Gender Based Violence: Psychosocial, Economic and Physical Impacts and Proposed Mitigating Measures

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Abstract:

Gender-Based-Violence is the use of physical force or physical power to threaten an individual or group of people that you will harm or kill them. It is more common within the patriarchy system where men fill positions of authority and generally belief that what is good is associated with norms of masculinity and the focus is within themselves and for their actions. In Botswana GBV is common with 67% of women having experienced some form of GBV in their lifetime. 44% of men also admitted having perpetrated violence against women at one time in their lives. The World Health Organization (WHO) classified GBV into sexual, physical or emotional violence. The psychosocial effects of GBV include intense guilt, bearing the responsibility for the problems that have happened, enduring the illtreatments quietly and shamefully without retaliation. Victims experience overwhelmingly chronic anxiety, uncertainty, and distress over their own situation as they are expected to retain the socially acceptable appearance of being strong. Economically, they incur out-of-pocket expenditures that are normally unbudgeted for, while physically they are exposed to all kinds of injuries and aches, sometimes permanent deformities. GBV requires multi-disciplinary approach to mitigate. This can start from individual to government level.

Keywords: Gender-Based-Violence, Partner violence, Abuse, Patriarchy, Gender victims.

Introduction

From time in memorial, women have played the role of nurturers and care giving to their family member and significant others (Murthy, Upadhyay & Nwadnobi 2009). In many patriarchal communities, the system has perpetuated gender inequalities and subsequently gender violence through disregard of the other vulnerable groups, particularly women and children. Patriarchy is a system that focuses on gender, where men maintain power over women in a hierarchy of domination through social systems (Hunnicutt 2009). Patriarchy is the system of male domination over women. Within the patriarchy system, men fill positions of authority, there is a general belief that what is good is associated with norms of masculinity and the focus is on men and their actions (Johnson 1997). The non-masculine groups are hence always oppressed and subjected to violence. Violence is a global concern and most often affect women and girls. It requires immediate action to ensure that it is curbed and ultimately totally prevented where possible (Barchi et al., 2018). Gender based violence (GBV) is defined as “any gender related violence that is based on gender relations that seek to maintain men’s control over women. Violence can be physical, sexual or emotional and includes threats of violence, coercion and the actual occurrence of violence.”
act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (Michau et al., 2015). It is in most cases perpetuated by men, cultured by men and condoned by men (Neal & Hammer, 2017).

Gender-based violence can be classified by type of the act, such as sexual, physical or emotional violence (World Health Organization, WHO, 2017). We can therefore simply say GBV is the use of physical force or physical power to threaten an individual or group of people that you will harm them or kill them. It encompasses violation of fundamental freedom and includes rape, domestic assault, abduction, human trafficking, forced prostitution, incest, sexual harassment, and beating (Grootboom, 2016; Kiguwa et al., 2015). GBV is an abuse of human rights that occurs internationally, in both developing and developed countries regardless of culture, socio-economic class or religion and varies in frequency, forms and extent from country to country. GBV is usually under reported in most societies simply because of the stigma attached to it. The cases are growing, and they usually repeat within a victim. In South Africa for example, a study by Duvvury et al., (2012), reported that in a group of participants, 20% of the incidences had happened once, 80% had happened two times or more 13.5% had happened for more than 30 times. Furthermore, violence is often experienced in multiple forms, that is physical, sexual, and psychological.

Estimates by WHO suggest that approximately one in three women and girls experience lifetime physical or sexual violence and imply that the prevalence of all forms of GBV is even greater (Wirtz, et al., 2018). During covid 19 lockdown Australia reported a 5% increase in domestic violence cases (Tisane, 2020). France was the first to report a 30% spike in domestic violence cases, a week after the national lockdown was implemented (Tisane, 2020). India clocked a 45% increase in domestic violence complaints within a 25-day period from the first week of March (Tisane, 2020). In Italy, calls to help lines dropped sharply; however, SMS and emails to support services concerning violence increased (UN Joint Global Programme, 2020).

Violence against women has been regarded as one of the main human rights challenges in most African countries. In Sub Sahara Africa (SSA) for the year 2018, GBV among women stood at 35.5% while in 2019 it was 44%. The highest prevalence rates of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) that were reported included emotional (29.40%), physical (25.87%) and sexual (18.75%) violence. In Somalia, 22.2% of men and 15% of female reported that they experienced abuse during their childhood (Wirtz, et al., 2018). This evidence is an important aspect to work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s) target of eliminating all forms of violence in SSA.

The sub-regional analysis found that women residing in Western (30%) and Eastern (25%) African regions experienced higher levels of emotional violence (Muluneh et al., 2018). In Tunisia, calls to a helpline concerning violence in the first days of confinement increased fivefold (UN Joint Global Programme, 2020). South Africa saw the surge of Gender-Based Violence since the implementation of the national lockdown, with 87 000 gender-based violence complaints (Tisane, 2020). An examination of routinely collected data from the command Centre, call center in South Africa suggests that the absence of intoxication did not remove aggression towards women in the domestic sphere.

Gender-based violence is a toxic but common form of gender-related violence. Various studies have estimate that between 10 and 35% of women experience domestic violence at some point in their lives. However, little attention is paid to this type of social ill, with no proper system to deal with. This has become a social problem that, although well recognized internationally, it is still associated with uncertainty and taboos. Many women, in their intimate relationships or immediate social environment, experience psychological and/or physical violence, which becomes a serious health problem for them (Flury M., Nyberg E. & Riecher-Rössler A. 2010).
### Types of GBV

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of act</th>
<th>Description/Examples</th>
<th>Perpetrator</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical assault (physical violence)</td>
<td>eating, punching, kicking, biting, burning, maiming, or killing, with or without weapons; often used in combination with other forms of sexual and gender based violence</td>
<td>Spouse, intimate partner, family member, friend, acquaintance, stranger, anyone in position of power, members of parties to a conflict</td>
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<td>Trafficking, slavery (physical violence)</td>
<td>Selling and/or trading in human beings for forced sexual activities, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or removal of organs</td>
<td>Any person in a position of power or control</td>
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<td>Abuse/Humiliation (Emotional and psychological violence)</td>
<td>Non-sexual verbal abuse that is insulting, degrading, demeaning; compelling the victim/survivor to engage, in humiliating acts, whether in public or private denying basic expenses for family survival</td>
<td>Anyone in a position of power and control, often perpetrated by spouses, intimate, partners, or family members in a position of authority</td>
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<td>Confinement (Emotional and psychological violence)</td>
<td>Isolating a person from friends/family, restricting movements, deprivation of liberty, or obstruction/restriction of the right to free movement</td>
<td>The invasion of any part of the body of the victim or of the perpetrator with a sexual organ, or of the anal or genital opening of the victim with any object or any other part of the body by force, threat of force, coercion, taking advantage of a coercive environment, or against a person incapable of giving genuine consent (International Criminal Court)</td>
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<td>Rape and marital rape (Sexual Violence)</td>
<td>The invasion of any part of the body of the victim or of the perpetrator with a sexual organ, or of the anal or genital opening of the victim with any object or any other part of the body by force, threat of force, coercion, taking advantage of a coercive environment, or against a person incapable of giving genuine consent (International Criminal Court)</td>
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<td>Crimes against humanity of a sexual nature (Sexual Violence)</td>
<td>These include rape sexual slavery, forced abortion or sterilization or any other forms to prevent birth, forced pregnancy, forced delivery, and forced child-rearing, amongst others. Sexual violence as a form of torture is defined as any act or threat of a sexual nature by which severe mental or physical pain or suffering is caused to obtain information, confession, or punishment from the victim or third person, intimidate her or a third person or to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group</td>
<td>Often committed, sanctioned, and ordered by military, police, armed groups, or other parties in conflict</td>
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<td>Female genital mutilation (FGM) (Harmful traditional practices)</td>
<td>Cutting of genital organs for non-medical reasons, usually done at a young age; ranges from partial to total cutting, removal of genitals, stitching whether for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons; often undergone several times during lifetime, i.e., after delivery or if a girl/woman has been victim of sexual assault</td>
<td>Traditional practitioners, supported, condoned, and assisted by families, religious groups, entire communities and some states</td>
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Early marriage | Arranged marriage under the age of legal consent. (Harmful traditional practices)
---|---
sexual intercourse in such relationships constitutes statutory rape, as the girls are not legally competent to agree to such unions.
Forced marriage | Arranged marriage against the victim/survivor’s wishes; often a dowry is paid to the family; when refused, there are violent and/or abusive consequences.
Parents, community and state | Parent, family members
Human killing
Discrimination and/or denial of Opportunities and services | Exclusion, denial of access to education, health assistance or remunerated employment; denial of property rights
(Socio-economic violence)
Family members, society, institutions and organizations, government actors
Social exclusion/ostracism based on Sexual orientation

Violence against women is a manifestation of unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men. It also results in lack of control over resource and decision making by women, cultural prejudices, lack of access to sexual and reproductive health and rights services, lack of laws against sexual violence against women which in turn affects the advancement and enjoyment of women’s rights (Kennedy & Prock, 2018). Men learn gendered sex-role expectations through direct instruction as part of tradition. Transgression of these gendered sex-role expectations causes tensions in relationship and can result in arguments that turn into violent (Gibbs et al., 2020).

**Gender Based Violence in Botswana**

In Botswana gender-based violence is rampant with a third of women (67%) having experienced some form of gender-based violence in their lifetime (GBV Indicator Study, 2012). High proportion of men (44%) admitted to have perpetrated violence against women at one time in their lives, with 29% of women reporting to have experienced GBV. On contrary it is disappointing that only 1.2% of the Botswana women report cases of GBV to the police when they happen. It can therefore be assumed that the cases of GBV are greater than what is reported to the police. In most cases victims are reluctant to report the matter to the police due to stigma and fear of rejection by their families and society. Inequality remains a major “concern” in Botswana, particularly “between urban and rural areas, and especially in remote and hard to reach areas in the Western and Northern parts of the country. Of those who reported cases, 18% had sustained physical injuries, 25% contacted STIs and 26% of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), survivors were HIV-positive. Some studies have recorded a high rate of non-consensual sex including rape among adolescents and at sexual debut (BIAS IV, 2013). In this regard, cases of rape reported to police have increased (from 1596 in 2007 to 2073 in 2014-The GBV Program Report) with 15% of rape survivors found to have attempted suicide.

Furthermore, feedback emanating from interaction with one of the Women’s Shelter indicated that there were 6 children 0-9 years, 6, 10 to 14 years; 15, 15 to 19 years; 29, 20 to 24 years; 216,25 to 49 years and 25, 50 years and above 2018. For the year 2019 there were 1200 victims consisting of 947 females and 153 males.0 to 9 years were 14, 10 to 14 years were 24,15 to 19 years were 79, 20 to 24 years were 184,25 to 49 years were 792 and 50 years and above were 117. Then for the Covid period which was April to June 2020 there was a total of 157 victims. April had 42 cases, May 55 cases and June 60 cases. One case for 0 to 9 years, 2 cases for 10 to 14 years, 14 cases for 15 to 19 years, 22 cases for 20 to 24 years, 82 cases for 25 to 49 years and 4 cases for 50 years and above.

Traditionally, girls in Botswana have been raised to believe that they should be subservient to men; boys are raised to believe that they have power and control over girls and women. Girls and women are generally conditioned to believe that their natural sphere of influence is inside the home, whereas power and decision-making outside the household and in public life belongs to men and boys. When a girl is married, she is
told that she is obligated to obey her husband, that she is a junior partner, and that being beaten by a man is a normal part of marriage, even an expression of love. Although household social dynamics are slowly changing, these norms still directly influence GBV by reinforcing gender inequalities (Wirtz, et al., 2018).

Effects of gender-based violence. The negative effects of all forms of GBV are many. They include increased risk of unplanned pregnancies, abortion, physical injuries and HIV/STIs transmission. Deaths directly due to violence or indirectly through suicide, abortions and failure to seek care for those with unwanted pregnancies add to the burden. Long term disabilities include a range of mental health problems, chronic pain syndrome as well as drug and alcohol abuse with the victims often becoming perpetrators of violence.

GBV increases during every type of emergency be it economic crises, conflict or disease outbreaks. Pre-existing toxic social norms and gender inequalities, economic and social stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with restricted movement and social isolation measures, have led to an exponential increase in GBV. Many women were in ‘lockdown’ at home with their abusers while being cut off from normal support services (UNICEF Global COVID-19 Situation Report No. 8).

Gender based violence has far reaching impact ranging from immediate to long term physical, sexual and mental health consequences for women and children, including death. It negatively affects women’s general well-being, prevents women from fully and free participating in society. There is also long-term effect on women and also their families, the community and the country at large. The financial costs are tremendous resulting from health care and legal expenses to productivity losses, impacting national budgets and overall development. Gender based violence creates a barrier to achieving equality for all citizens and realizing development and peace. The violated gender is denied the opportunity to enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms. The victims are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological deprivation that cut across lines of income and culture (United Nations, 2005)

Psychosocial Effects

Victims of gender-based violence struggle with ascertaining themselves as worthy people in the community because if the perpetuator himself is supposed to nature and protect her, no other person can fill the void. The violence, whether physical or verbal normally leaves them humiliated. Perpetuators insult, demean, beat and can even shout at their partners in public. Kohli et al. (2015) reported that in some polygamous setting, husbands may use public humiliations strategically to demonstrate that the wife did not meet her marital obligations, thereby “justifying” his taking of a second wife. The victim experience intense guilt since they have been socialized to be the caretakers of relationships and bear responsibility for problems that arise. They are expected to endure such treatment quietly and feel shame and fear of retaliation that would follow from not living up to that ideal. They express such experience as “living in a birdcage” (Glantz N. M. & Halperin D. C. 1995). Boonzaier F. A. & van Schalkwyk S (2011) also reported experiences of shame over being beaten and psychologically humiliated in the context of their relationship.

Long term -victims of GBV experience overwhelmingly chronic anxiety, uncertainty, and distress over their own situation and the well-being of their children. They are expected to retain the socially acceptable appearance of being strong or unphased in the phase of the society though it creates a strong burden of psychological wellness (Barada et al 2021). Some victims are afraid to disclose their situation to other people because they want to protect their family from the shame and from angering the perpetrator who may further abuse them. Most victims subject themselves to pressure of living with the perpetrator for the sake of their children well being, or just uncertainty of leaving to go and stay alone (Horn et al. 2014). The humiliation of the victims because of being overcontrolled disempowers them and takes away their dignity (Hobfoll et al. 2007), leaving
them helpless to navigate complex environments and negotiate decisions in difficult relationships (Grose et al. 2019). The victim may develop mental illnesses which will leave her/him with suicidal thoughts and tendencies, and potentially often result in suicide attempts. Other symptoms include lack of focus and problems in performing daily routine activities, loss or hindered ability of decision making, loss of interest in previously enjoyable things and loss of self-esteem leading to major depression (Hammar A, & Ardal G. 2009).

Economic Effects

GBV has a sizeable economic impact. All types of violence require remedial attention, whether medical or psychological. The victims would incur out-of-pocket expenditures that are normally unbudgeted for (Vyas et al. 2021). The indirect costs of episodes of GBV include income loss due to survivors missing or cutting back on paid work due to injuries, shame, or fear, or a combination of these.

The costs of violence are typically described as direct (or tangible), indirect (or intangible) and opportunity costs. Direct, or tangible, costs are those representing actual paid expenses, or real money spent, on the provision of services, facilities, or expenses incurred by the victim or the household. These may include but not limited to prescription costs, medical care, travel to medical facility, hospitalization costs, reproductive health costs e.g. termination of pregnancy and treatment of STIs, psychological care costs, counselling or other therapy, and medical aid premiums and payouts. Indirect costs are pain and suffering, premature mortality by the victims, disability or impaired functioning costs and loss of a loved one.

Physical Effects

The various types of violence may result in the victim contracting different illness including systemic and variety of psychiatric. 40 to 70% of homicides against women are committed but intimate partner globally (UNICEF 2008). Injuries and trauma are the most common consequent of physical violence.

Ali (2019) reported that victims may have physical symptoms such as shoulder aches, backaches, and at times overeating due to depression leaving them obese further aggravating the situation including diabetic mellitus, arthritis. Different authors agree and reported that victims suffer the following physical effects; injuries to the abdomen and thorax which can result in damage to the tissues and vital organs such as heart, lungs, and spleen, bruises, welts, contusion, fractures, hemorrhages, burns chronic fatigue syndrome, ocular damage which may result from retinal detachment leading to blindness and reduced physical movement body disfigurement (WHO 2002; Ellsberg M. C. & Heise L. (2005)

Proposed Mitigative Measures

To mitigate effects of GBV and finally curb it, there is need to consider amending the legal system of our countries and foster behavioral change among all citizens.

i. Governments should actively resolve this issue at a national level by instituting or amending the laws to deal with perpetrators of GBV. Governments should invest on efforts such as authorizing commissions and allocating budgets which would as a result help recognize, authorize, and empower victims by guaranteeing them an adequate level of safety and security while also ensuring them the provision of equal opportunities towards enjoying personal freedom. There is a need also to streamline types of GBV and criminalize those that directly put the lives of victims in danger.

ii. Governments, through the Ministries of Health should also initiate proper screening of all types of domestic violence and abuse in all private and public healthcare settings while adequate emergency treatments with rehabilitative measures should also be provided. There is need to incorporate the concept of GBV in medical and nursing curricular to help doctors and nurse better deal with victims and perpetrators.
iii. Continuous research studies on causes and effects of GBV be conducted to continuously monitor the dynamics of the situation.

iv. Empowerment of society at large should be intensified. Potential perpetrators should know the effects of GBV and the penalties to face. On the other side potential victims should be empowered and supported to take appropriate action whenever their rights are violated. This can be done through workshopping the communities and raising awareness through social media.

**Conclusion**

Gender based violence remains a major issue of concern in both developed and developing countries Botswana included. Factors associated with GBV include power in equality between man and women as well as the issue of culture. The penetrators can either be family members, strangers or even people of high authority. For countries to curb the issues of GBV, there is need for multidisciplinary approach starting from families to the community. Policy makers need to play an important role in amending existing laws that are not gender sensitive and coming up with strategies, interventions and programs that address issues of GBV.

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