

EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN VICTIMIZED BY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN KENYA

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<p>The purpose of this project was to study the experiences of domestic violence victimized women in Kenya and understand their encounters in the abusive relationships. The aim is to acquire knowledge on the prevalence and the pre-disposing factors of domestic violence in order to help in the planning and implementation of mitigation programs. This study was conducted through Ujamii society, an organization that offers a help line for women victimized by domestic violence.</p> <p>The study was qualitative and data collection method was open-ended questionnaires whereby the informants expressed themselves unlimited. Data analysis was made by deductive content analysis method.</p> <p>The study found out that culture, alcohol abuse and economic factors were the major causes of domestic abuse against women. Most of the women gave positive feedback how Ujamii society has helped them find alternative ways in dealing with their domestic violence experiences.</p>
<p>Keywords: Domestic violence, victimized women, experiences.</p>

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<p>Projektin päämäärä on tutkia perheäkialtaa kokeneiden naisten kokemuksia Keniassa, ja ymmärtää heidän kokemuksiaan väkialtaisissa suhteissa. Tarkoitus on kerätä tietoa perheväkivallan yleisyydestä ja esiintyvyydestä, sekä perheväkivaltaan johtavista olosuhteista sekä osatekijöistä. Tutkimus on suoritettu yhteistyössä Ujamii -yhteisön kanssa. Ujamii -yhteisö tarjoaa apua perheväkivallan naispuolisille uhreille.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa on käytetty kvalitatiivisen informaation keräysmetodeja seuraavasti: Avoimia kyselylomakkeita, missä vastaajat saivat ilmaista itseään vapaamuotoisesti. Tieto analysoitiin deduktiivisella sisällöntarkastelumethodilla.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen perusteella voidaan päätellä, että kulttuuriset tekijät, alkoholismi, sekä ekonomiset (taloudelliset) tekijät olivat naisiin kohdistuvan perheväkivallan yleisimmät syyt. Useimmat naiset antoivat positiivista palautetta Ujamii -yhteisön työstä heihin kohdistuvassa avustustyössä. Ujamii -yhteisön vaihtoehtoiset menettelytavat perheväkivaltatilanteissa, ja niiden ehkäisemisessä saivat positiivisen maininnan useimpien kyselyyn vastanneiden naisten kohdalla</p>
Asiasanat : Perheväkivalta, väkivaltaa kokeneet naiset, kokemukset

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1. INTRODUCTION

In a survey conducted in 2010 by a district education office in Kenya obtained information on the incidence of domestic violence in Kenya. The survey indicated that violence against women is widespread and occurs among all social economic groups. There is however lack of information on accurate estimates of domestic violence against women due to largely unreported cases. In America, a national survey conducted among 6000 families concluded that a significant number of men assaulted their spouses. (FIDA Kenya 2010)

Domestic violence has been a long-standing problem in Kenya, particularly in rural areas. A study conducted in 2003 explored the factors associated with physical and sexual abuse, on a sample of 4,876 married women aged 15-49 years in the Kenya demographic survey. The results indicated that almost half of the married women interviewed reported at least one type of violence 36% was physical and 13 % were sexual. (FIDA Kenya 2009)

Various factors contribute to high occurrence of domestic violence against women. This includes economic factors that render women sorely dependent on their husband. Economic dependency diminishes a woman's ability to have a say in a relationship or take action in the occurrence of domestic abuse. Cultural factors also contribute to the marginalization of women making it more acceptable for domestic violence to exist in the society. Lack of effective government initiatives discourages women from seeking protection. Social acceptances of domestic violence against women and deeply engrained cultural beliefs on the inferiority of women as well as gender roles have encouraged the practice. (Cooper et al. 2005, 120.)

Ujamii Society in Kenya is a Non-government organization organized by women for women. The purpose for the organization is to create a helpline for women who have been abused and suffered from advanced effect of domestic violence. The organization offers legal representatives to the battered women as well as psychological and physical therapy.

2. THE UJAMII SOCIETY

This study was conducted through Ujamii society, a program that works directly with the domestic violent victimized women. Ujamii Society is a Non-government organization that was established with the purpose of creating a helpline for women who have been abused and suffered from advanced effect of domestic violence. The organization offers legal representatives to the battered women as well as psychological and physical therapy.

Ujamii society is financed by the central government through CDF (constituency development fund). Constituency development fund was introduced by the central government to fund local municipalities with the purpose of enabling the local government's finance their individual needs. Due to high prevalence in domestic violence, Nairobi municipality felt the need to create a sanctuary for women who experienced domestic violence. Ujamii society co-operates with the police, district attorneys and family counseling centers and other organizations that advocate for women.

(Ujamii society 2010)

Ujamii society prevents violation against women by their male spouses by offering an alternative and empowering the women. The goal is to help the women from abuse through refuge, counseling, collecting information and experiences about the abuse and legal representation. The project also aims at developing services that teach self-economic dependency for the women. The purpose of the Ujamii society is to increase the security of all the family members and to direct them to places where they can get help through counseling. The goal is to stop the violence and to help the women to change their attitudes so that they can live in equal relationships. (Ujamii Society Kenya)

The activities in Ujamii society work process include phone services where battered women voluntarily contact the organization for help. After the first phone contact, they arrange an individual meeting with the client where the process starts, depending on the client's situation and the help needed, the client is referred to self-help groups within the organization where the women share and exchange experiences and how to stop the abuse. The services are confidential.

The women at Ujamii society share common experiences of spouse abuse. Various approaches are used by Ujamii society staff to equip the women with coping skills. Sharing experiences with individuals whom have shared a similar situation is considered to be a mile stone in the healing process.

Various activities are organized by the institution as well as by the women themselves in order to facilitate self-expression. These activities include; sewing, baking as well as pottery. The activities also provide distraction and necessary skills that some of the women may need for self-employment.

The women are grouped according to their progress into small help groups where they can share stories and experiences with others on the same path. The institution also offers one on one counseling services where by the victims are offered weekly sessions with professional counselors.

Self-help groups offer the women an opportunity to share their deepest feelings and experiences without the fear of ridicule. This in return equips individual persons with coping skills and alternative ideals that help them acquire self-esteem, economic independence, among other life transforming skills. The groups are particularly important tools that help the women in the healing process. In one particular meeting, a respondent described how physical abuses from her spouse begin from jealousy.

(Ujamii Society 2010)

Involving battered women in self-help groups is a crucial step in helping them to heal and seek solutions to their domestic problems. The women are able to get motional release from their frustrations and other problems whenever they have an opportunity to tell someone about them. Counseling history consistently shows that as persons begin to explain their problems to a sympathetic listener, their tensions begin to subside. They become more relaxed and tend to become more coherent and rational. The release of tensions does not necessarily mean that the solution to the problem has been found, but it does help remove mental blocks in the way of a solution.

(Mills 2008, 330.)

The other process involves one on one counseling sessions where every individual woman is assigned to a counselor. Counseling is defined as a developmental process, in which one individual (the counselor) provides to another individual or group (the client), guidance and encouragement, challenge and inspiration in creatively managing and resolving practical, personal and relationship issues, in achieving goals, and in self-realization
(Eagan 2006, 308.)

Through counseling process, the councilors are able to help the women confirm or make informed and voluntary decisions about their individual life. Informed choice is a voluntary, well-considered decision that an individual makes on the basis of options, information, and understanding. The decision making process should result in a free and informed decision by the individual woman about whether they desires to implement a desirable option. (Geldard 2002, 250-254.)

The objective of counseling is to give the client support in dealing with problems so that they will regain the ability to rationalize effectively in the situation at hand. Counseling helps the women enter back into their marriage if they wish to, with as much information as is reasonably possible about themselves as individuals, their respective families and personal integrity. Counseling provides the women with reassurance, which can be a valuable, though sometimes temporary, cure for a client's emotional upsets which will allow the women to function normally and pursue their goals.
(Geldard 2002, 255.)

3. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is defined as physical or psychological abuse directed toward a spouse or domestic partner; usually violence by men against women. It is a behavior used by one person in a relationship to control the other. Partners may be married or not married, living together, separated or dating. People in intimate relationships sometimes tend to disagree. Disagreements arise mostly on gender-based issues for instance division of duties and on the rights of individual partner. People from different cultures have different ways solving their domestic problems.

(Itzin 2010, 224.)

Domestic Violence against women in Kenya goes largely unnoticed. It consists of a pattern of coercive behaviors used by a competent partner to establish and maintain power and control over their spouses. These behaviors, which can occur alone or in combination, sporadically or continually, include physical violence, psychological abuse, and non-consensual sexual behavior. Each incident builds upon previous episodes, thus setting the stage for future violence.

Psychological abuse includes threats of physical harm to the spouse or others, intimidation, coercion, degradation and humiliation, false accusations, and ridicule. Stalking may occur during a relationship, or after a relationship has ended. In many relationships, insults are the most tangible evidence of the detailed work of power that aims at controlling, managing and hurting a spouse. Insults are used as a normalizing and punishing technique, and as such, they are an essential part of the discipline that aims at subjugating and dominating the other. More than half of the women in violent relationships report that men have humiliated and put them down with offensive words. In some relationships, insults are used in the power struggle.

(Nicolson et al.2010, 5.)

3.1. Physical abuse

Physical abuse refers to any behavior that involves the intentional use of force against the body of another person that risks physical injury, harm and or pain.

Physical abuse or assault is the most obvious form of Domestic Violence, and it is the most visible. Assaults often start small, maybe a small shove during an argument, or forcefully grabbing of the wrist, but over time, physical abuse (or battering) usually becomes more severe, and more frequent, and can result in the death of the victim. (Mills 2008, 338.)

Physical abuse includes, pushing, hitting, slapping, choking, using an object to hit, twisting of a body part, forcing the ingestion of unwanted substances, and use of a weapon. Physical abuse also includes traditional practices harmful to women such as female genital mutilation and wife inheritance.

(Newton 2001, 750.)

3.2. Psychological abuse

Women in abusive relationships often experience psychological abuse. Psychological abuse is characterized by one spouse exposing another to behavior that is psychologically harmful. The behavior are intended to intimidate and persecute and takes the form of threats, abandonment, social isolation, verbal aggression, constant humiliation and threats to take away custody of the children. Psychological abuse is crippling to the victims. It robs the persons their self-esteem, ability to think rationally, and lack of self-confidence. (Saltzman 2002, 160.)

Most of the respondents said that the ongoing psychological abuse they had experienced, emotional torture and living under terror was often more unbearable than the physical abuse and took them longer to come to terms and get over the emotional void than the violent episodes. They experienced low esteem and unable to trust, make even simple decisions and it left them doubting their own judgment and gut reaction. In some cases this led to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Saltzman 2002, 163.)

3.2.1. Social isolation

Social isolation is a technique used by perpetrators of domestic violence to control their victims by limiting access and communication with family and friends. Lack of social support increases the women vulnerability to abuse that may render the women to justify the abusive. The women are denied an opportunity to build up social networks they would need to draw on, once they leave the abusive relationship. Social isolation includes confinement to the home, overwhelming surveillance, public humiliation and restricting communication with friends.

(Saltzman 2002, 165.)

During one help group meeting, an informant described how she had being subjected to social isolation and humiliation. She was denied communication with her friends and relatives. Her spouse made it so difficult for her to communicate that she stopped attempts to make contacts with anyone. This enabled the spouse to abuse her uninterrupted by anyone. In many occasions, she was refused help when sick or injured, prohibited access to money and deprived of basic necessities.

For the victims, it is very easy for one to be isolated by the perpetrator from social interaction with the outsiders, in this case, home transforms into a space that allows more severe disciplinary practices. There is no one to interfere when such behavior takes place (Sadik 2000, 117.)

3.2.2. Financial control

Financial abuse can take many forms, from denying access to funds, to making the victim solely responsible for all house hold finances while handling money irresponsibly himself. Money becomes a tool by which the abuser can further control the victim, ensuring either her financial dependence on him, or shifting the responsibility of keeping a roof over the family's head onto the victim.

(Dr. Jeanne King 2011)

Financial abuse can include preventing the women from activities that may earn them money or from keeping the money, denying sufficient housekeeping finances, forcing the victim to account for every penny spent, denying access to finances and putting all bills in the name of the victim. The women are also threatened to be made homeless by forcing them out of the house. The perpetrators of domestic violence also force the victims to work while they themselves do nothing. (Dr. Jeanne King 2011)

3.3. Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is any sexual act where a person is forced to engage in sexual activities without their will. They may be forced with threats of physical violence or just enough fear to make them comply with their abuser's wishes. Sexual abuse of adults covers a range of inappropriate sexual behaviors that cause distress or harm to an individual. Sexual abuse can be actual or threatened and causes physical and emotional damage. (Bostock 2003, 32.)

Sexual abuse can happen within a marriage. Marital rape is often unreported and unrecognized within a marriage even by those experiencing the abuse. Culturally, there is an assumption by many women that they have a 'duty' to satisfy their husband's or partner's sexual desires and demands even if they do not want to. But, rape is a crime, even if you know the person. Sexual abuse within marriage may also cause the person experiencing the abuse to feel that it is their fault, or the attacker may act as if the abuse took place with the consent of the person being attacked, leading to confusion and guilt. (Bostock 2003,35.)

In Kenya Sexual abuse and rape by an intimate partner has not being recognized as a crime. Women in many marital relationships do not consider forced sex as rape if they are married to, or cohabiting with, the perpetrator. They assumes that it's their duty to offer their bodies and provide sexual satisfaction to their husbands once they enter into a contract of marriage, the husband has the right to unlimited sexual access to his wife. Surveys in many countries also reveal that approximately 10 to 15 percent of women report being forced to have sex with their intimate partner (Sexual Offences Act 2006, 115.)

Sexual abuse includes: rape that involves forcing someone into sexual activities against their will, using objects violently during sex, forcing someone to have sex with another person when they do not wish to, sharing sexual stories or images about a spouse without their consent, use of sexual or derogatory names, forcing someone to perform sexual acts in front of others when they do not want to. (Bostock 2003, 140.)

FACTORS THAT PROMOTE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Several factors make women easily susceptible to domestic violence. These factors include cultural pre disposition where by some cultures accept male dominance, lack of legal registration that would criminalize domestic violence and economic factors.

3.4. Cultural Factors

Most men in Kenya come from ethnic cultural groups where male dominance is accepted and hence expect their wives to be submissive to them and disregard their rights. Men from this cultural back grounds lack alternative knowledge on ways to deal with their family problems other than domestic violence. Cultural ideologies – both in industrialized and developing countries – provide ‘legitimacy’ for violence against women in certain circumstances. Religious and historical traditions in the past have sanctioned the chastising and beating of wives.

The physical punishment of wives has been particularly sanctioned under the notion of entitlement and ownership of women. Experiences during childhood, such as witnessing domestic violence and experiencing physical and sexual abuse, have been identified as factors that put children at risk. Violence may be learnt as a means of resolving conflict and asserting manhood by children who have witnessed such patterns of conflict resolution.

Cultural factors make it difficult to define exactly what domestic violence means. For instance in some ethnic groups in Kenya, a soft slap on the cheek is acceptable while in others, physical beatings to women is considered normal and a show of love. In these cases, men face social pressure to maintain power and control over the women.

3.5. Lack of Legal Support

Lack of legal support particularly within the sanctity of the home, is a strong factor in perpetuating violence against women. Until recently, the public/private distinction that has ruled most legal systems has been a major obstacle to women's rights.

Increasingly, however, States are seen as responsible for protecting the rights of women even in connection with offences committed within the home. In many countries violence against women is exacerbated by legislation, law enforcement and judicial systems that do not recognize domestic violence as a crime. (Human Rights Kenya 2008)

The challenge is to end impunity for the perpetrators as one means of preventing future abuse. Investigations by Human Rights Watch have found that in cases of domestic violence, law enforcement officials frequently reinforce the batterers' attempts to control and demean their victims. Even though several countries now have laws that condemn domestic violence, "when committed against a woman in an intimate relationship, these attacks are more often tolerated as the norm than prosecuted as laws. In many places, those who commit domestic violence are prosecuted less vigorously and punished more leniently than perpetrators of similarly violent crimes against strangers (family protection) bill was drafted in 2007. (Human Rights Kenya 2008)

There is still no law to address domestic violence in Kenya. A Domestic Violence Bill, which includes a provision sanctioning marital rape, has been pending since 1999. Law enforcement officials are generally reluctant to investigate domestic violence reports as they are considered "domestic issues." (Human Rights Kenya 2008)

Although the Penal Code, section 139, criminalizes rape and provides for a sentence of up to life imprisonment, the rate of reporting and prosecution remains low due to victims' fear of retribution, police reluctance to intervene, poor training of prosecutors, and unavailability of medical personnel.

3.6. Economic factors

Lack of economic resources underpins women's and increases their vulnerability to violence and their difficulty in extricating themselves. On the one hand, the threat and fear of violence keeps women from seeking employment, or, at best, compels them to accept low-paid, home-based exploitative labor. And on the other, without economic independence, women have no power to escape from an abusive relationship. Women's increasing economic activity and independence is viewed as a threat which leads to increased male violence. This is particularly true when the male partner is unemployed, and feels his power undermined in the household. Increases in poverty, unemployment, hardship, income inequality, stress, and alcohol abuse – has led to increased violence in society in general, including violence against women. (FIDA Kenya 2009)

Male control of family wealth inevitably places decision-making authority in male hands, leading to male dominance and proprietary rights over women and Women's economic dependence on men. Limited access to cash and credit. Discriminatory laws regarding inheritance, property rights, use of communal lands, and maintenance after divorce or widowhood. Limited access to employment in formal and informal sectors. Limited access to education and training for women. (FIDA Kenya 2009)

3.7. Alcohol and Drugs

Excessive use of alcohol and other drugs have been noted as a factor provoking the aggressive and violent male behavior towards women. A survey of violence against women conducted in Russia 2010 revealed that half the cases of physical violence were associated from the male's excessive use of alcohol. Alcohol may impair judgment, reduce inhibition and increase aggression. Alcohol has however been used by the perpetrators of domestic violence as an excuse for their behavior. The men will rid themselves off the responsibility of their behavior by blaming it on the effects alcohol. (FIDA Kenya 2009)

4. EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN WOMEN

Domestic violence has profound effects on the individual women as well as the society in general. Participation of women in the society plays a key role in social development programs, be they governance, poverty elevation, or environmental. The suppression of women denies them the chance to reach their full potential. This in return undermines the human and economic development progress. (Smith 2011, 397-399.)

Domestic violence against women also affects future generations and family ties. Children, who have witnessed domestic violence or have themselves been abused, exhibit health and behavior problems, including problems with their weight, their eating and their sleep and clinical level of anxiety or post traumatic disorders. They may have difficulty at school and find it hard to develop close and positive friendships. They may try to run away or even display suicidal tendencies. Children may blame themselves against the violence which precipitates feelings of self-blame, withdrawal and non-verbal. They may also exhibit regressed behaviors such as clinging and whining and concentration problems (Newton 2001, 240.)

Violence against women leads to far-reaching physical and psychological consequences, some with fatal outcomes. While physical injury represents only a part of the negative health impacts on women, it is among the more visible forms of violence. The United States Department of Justice has reported that 37 per cent of all women who sought medical care in hospital emergency rooms for violence-related injuries were injured by a current or former spouse or partner. Assaults result in injuries ranging from bruises and fractures to chronic disabilities such as partial or total loss of hearing or vision, and burns may lead to disfigurement. The medical complications resulting from female genital mutilation (FGM) can range from hemorrhage and sterility to severe psychological trauma. (WHO 2011)

Studies in many countries have shown high levels of violence during pregnancy resulting in risk to the health of both the mother and the unborn fetus. In the worst cases, all of these examples of domestic violence can result in the death of the woman murdered by her current or ex-partner. Sexual assaults and rape can lead to unwanted pregnancies, and the dangerous complications that follow from resorting

The impact of violence on women's mental health leads to severe and fatal consequences. Battered women have a high incidence of stress and stress-related illnesses such as post-traumatic stress syndrome, Panic attacks, depression, sleeping and eating disturbances, elevated blood pressure, alcoholism, drug abuse, and low self-esteem. For some women, fatally depressed and demeaned by their abuser, there seems to be no escape from a violent relationship except suicide. (WHO 2011)

Post traumatic disorders (PTSD) is a condition that generates waves of anxiety, anger, aggression, depression, and suspicion that threaten the person's sense of self and interferes with daily functioning. Domestic violence is a specific example of an event that places women at risk of suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. (Smeltzer 2004, 104-105.)

Women who have experienced extreme domestic violence can show symptoms of PTSD hours to years after the trauma is experienced. Symptoms lasting less than 3 months can be defined as acute PTSD. Symptoms lasting more than 3 months indicate that the victim has Chronic Post traumatic stress disorder.

A factor that contributes to the risk of depression to women of domestic violence includes gender inequality, lack of reproductive and sexual rights, economic and social control. Some of the women who are exposed to domestic violence are more likely to exhibit impairment in social, occupational and overall daily functioning while others function appropriately in their interactions with the outside world by exerting great effort enforcing them to mask their distress. Sometimes they are successful camouflaging their depression for months or years but they sometimes succumb to the severe depression. The women who are suffering from depression experience at least five out of nine characteristics of diagnostic criteria with one of the first two symptoms present most of the time.

Women under violent situations are more likely unable to negotiate for safer sex and use of contraception. They therefore run a high risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS (Daily nation Kenya 2001, 5.)

5. RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the experiences of domestic violence victimized women in Kenya?

6. THE AIM AND PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to find out what are the experiences of domestic violent victimized women. The aim is to acquire knowledge on the prevalence and the predisposing factors of domestic violence in order to help in the planning and implementation of mitigation programs.

7. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDY

7.1. Data collection methods

This is a qualitative study. There is no universally accepted definition of qualitative research, because it is a field of enquiry rather than a single entity. Qualitative research is a broad term for a variety of research approaches, just as quantitative research is not a single entity but encompasses a variety of research designs, such as clinical trials and surveys. (Creswell, 2010 160-165.)

'Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.'

The purpose of the various types of qualitative research is broadly agreed and involves the description and interpretation of human experience so that social situations or human experience can be better understood (Powers and Knapp, 1990). The key principles of such inquiry are that it is conducted in a natural setting, by a researcher who is involved in and may be a part of the data collection process, that the data are usually in the form of words or pictures, not numbers, and that the analysis is inductive (i.e. variables, relationships and theories are constructed after reflecting on the data gathered rather than testing to see if the data support pre-established

definitions and theory), focuses on focuses on participants' perspectives, and describes the results using expressive and persuasive language (Gretchen 2006,206.)

Grey (1997, 68) says that the experiential designs involved in qualitative research yield greater evidence than any other forms of research. However, some researchers think that since qualitative research is in the other end of the spectrum, it does not produce evidence as powerful as that generated by quantitative work ((Morse et al.1996, 250-260.)

According to Parahoo (1997, 6) states that reason why this research approach has so much to offer nursing is that both nursing and qualitative research set great store by the patient-centred, holistic and human aspects of care:

Qualitative research concerns individual experiences and the uniqueness of each individual's responses. Similarly, in nursing we subscribe to the notion that patients have individual needs and ideally should have an individualized plan of care. The data is collected from people in their own environment, taking into consideration their own social and cultural situation. Also in nursing, and particularly non-acute care, the situation in which an individual is living when planning treatment and interventions is acknowledged. Moreover, it seeks to understand an individual's perspectives and daily life. Nurses must also take account of an individual's preferences, respect and promote the patient's rights, choices and decisions. (Johnson et al 2002, 420-422)

There are various issues that need to be considered while conducting a qualitative study. Variables of interest are not obvious, such as in a complex situation or phenomena where the researcher is not in a position to determine which variables may be important. A detailed, holistic view of a topic, individuals is investigated in their natural setting and finally the researcher is drawn to writing the research in a literary style rather than in a numerical way. (Johnson et al 2002, 450)

The informants were women of Ujamii society of Kenya who have been affected by long term abuse by violent spouses. The staff of ujamii society who closely works with these women also participated. The preliminary meeting with the informants was held at the Ujamii society headquarters. At the meeting, it was agreed that the mode of communication would be through questionnaires and interviews. Tape recording would also be used during the interview.

7.2. Data collection

A written permission for collecting data through questionnaires and interview was sent to the administrator of Ujamii society. The possibility of getting in touch with appropriate informants was discussed with the director. The director then sent a request to the clients of Ujamii society requesting for their participation. Eight women agreed to participate in the study. A purposive sample research uses a specific knowledge about a certain group of people in order to find a suitable representative (Berg 2007, 44)

The data collection commenced on 21st December 2010 when an official introduction of the researcher with the respondents was done by the director. The questionnaires were handed and a date was set for the interview. A preliminary interview was then conducted on 28th December 2010 at Ujamii society. Another meeting was then arranged on January 14th 2011 for follow up discussions. A total of A4 forty pages of data material were gathered.

Seeking the informant's permission before the interview was appropriate way of finding suitable and reliable informants. Eight women agreed to participate in the interview. The women had experienced domestic violence. (Berg 2007, 44)

The method of gathering data was by open-ended questionnaires. Maggi (2010, 98) explains that open-ended questions are those that elicit answers which the interviewer cannot anticipate and are usually lengthier to get a description of the phenomenon of interest in a condensed and general form. This allowed the respondents to answer the questions in an essay form giving a lot of information without limit. This form of data collection was successful because very important issues regarding the women violent experiences were discussed.

The questions explored the women's experiences in domestic violence as well as the process of intervention at Ujamii society. An interview was also conducted after the respondents answered the questionnaires. This was to get deeper information about their experiences. The language used in both the interview and questionnaires was English and Swahili.

The main research question was; ‘What are the experiences of domestic violence victimized women in Kenya?’

The questions were given to the staff that had enough time to describe as much as possible about their counselling therapeutics while the clients of Ujamii society participating in the study described their violent experiences.

7.3. Data analyses

Data analyses of this study begun by reading the questionnaire’s responses. The data was then jolted down into categories. The written data was read and re-read and the information picked up from the data familiarized with.

Familiarization involves questionnaires been re-read with the aim of becoming immersed in the data. This is an essential stage in qualitative analysis. According to qualitative researchers, it enhances the researchers’ awareness of the respondents’ reality. Make rough categories of answers that seem to belong together and code them with a key word. The information obtain will be summarized in discussion (Thomas et.al 2003, 259)

The next step was to divide the data into subcategories, which were formulated by interpreting the contents of the data, and then into main categories. All those reflecting things concerning a same certain area belonged to the same group. In this way, main categories were formulated. The subcategories were named in order to describe the areas the women at Ujamii society had given.

According to Thomas (2003, 209) he considers content analysis to be how the researcher succeeds to simplify the data and formulate the categories in a way that it describes the phenomena in a reliable way. Due to the trustworthiness of the analysis, it is important that the researcher is capable of providing link between the result of the analysis and the original data. In this study, deductive content analysis was found to be a reliable way possible to present the findings.

After gathering the data I interpreted the questionnaires in order to get the meaning and come up with my interpretation. When I had the data documented on paper, I used deductive manner to make the analysis. (Mathews 2010, 335-338.)

8. RESEARCH FINDING

The research was conducted among the women of Ujamii society. The women were at the center to seek shelter and learn skills that would help them cope from their experiences of domestic abuse. The Data collection was done through questionnaires and interview. Tape recording was done during the interview for reference during the analyses. Due to the sensitivity of the issue, the data collection was done discreetly, in order to protect the women's dignity and family status.

The study found out that domestic violence is still very prevalent with an affirmation of most of the women interviewed. Poverty was among the highest cause of family disturbances and violence which was up half of the women interviewed. Women in poor families lacked the ability for proper housing, accessibility to legal representation and faced barriers to employment. Alcohol presented a significant rate as a cause of domestic violence, income inequality and cultural believes were also marginable factors.

The research also found out that there is high rate of domestic violence but most of it goes unreported due to the fear of society ridicule, fear of broken families and religious believes that prohibit divorce and support male superiority. There is there for a great need to provide counseling and refuge homes for women as well as create awareness on the impact of domestic violence that affects the victims as well as the society in general.

Emotional abuse

In responding to the questions concerning the emotional abuse they experienced, the women described emotional abuse being the most difficult experience to deal with than the physical abuse. The emotional scars took more time and effort to recover than the physical scars they sustained from the abuse. Women who were emotionally abused experienced low esteem and were unable to trust themselves, make even simple decisions and it left them doubting their own judgment and gut reaction.

The women described a common view about emotional abuses they experienced. Most of them agreed that emotional abuse was harder to recognize but more or less the same as physical abuse. During the abuse, most women expressed feelings of stress, sense of depression and anxiety but at the time they could not identify what was wrong. Most of them became fearful of their partners and began to change their behaviors in order to please the men. The emotional abuse made the women to question their sanity. They would doubt themselves and their own sense of reality which lead to the women questioning their every thoughts and behavior.

The affected women suffer from profound psychological and emotional damage that goes widely ignored by the society. A respondent described how her husband begun to emotionally abuse her by controlling due to his irrational jealousy;

“My spouse initially would explain that his behavior was out of love and concern, and I was flattered at first, but as time went on, the jealousy became more severe and the control worsened. He questioned my every move and about whom I had spoken to or seen during the day, accused me of flirting. He was very jealous of the time I spent with my family, friends, children or hobbies which did not include him. As the jealousy progressed, he started to call more frequently during the day and would drop by unexpectedly at my work place. He expressed unhappiness about my work and said he feared I would find someone else” Jealousy is not proof of love; it is a sign of insecurity and possessiveness.

In a similar help group meeting, a woman described how her abusive spouse began demeaning her

“He would constantly criticize and belittle me in front of relatives and friends. The criticism grew rampantly in everything I did”.

She described how her spouses demeaning behavior affected her self-esteem to the point that she failed to carry out the simplest chores. This inadvertently made the relationship to deteriorate to physical and sexual abuse.

Physical abuse

In most relationships, physical abuse is usually an escalation from other forms of abuse. While some of the women described their relationship to being abusive from the start, most of them said that their relationships started subtly and got worse over time. Most of the respondents who had suffered physical abuse described a pattern of threats of violence that would eventually lead to the first strike. The first physical abuse would be followed by an apology, promises of change and gifts. The cycle would repeat, becoming more severe than before.

Various factors that caused the escalation of physical abuse were described by the respondents. Alcoholism and drugs were the major causes of escalating violence. One of the respondents described how alcohol would make her seemingly loving husband to abuse her. She described how her husband of twenty years began to use alcohol as an excuse to psychologically and sometimes physically abuse her.

“Whenever he got drunk, my husband would come home very late in the night and accuse me of unfaithfulness among others. The drinking increased in frequency which in return worsened the abuse. I was forced to stay up late in the night waiting for him to return from his drinking. He would demand for food and other privileges that the family would not afford and he would beat me if I did not meet his demands. He more and more lacked understanding and patience”

Various women also described an aggravating trend of physical and sexual abuse during pregnancy. The reason relating to heightened violence during pregnancy is that the male partners felt greater sense of stress on the impending pregnancy. This in return made them express their frustrations back to the perceived source which in this case is the woman. These experiences were particularly relevant as a result of unwanted or unintended pregnancies.

“Unlike other domestic violence, abuse against pregnant women is usually directed at the breasts, abdomen or the genitals. (Brown ridge et al. 2009, 296.)

Responding to the issue of physical abuse during pregnancy, a respondent said that her husband physically abused her for the first time when she was pregnant.

“My husband was controlling and very jealous before my pregnancy but he had never hit me until this one time he slapped me during an argument while I was five months pregnant. The pregnancy had being unplanned and this had put a lot of tension in our relationship. My husband was particularly stressed about our financial inability to support the unborn child. He expressed his frustration about the pregnancy by being physically abusive to me”

Physical abuse is one of the most identifiable forms of domestic violence. Physical abuse usually leads to bruising, broken bones and burns. However physical abuse leads to far more emotional and behavioral consequences that may affect the victim in a lifetime.

Sexual abuse

Marital sexual abuse was described by the respondents to be one of the most ignored forms of abuse by the legal system. For instance the Kenyan legal system continues to reflect the belief that rape within a marriage is not rape. Complaints for sexual assaults other than those committed by a stranger are in most cases dismissed.

The respondents however felt that the emotional bond that is shared by a woman and her husband makes any form of sexual abuse a very emotional trauma to the victim. Majority of the respondents described sexual abuse to have occurred soon after child birth.

“My husband forced me to have sex with him just few weeks after childbirth. I tried to urge him to wait but he just could not listen. The sex was very painful and it caused the childbirth breeding to relapse. I was afraid that he would continue so I decided to report the matter to the police. The police said they could not do anything about the matter because we were married and it is a woman’s duty to fulfill her husband sexually”

Marital rape soon after child birth was identified to be caused by the men’s unwillingness to control their sexual urges. The research also found out that some of the men felt threatened by the attention the mother gave to the new born which led to a sense of loss to the relational security with their wives. This created jealousy and

tension that led some of the men to use forced sex as a tool of re asserting their authority.

According to the respondents, sexual abuse was the most difficult form of abuse to discuss with relatives and friends. This in return caused the women to suffer in silence. Sexual violence ranges from marital rape, use of objects against the partners will, discussing sexual issues about the victim to other people without the victims consent and forcing the victim to have sex with multiple partners.

The respondents agreed that the response a woman gets after revealing the abuse greatly affects her coping. Cases that are dismissed by the police or the judiciary leave the women more vulnerable to continued abuse and more emotional scars. Healing is more apparent when a disclosure is met with compassion and is followed with effective intervention.

9. DISCUSSION

In my study it was noted that counseling and self-help groups played a big role in the healing process for the victimized women. Counseling and sharing experiences helped the women understand that, it is not their fault or inadequacies that cause the men to abuse them, but the fact that violence against women are deeply rooted in the society. This in return helps the women break the cycle of abuse by speaking out more and by seeking help from the authority.

The staff described counseling and the general process of intervention to the victims of domestic violence to being very important, very appreciated and valuable to the women. They described that the staff find out themselves with the help of the client what kind of intervention that they need. This is done by having discussions with the client and observing their individual needs.

The staff described the process they followed during this kind of interventions. They said that during the first contact by phone, they try to evaluate the best they can the whole situation and they try to get the victims to participate in their work process. That means that they try to fix a first personal meeting with the client. On the first appointment they evaluate once again the “whole” situation and at the same time they explain to the client what exactly are the purposes of Ujamii society in order to establishing a workable relationship based on mutual confidence and trust.

During the working process, the staff said that they talk concretely about the violent situations in the family or the relationship and try to focus in an alternative to violent point of view.

The respondents agreed that among the most important things to start with would be to change the society’s cultural attitudes and beliefs, which support women suppression. Religious, cultural, and parental influences often lead to differences in relationship view, values, priorities attitudes and behaviors that normally require mutual respect, understanding and tolerance.

It was noted that a healthier and mutually satisfying relationship free of violence would lie on the society’s ability to see beyond superficial gender distinctions that

sometimes have been set by some beliefs. The respondents felt that the gender differences prevent sharing, connecting and relating spouses, which in most cases will lead to the men using domestic violence as a means of attaining control. Also, the society should make the violent men take full responsibility of their actions.

Breaking the cycle of abuse in the abusive relationship would depend more on the victim's ability to break free both emotionally and economically from the perpetrators. The cycle of abuse occurs when a family's life becomes a cycle of violence. Life begins to revolve around anticipating violence; coping with actual acts of violence; or recovering from the violence. Ironically, a family can become tremendously close in the recovery phase. The man who was terrifying and intimidating turns into a remorseful, needy, and dependent man. The woman who was battered then will feel sorry for the man and recommit to him in a fantasized hope that the abuse won't happen again. But the cycle of abuse will begin again, often becoming worse. The cycle of abuse can only be broken with awareness and professional help.

Various factors that prevented the women in the study from breaking the cycle of domestic abuse were noted. This includes lack of economic self-dependency, social and cultural trends that supports male supremacy as well as lack of legal support.

10. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Attention was paid on ethical issues that are present in all phases of the study. In the beginning of any study, as Kvale has presented (2009), a researcher needs to consider the informed consent that includes estimation of possible risks or benefits, from the interviewee's point of view. A researcher has to define the study overall purpose, and clarify that the participant is a volunteer and has the right to withdraw at any time (Talbot 1995, 36.)

In this study, permission to carry on the study has been requested from Ujamii society. Participants may choose to participate in study and no names will be written down. If they wish to withdraw from participation they are free to do so at any time.

In order to protect the participants, anonymity and confidentiality was guaranteed; special attention ought to be paid when publishing the report.

11. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Reliability is defined as ‘the extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research is considered to be reliable (Joppe 2000,7.)

Validity determines whether the results truly measures that which it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are. Researchers generally determine validity by asking a series of questions, and will often look for the answers in the research of others (Joppe 2000, 7.)

In this research previous studies and findings done by other researchers were taken into consideration to ensure conformity. Creating trust with the respondents ensured for more reliability of the study.

12. RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

Long term measures should be taken to ensure that women are not easy victims of domestic violence. There is need to empower women through equal opportunities for education, employment opportunities, enlighten them on legal issues as well as implement policies that address rights of women to inheritance.

Women should be educated about human rights as well as get information about domestic violence which is a matter of their absolute right. They should be taught about early signs of violence, and their right to equality in family partnership.

Education and other activities that will equip the women with self-esteem and economic skills and enhance participation of women in political and social-economic fields should be done early on in schools. Men on the other hand, should be given positive role models from adolescence by responsible adults and from the society at

large with a message that violence against women is unacceptable and that perpetrators should be held accountable.

Support services that intervene early on before the onset of violence should be enhanced. The services should address associated behavioral patterns such as drugs and alcohol abuse that may facilitate aggression by men. On the other hand, communities should create awareness about the impact of domestic violence. Local communities should mobilize to oppose domestic violence in its midst. Actions taken by the local community may include surveillance of domestic violence situations, offering support to the victims, and challenging the men to stop violence. The society and government agencies should develop appropriate programs that will assist battered women to recover from the violence they have experienced.

Traditional practices and beliefs that demean women integrity should be abolished. This belief includes female genital mutilation (FGM) and society acceptance to the superiority of men over women.

Training the men to master the art of conflict resolution will likely prevent conflicts in the family escalating to violence. One ground rule of conflict resolution that the violent men need to be trained to understand is that their partner's point of view is as valid as their own point of view. Their spouse feels just as strongly about her ideas and feelings as they do. With this knowledge the violent men would be able to approach negotiations with the utmost respect for their partner's point of view.

It would also be crucial to educate the men about the importance of avoiding issuing threats, personal attacks, or ultimatums when negotiating with their partner. Using displeasing strategies, for example, cornering tactics, personal attacks, and ultimatums will only lead to their partners becoming defensive and uncooperative. Taking a break from heated discussions with their partners would also help in avoiding violence. Resuming negotiations after cooling down would most likely ensure a more productive frame of mind.

Violent men need to be educated about the need to compromise with their partners if their recommended solutions to a problem they are discussing is denied. Remaining

rigid and unbending in their problem solving will probably cause them unhappiness more than would be the case if they were more flexible and tolerant.

Women should learn how to define their problems to their partners clearly. Letting their spouse know the problem they wish to solve before a negotiation session would help their partners to prepare for the meeting and hopefully develop their own plan. This would prevent flare ups. After defining the problem, the men should learn to cooperate with their partners to generate a long list of possible solutions of which the partners in an atmosphere of collaboration and cooperation choose the best choice among the stated. This will influence a willingness on both sides to work out a viable compromise solution. The implementation phase will involve discussion of who will do what, how and when. Participating in a plan evaluation phase for the men would be crucial in order to review how each partner is satisfied with the results of the plan.

Violence against women continuous to be a global epidemic that in advertently affects the physical, emotional, and psychological factors of the victimized women. It is one of the most intense violations of human rights that deny woman equality, self-worth and their right to enjoy fundamental freedom.

Domestic violence is widely prevalent in Kenya and cuts across ethnic boundaries, class, and level of education, income, and age. Even though domestic violence is condemned by many societies; the reality is that violence against women continuous under cultural practices and norms, or through misinterpretation of religious teachings. Moreover, when the violence takes place within the home, which is often the case, the abuse goes without being reported or is passively ignored by the law enforcement.

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Appendix I

Research Questions

1. What were your experiences through the abusive period?
2. What type of abuse have your spouse inflicted on you. Was it psychological, physical or sexual?
3. How did the abuse begin? Did it begin early on in your relationship and were there particular triggers to the abuse.
4. Did you realize from the start that you were being abused? Did you feel that you deserved the treatment?
5. Have you sustained serious physical injuries from the abuse?
6. Did you ever experience denial to the abuse?
7. Did you confide with friends or close relatives about the abuse. If yes, what were there reactions towards the abuse?
8. When and why did you decide to seek help?
9. Did you seek help on your own initiatives or were you pressurized by friend or relatives to do so.
10. Has the intervention from the outside changed your approach in regards to self-perception and future choices?
11. Has the intervention offered tools for self-economic reliance?