and Sources of Information for the Study.

The triangulation methodology was used in the collection of primary data to address a group of situations alleged to occur in varying degrees in the whole country. The following methodology and sources of information were adopted for use.

Sampling procedure

Multi-stage sampling procedures were employed to constitute sources for both quantitative and qualitative data. In the absence of current population data, a combination of purposive and random sampling methods was used.

Districts, Sub-districts and Communities

- (i) Three districts were purposively selected from each of the ten regions taking into consideration urban/rural composition and accessibility.

- (ii) Using the Legal Instruments (LI's) of the selected districts, two sub-districts were selected, namely the district capital as urban and one other to serve as rural. Using the list of communities and/or villages in the sub-district, one community/village was randomly selected to represent the sub-district.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Individuals were purposively selected within the age groups 15—19, 20—44 and 45+ for males and females separately. In all six groups from six communities were formed in each district.

In-depth interviews

Opinion leaders were selected with the assistance of Assemblymen and women in the selected communities/villages for this aspect of the study.

Individual household interviews

An initial house was identified and selected. Every third house was thereafter selected. From each housing unit, individuals were purposively selected and interviewed based on their ages in the following age groups, 15—19 years, 20—44 years and 45 years and above. Females to males were selected in the ratio of two females to one male from each house. Where a member in a particular age group and sex could not be found in a house, that membership was carried to the next house. In order to maintain the age groups and sex ratio, an interview chart was designed for the purpose.

Data collection procedures

Data was collected in phases, but due to time constraints, some of the phases overlapped.

Phase One

This was divided into two parts. The first part was the literature survey. A vigorous literature search was conducted, from the internet, various relevant libraries, sector ministries and institutions and from student project reports and dissertations on the university campuses. The reviewed documents helped to establish the scope for the study.

The second part was the formative component of the study, aimed at determining which acts are classified as constituting “violence against women” within the Ghanaian context. The focus was on two levels: the societal level, through the use of focus group discussions (FGDs) and the individual level, through in-depth interviews with opinion leaders in the communities like chiefs, queen-mothers and leaders of women’s groups.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

The purpose of the FGD was to determine what society defines as violent acts against the woman, and what is generally thought and done about such acts. Each of the sixty (60) groups participating in the FGDs comprised a minimum of eight (8) and a maximum of twelve (12) individuals, in the ratio of two female groups to one male group. The three age groups were represented i.e. adolescent/young boys and girls (19—24years olds);

adult men and women (25—44 years olds); and elderly men and women (45 year old and above).

In-depth interviews

Selected leaders from the study districts were interviewed on the issue of violence against women, using an interview guide. The in-depth interviews included interviews of victims of the so called “Trokosi religious shrines” or ritual slavery and the “alleged witches” of Gambaga, widowhood rites and female genital mutilation.

Phase Two

This stage of the study comprised interviewing of men and women aged between 15 years and about 72 years, from selected households in thirty (30) districts throughout the country. The interviewers were recruited from the regions in which they conducted the interviews because of the language, and were trained both in the classroom and in the field.

Phase Three

This phase covered two field activities; collection of statistics from law enforcement agencies and help-seeking facilities:

- Existing statistics and information regarding reported violent acts perpetrated against women were collected. Public institutions covered were police stations, hospitals, polyclinics, health centres, social welfare service points and legal aid service points. Data collection was restricted to facilities located in the regional capitals and the capitals of the districts selected for the study. Statistics were collected for a period of eighteen (18) months, that is, the whole of 1997 and the first half of 1998.
- Victims of some of the violent acts identified were recruited for in-depth interviews. Additionally, investigations were conducted into the cases of the “Gambaga witches”, and the religious *trokosi* shrines.

Data processing

The data were edited, coded and keyed. Taped FGD data were transcribed by individual language specialists recruited from the regional capitals, and data analyzed to enable similar ideas and opinions to be grouped. FGD data were used to complement questionnaire data.

Challenges of Data Collection

Limitations of research encountered throughout the phases, included the following encumbrances. Language and translation have to be grappled with in the study because Ghana has more than 27 local languages. Major ethnic groups were selected with the study covering eight minimum corresponding languages. All the terms used in the study were dually translated into the local languages to ensure full understanding of the concepts and issues.

Access to the people especially women, was a challenge. There was need for lengthy negotiations at both household and institutional levels because in many cases women need permission from husbands/household heads for interviews. Households also need to confer with chiefs and elders.

There were also inconsistencies in access to records in the regions and within agencies. Other areas that were identified as challenges comprise the lack of data disaggregated by sex in records of Offence Book Records of the Police Stations, hospitals/polyclinics, health centres, social welfare case registers, family tribunals/family courts and the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice Offices.

Non-coverage of violent acts in print media does not adequately expose this crime at the national level. At the same time, the construction of femininity and masculinity whereby women are considered as chattels, inferior, vis-à-vis the perception of superiority of men is a real issue. In this case the social concept of femininity and masculinity, confuses the acceptance of violence as an excuse and it is trivialized.

Findings of the Study

What Constitutes Violence against Women?

Generally speaking, the people themselves through focus group discussions came out with what in their opinion constitutes 'Violence Against Women'. Specific examples include wife-beating, early and forced marriages, rape (both within and outside marriage), defilement, sexual harassment, psychological abuse, economic abuse and physical abuse.

Who are the Respondents?

The survey covered a total sample of 3,047 people. Sixty-six per cent (66%) were females with 34% males. Their ages ranged from 15 to 72 years, with a proportional representation of each of the three age groups constituting a third of the total. These respondents were selected from both the rural and the urban areas. A large majority of those interviewed have either never been to school before or have just attained primary level of education. Thirty-three percent (33%) have never been to school and 65% have primary education. The males were more likely to have post-primary education (67%) than females (51%). Only 1% of the respondents have university education. The education pattern reflects that of the country generally. Whereas 46% of the respondents were married 39% have never been married before, 2% were separated, 5% were divorced, 6% were widowed and 2% were in co-habitation relationships.

By religious affiliation, there were 67% Christians, 24% Moslems, 6% in traditional religion and about 3% who do not belong to any religion. The respondents covered different ethnic groups in the country including the Akan (40%), Ga-Adangbe (8%), Ewe (12%), Guan (5%), Mole-Dagbani (18%), Grusi (2%), Gurma (4%), Mande (1%) and others (11%). Almost all the major occupation categories were represented. The majority (61%) were farmers, traders (mostly petty traders) and students/apprentices. About 5% were professionals like teachers, nurses, religious leaders, doctors and engineers. Ten

percent (10%) were unemployed, 4% were housewives and 1% were pensioners. The rest included fishermen, artisans, labourers, tailors, barbers and clerks.

General findings from research

The study findings showed that violence is a reality for a substantial number of women. It demonstrates that:

- Women are most at risk of sexual violence in all its forms between 10—18 years.
- Women experience different forms of abuse.
- Anything and everything can be used as an excuse to justify the use of violence against women.
- Men and women have well-defined ascribed roles in Ghana; any breach of these roles on the part of women can lead to violence.
- It is seen as a private matter
- Women are inhibited from talking about their experiences of violence.
- Women do not generally report their experiences of violence (more do not report).
- They are least likely to report to state agencies when they do.
- When women experience violence, families and friends are important means of support.
- Perpetrators of violence in the study were lovers, spouses, family members, ex-spouses and acquaintances.
- Violence against women has important health and social consequences.
- It has economic effects on the family.
- Women report violence when the situation or injury is serious.
- It undermines the overall status of the abused woman in society.
- Perpetrators are scarcely held responsible for their behaviour.
- Violence against women is not seen as a crime.
- The behaviour of the victimized woman becomes the centre of attention (considering acts of violence against women).

Violence acts Against Women in the Communities

The violent acts identified by the people in the study included wife beating, rape, defilement, widowhood rites, forced marriages and female circumcision.

Wife beating

This was common act in all communities studied. Seventy-two (72%) of the respondents reported that it is a common practice in their communities. Based on the questions, about 23% of the female reported that they have been beaten by their husbands or boyfriends. Three per cent (3%) reported that it happens regularly and 19% reported it occurs sometimes. Twenty-five per cent (25%) of the males reported that they beat their partners. The men generally explained that wife beating is a way of correcting their wives, but they also accepted that it is a wrong practice. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of

the respondents' reported that it is wrong for one to beat his wife, 8% think it is right for one to beat his wife and the remaining 4% were indifferent.

Defilement

Six percent (6%) of the female respondents stated that they had been defiled before and 78% of the perpetrators were either close relations, acquaintances or family friends. Fifty-two percent (52%) of the males reported that men have sex with very young girls due to weak morals on the part of the men, 14% think that men who do that are opportunists, 13% said that such men lack self respect and 8% think that such men are not normal and may have psychological problems. On the other hand, the highest responses given by female respondents is that such men normally lack self respect (32%), some are opportunists (28%) and 21% said that they are not normal, other reasons include men taking advantage of girls' ignorance, financial and unemployment problem of men and some men consider young girls to be "STD-free".

Rape

Female respondents were asked whether any man had forced sex on them. Likewise male respondents were asked whether they have forced and had sex with any woman (whether a wife or a girlfriend) against her wishes. Eight percent (8%) of the females said they have had that experience before and 5% of the men also said they had forced sex on their wives and girlfriends. According to the males, this happens when women/girls always request for money from them and deny them sex in return. It is also meant to settle a quarrel between them. In certain cases respondents claimed that some girls challenge men by "saying they are sexually weak" and some wives deny husbands sex sometimes. On the question of what action was taken after these acts, 59% said they never reported these actions to anybody.

Forced marriages

Both married males and female respondents were asked questions regarding the age at which they married, the person who decided that they should get married, and the person who chose them a partner. Unmarried females were also asked similar questions, concerning their female siblings. Generally, it was realized that girls marry at an earlier age than boys and that parents and other close relations were more likely to decide and choose partners for the girl-child than the boy-child. About 40% of the females reported that they married before the age of 20 years as compared to only 8% of the males. Twenty-two percent (22%) of the married females stated that their parents decided for them as compared to 12% of the males. In addition 30% of the females reported that their parents and other closer relatives chose their partners for them as compared to 16% of the males.

Widowhood rites

Respondents were asked whether any of their closest relatives have undergone any widowhood rites and their feelings about these rites. Thirty-one percent (31%) of widowed respondents said they were being asked to marry their dead husband's brother and 23% of the other respondents said their relatives (who are widowed) were asked to marry their dead husband's brother. Other widowhood rites which the respondents

mentioned include shaving of hair, ritual bath, confined to a room for days and wearing of rope around the neck.

Female circumcision

Respondents were asked whether their female siblings have been circumcised and female respondents were specifically asked whether they have been circumcised and their feelings about this practice. Twelve percent (12%) of the female respondents have been circumcised and 10% said that their siblings have been circumcised. Sixty-five percent (65%) of the respondents who have been circumcised and those whose siblings have been circumcised said that it is a custom or tradition, and 12% stated it is to ensure a good marriage. In spite of these answers 75% said it is a bad practice.

The Gaps Identified

The survey conducted was nationwide and is considered representative of the situation so far as violence against women is concerned. Yet certain areas were not fully covered. In areas identified as gaps, research may urgently be required. Other areas outside these loci include:

- Violent acts against women in the work place
- Violent acts against women in educational institutions at all levels.
- Violence against women in religious institutions
- Trafficking in women and girls
- Forced prostitution
- Use of violence itself as control of women
- Economic violence and gender inequality
- Review of existing traditional practices towards identification of gaps that discriminate against women and encourage violence.
- Evaluation of centres for women experiencing abuse or violence
- Portrayal of women in the media—sex roles and stereotyping.

There is the need also for systematic study of violence against women, monitoring of the situation and consistent development of database on violence against women.

Recommendation for Data Collection

Type of data needed include:

- Surveys and Quantitative studies (*statistics*)
- Qualitative studies (*experiences of victims*)
- Institutional records (*quantitative*)
- Systematic development of electronic database of violent acts for constant monitoring.

Responsibility for Data Collection

- University Institutions provides opportunity for on-going research and capacity building.
- National Statistical Services
- National Machinery on Women and Children
- NGOs and other stakeholders could supplement national data.

Conclusion

The need for national data on violence against women in Ghana cannot be overemphasized. Our study is just the beginning, revealing many gaps in research yet to be filled. Whilst there is urgency to correct this imbalance, it is equally imperative to conduct nationwide survey on systematic basis to monitor trends and rates in prevalence and its outcome. In order to be effective, the responsibility for the research should be national based with collaboration from national statistical offices, university and research institutions, and the national machinery for women.

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