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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN GHANA: THE ATTITUDES OF MALE VICTIMS OF ACCRA

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ABSTRACT

The prevalence of domestic violence against males and their attitude towards reporting is characterised by the social construct of masculinity which excludes weakness in men and view them as physically dominant over women. Due to these views men are often times viewed as the perpetrators of domestic violence which prevent them from stepping forward to report their experiences. Using a qualitative research design, the study captured men's attitude and domestic violence through a phenomenological process to understand the lived experiences of the participants. Purposive and social network approaches were used to recruit participants of the study and in-depth interviews were done to solicit information from 10 men, hence ten (10) case studies of men. Findings indicate that, domestic violence cases against men were woefully not reported due to conceived male masculinity, stigma and the fear of not being believed. The study recommends sensitization to encourage men report cases and address the issue of stigmatization.

KEY TERMS: *Domestic violence, male victims, reported cases, attitudes*

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INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is a prevalent reality in almost all societies, and it occurs among all demographic groups. While perpetrators and victims of domestic violence can be of either male or female gender, the majority of cases have a male perpetrator and a female victim (Casey et al 2012). Pinheiro (2006) has estimated that thirty-five per-cent of women worldwide have experienced either physical or sexual intimate partner violence at some point in their lives. However, some national studies show that up to seventy per cent (70%) of women have experienced either physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime. The prevalence of physical violence within the domestic settings has been highest in Africa, with almost half of the countries of the continent reporting lifetime prevalence of over forty per cent (40%); the Democratic Republic of Congo having the highest figure of sixty-four per cent (64%) of such cases as at 2007 (Adebayo, 2014).

According to the statistics available at the Accra Regional Office of the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service as at the eighth month of 2007, one hundred and sixteen men had been physically abused. In the Ghanaian society, women, on the contrary, are subjected to discriminatory cultural practices that expose them to the violent tendencies of their male counterpart. Literature reveals that women in violent relationships are more likely than men to report forms of violence among almost all cultures of the world. In other words, male victims compared to female are less likely to tell anyone about partner abuse. Fewer number of male victims of domestic violence compared to female report cases to the police and other law enforcement agencies. The reasons for the lower tendency to report domestic violence among men seem to partly find an explanation in the patriarchal relationship that entrusts power, might, and physical strength to men. Therefore, male victims of violence are mostly ridiculed and shamed when they report cases of domestic abuse they suffer in the hands of their female spouses. Men who report abuse by their spouses are considered “weak” and unable to manage domestic crisis Garrat (2012).

More so, most patriarchal societies perceive men as perpetrators and not victims of domestic violence. This stereotypical misconception seems to have found further expression in the one-sidedness of scholarly work on domestic violence, which mostly studies men as culprits and women as victims of gender-based violence. Men have also been victims of domestic violence. This article attempts to investigate the attitude of male victims towards reporting domestic violence, and the effect of domestic violence on the male victim. Because of the stereotypical notion that men are perpetrators, male victims hardly own-up, therefore, this author used the social networking approach to access research participants. The study is organised into four sections of background, theory and literature review, methods, results, conclusions, policy recommendations, and implications for social work.

THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper is philosophically anchored on the social change theory on domestic violence as espoused in (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961 & Kelley, 1959). The theory assumes that members of the family will resort to violence to obtain their goals for as long as what is to be gained outweighs the cost. This implies that within the family, each and every one has personal desires he or she would wish for, hence, the opposite spouse serves as a stumbling block to achieving such needs. Homans (1961) is of the opinion that, the key assumptions of the exchange perspective are that social behaviour is a series of exchanges and in the course of these exchanges individuals attempt to maximize their rewards and minimise their costs.

The social exchange theory further assumes that women are victims and men are perpetrators of domestic violence. In this paper, the author challenges this proposition and argues that men are not only perpetrators but could be victims, too. Contrary to the opinion of the proponents of this theory that women would resort to violent acts in order to make the male partner succumb to their desires, there could be instances of unprovoked attacks on men by their female spouses.

There are few studies that sought to unravel the attitude of men victims in relation to reporting violent attacks to law enforcement agencies. For instance, Josolyne (2011) is of the opinion that societal perceptions are likely to perpetuate the common assumption that women are always victims and, implicitly, that men are the main perpetrators of such violence. Because of this misconception, male victims are mostly constrained to take up a position of the victim that would warrant the right to justice. Invariably, social prejudice dampens the ability of men to report cases of domestic violence. Also, Josolyne (2011) stated that the police are regularly accused by ‘abused men’ of ignoring male abuse and favouring women during domestic call-outs and investigations. The apathy of the police towards male victims discourages the latter from presenting themselves as victims who seek justice.

However, violence against men is real. Just like women, men suffer physical, emotional and psychological abuse within the domestic set up. Adebayo (2014) echoed the notion that men victims bear the effects of violence in silence, which consequently give them emotional and psychological stresses, these short-term effects, could, in the long run, have far-reaching health consequences such as depression, cardiac attacks, and other mental illnesses.

On the whole, the gap pointed out as lack of sufficient studies in male victims and the theoretical weaknesses that underpin studies on domestic violence, as presented in this section serves as a motivation for this study.

METHODS

This paper was designed on qualitative research techniques because the variables under investigation, which are men's attitudes and effects of domestic violence could be better explained through a phenomenological process to understand the lived-experiences of the participants. This is because the variables relate to individual subjective realities. Through the qualitative strategy, the researcher was able to examine the deeper patterns and multiple dimensions of domestic violence. The author did ten (10) case studies of men who have suffered one form of domestic violence or another. The ten respondents were, therefore, purposively sampled; subsequently, the author did in-depth interviews with these victims. As discussed earlier, male victims of domestic violence experience stigma and most often shy away from letting other people know their predicament, therefore, the author had to rely on the social network approach to access the research participants.

Operationalising the social network approach

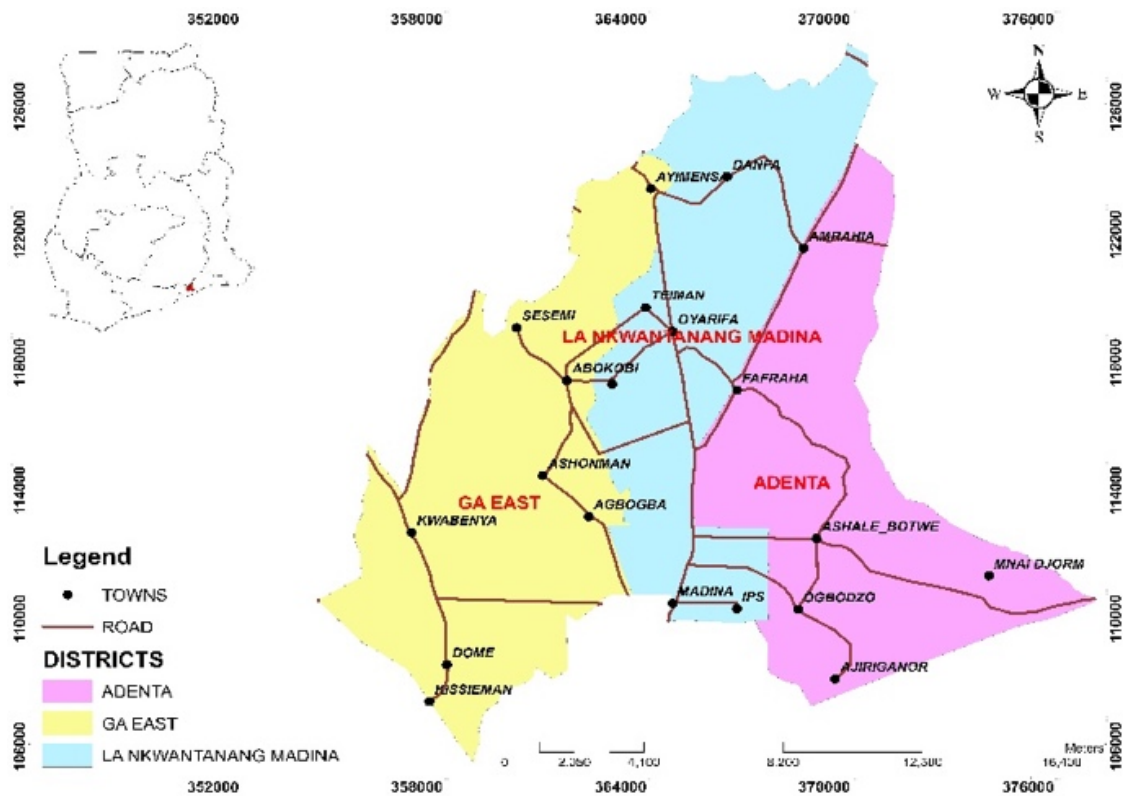
The social network approach to qualitative inquiry explores the interactions among research respondents within a spatial context or sample frame (Adam & Kriesi, 2007). Social network attempts to unravel the opportunities, advantages, and challenges that are nested in the inter-connectedness among research participants. Because male victims seldom share their predicaments with few close friend and associates, this author used a network of friends and family living in the study communities to access the initial respondents. After the interview, the author asked the initial interviewees to help identify other individuals who shared similar domestic experiences. The initial interview generated a snowball effect through which subsequent respondents were accessed. The social network approach helped the author to unpack and better understand the research variables, which are the effect and men's attitude towards domestic violence.

The data collection processes were a bit difficult in terms of getting respondents, especially, from perceived affluent members of the communities because these are people who most of the times are unwilling to discuss their domestic affairs with people they hardly know. Therefore, some of them were sometimes unwilling to participate in a close to two-hour interview. Among the relatively less affluent community of Madina, the author accessed respondents with little difficulty. This was partly because, some of the participants who were being abused due to financial difficulty were ready to discuss, in confidence, their plight with close friends and associates. Subsequent to the field interviews, the data was analysed and the results were thematically organised on the two objectives of the research, which were the attitudes of men towards reporting, and the effects of domestic violence on men victims. Although, ten (10) participants were interviewed, the author presented supporting empirical narrations from five (5) participants because some of the cases were similar, therefore, using all ten (10) cases would have been monotonous and a waste of limited writing space.

Study area

The study was conducted in the Greater Accra region precisely Accra central and Madina. In other instances, information was solicited from participants who resided within the province of Kissieman, Adenta, and Mnai Djorm. The motive for choosing these locations was influenced by the heterogeneous behavioural traits processed by the various residents within the researcher's choice of site.

Fig 1: Map of Accra



Ethical consideration

Before proceeding with the soliciting of information, the nature and purpose of the study were made known to the respondents. The respondents were made aware of the ethical principles the researcher is bound to keep. Since issues pertaining to domestic violence are sensitive, the interview was conducted on a one-on-one basis. Additionally, the author adhered to the ethical principles of social work practice. Informed consent of the respondents was solicited before the interviews. The participants were made aware of the confidentiality principle that governs social research. As much as possible, discussions respected the respondents’ right to self-determination, devoid of prejudice and subjective judgement.

RESULTS

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the participants and the issues that emerged from the data collected from the field interviews. In literature, the attitudes of men towards reporting domestic violence and abuse to the law enforcement agencies have been described as apathetic and marked by social prejudice, which dampens the victims’ spirit. Also, existing literature showed that similar to women, male victims of domestic violence suffer physical, emotional and psychological effects within the domestic set up. These effects sometimes result in serious health consequences such as depression, cardiac and mental illnesses (Josolyne, 2011 & Adebayo, 2014). Data on the case studies supports existing information on male victims. However, some study sites specific nuances emerged from the analysis of the field interviews. The remaining portion of this section is organised on the demographic characteristics of respondents and the two main themes, which are the attitudes of male victims and the effects of domestic violence on male victims.

Demographic characteristics

The research participants were selected from different background of the country’s demographic spectra. The average age of the ten case studies was thirty-five (35) years; five (5) of them were married, four (4) of them were in a consensual union, and one (1) was divorced. The minimum educational attainment was the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and the highest is a Bachelor’s Degree. On the occupational front, the majority of the participants worked in the informal sector of the country’s economy, in jobs such as construction, driving, and carpentry. The few who worked in the formal sector were actors and administrative staff.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

PARTICIPANT NAME	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND	OCCUPATION	RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION
Yaw	24	Consensual union	Senior High	Unemployed	Christian
Kwabena	Did not mention	Married	Junior High	Construction	Christian
Kwadwo	27	Consensual union	Tertiary	Actor	Christian
Kofi	43	Married	Junior High	Bus driver	Muslim
Kwami	45	Married	Senior High (6 Form)	Construction	Christian
Kwasi	24	Consensual union	Tertiary	N.G. O	Christian
Kwaku	32	Married	Senior High	Selling of Clothing's	Christian
Komla	40	Divorced	Primary School	Bicycle repairer	Christian
Kuuku	45	Married	Senior High	Carpentry	Christian
Kojo	35	Consensual un	Senior High	Bus Driver	Christian

Attitudes of male victims

The outcomes of the case studies on the attitudes of men victims reveal apathy, low self-esteem, and unwillingness to report cases of abuse to the law enforcement agencies as the main attitudes of men in an abusive relationship. The author deduced from the field data that societal prejudice, and stereotypical viewpoints such as gender power relations, and low self-esteem prevented men victims from seeking redress whenever they find themselves in violent matrimonial situations. Most of the participants were of the view that it was unheard-of for a man to report to the police that he had been physically assaulted by his wife. Most Ghanaian families repose ultimate security responsibilities such as protecting female spouses and children from physical abuse by an outsider on the man. The two dominant family systems in Ghana, which are the patrilineal and matrilineal put man as the head. In patrilineal, the man is responsible for the needs, including security and protection of the female and young members of the family. In matrilineal, lineage is traced to the mother, therefore, children inherit their maternal uncles. In both lineage systems, men are the providers and protectors of the other members of the family. These family power relations that entrust familial authority in men, therefore, make it difficult for male victims of domestic violence to report their situations to the law enforcement agencies. The case of Yaw and Kuuu whose wife constantly abused him is presented in the following extract. Yaw has been in an abusive relationship for the past five years. He is a taxicab driver who hardly makes ends meet. Yaw's poor financial situation made him vulnerable to violent acts by his wife who always says she is married to a "weak" man. Yaw recounted his situation as follows:

When we got married, she was very polite to me and my family. At that time, my work was bringing money. But for the past three years, the taxi work has gone down, the rise in prices of fuel and competition from Uber have reduced the customers I used to get. Also, my car has become old, so most passengers do not want to hire me. This woman (Yaw's wife) started complaining that I don't take of her, I don't give housekeeping money. She had been insulting me, sometimes when we are in our room she'll insult and raise her voice. Because I don't want other people to know what is going on in our room, I'll plead with her and promise her that I'll give her more money. In fact, she has now become a 'Tiger' hitting me always.

Kuuu *Currently, things have gotten worse. Now, she has gone to her parents with our two children, after she assaulted me and hurt me. She hit me with a stick, I got a cut on my right eye, so I could not go to work the following day. I could not tell anyone about it because people will laugh at me. I only informed my close friend and he advised me to report to the police, but I didn't know how to do that because I know women go to the police when their husbands beat them, but not men. I'm sure the police will not take me seriously even when I go there.*

The above narrations by Yaw and Kuuu corroborate Josolyne (2011) that societal perceptions perpetuate the assumption that women are the only victims and, implicitly, that men are the main perpetrators of such violence. We can infer from Yaw's demeanour that he holds strongly to the erroneous assertion that only women could be victims of domestic violence, hence his unwillingness to let other people know his marital plight. Male victims of violence are mostly ridiculed and shamed when they report cases of domestic abuse they suffer in the hands of their female spouses. Additionally, the above extract from the field interviews confirms the assertions in Garrat

(2012) and Adebayo (2014) that men who report being abused by their spouses are considered “weak” and unable to manage domestic crisis.

An important point which came out of the above narration but had not been echoed sufficiently in existing studies is the fact that the poor employment situation of the male spouse as a cause of domestic violence. According to Yaw, he and his wife lived in harmony after their marriage until his taxicab business began to face challenges. It is common with most male breadwinner families that some female spouses, out of frustration, abuse their husbands as a way to get the man live up to his matrimonial responsibilities. This notion confirms some the propositions of the social change theory on domestic violence that women resort to abuse when their desires are not being met (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961 & Kelley, 1959).

Effects of domestic violence on men victims

The aftermath of an abuse always has devastating effect on all types of victims of violence. Therefore, men victims are no exception; they suffer physical, psychological and emotional tortures in the hands of their spouses. The men interviewed for the case studies explained various degrees of these negative consequences on their lives. Among the ten (10) cases investigated, the majority explained emotional and psychological effects as the main outcomes of the abuses they suffered from their spouses. Very few participants added physical injuries as a result of the violence they suffered from spouses. The cases of Komla and Kojo who have been assaulted by their spouses are partly presented in the narrations below: Komla who divorced his partner as a result of persistent physical assault narrated part of his ordeal as:

When she hit me, I got hurt on my head and had to go to the hospital. Unfortunately, I couldn't tell the doctor the truth. I told her I was knocked down by a motorbike, which was not true. I was hurt in the arm, too. At this moment, one of my fingers is not working. My arm was cut like five times. At the moment, I have two stitches there as well. There were also cut on my arm and my ribs. There was no way we could continue, so she had parked her belongings and left.

Kojo narrated part of the emotional effect of abuse in the following extract:

It really affected me emotionally because, as a worker working with an NGO that deal with children and family issues, I do not want to talk about my emotional torture I am going through at home. Anytime I go to work, I do not think right because I was emotionally disturbed. I would try one day to send the case to Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU), so we can discuss it there... I, the family are not handling it well and are in favour of the woman but, if you send it to DOVVSU, I am sure they would not be biased and solve the issue fairly.

Komla's explanations confirm that violence against men, similar to all other demographic categories, has both physical. The evidence narrated by Kojo that he was unwilling to talk about his situation is in tandem with Adebayo (2014) that men victims bear the effects of violence in silence. His narration also points to the fact that the emotional effect of violence on male victims has a negative consequence on the work they do. Indeed, all victims of domestic violence suffer multiple effects, which sometimes result in low mental alertness and ultimately in gloomy performance at the workplace. Kojo had explained that he worked for a non-governmental organisation that assists children from deprived families. It is likely that some of these children under Kojo's care were from abusive relatives, therefore, allowing such children to see his predicament could remind them of the past bad situation they had gone through.

More so, from Kojo's narration, it seems male victims seek assistance from security and welfare institutions as the last resort. Despite all the physical and emotional stresses Kojo had gone through, he was yet to seek help or report to any institutions. He explained that he was considering reporting his case to the DOVVSU only because family-based dispute settlement arrangements worked in favour of his spouse. Also, the delay on the side of law enforcement agencies handling domestic cases is off-putting for some male victims, who as a result refuse to report cases of abuse. For instance, Kofi narrates in the quotation below that he refused to report his situation because of delay in dispensing cases: *The issue became something like a household case so I did not get the opportunity to report there. I also did not think of reporting there because of the time I think I would waste.*

These factors discussed above reinforce the notion that male victims would like to keep their predicament to themselves.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The foregone discussions indicate that male victims of domestic abuse are most of the times unwilling to report their situations to either the law enforcement agency or the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) which is mandated by law to give support services such as counseling, and home visits to victims. On the whole, many of the participants agreed that domestic abuse is an infringement on human rights, but societal prejudice, which

includes gender stereotype prevents men from seeking legal redress. Additionally, some of the participants expressed misgivings about how law enforcement institutions such as the police and DOVVSU give little attention and sometimes ridicule them whenever they reported cases. This author, therefore, concludes that the attitudes of law enforcement agencies and other care givers towards male victims is a major factor that explains the lackadaisical postures of men on reporting abuse. It is also, important to state that the reason law enforcement agencies do not take male victims seriously is partly as a result of the perceived notion that men, because of their position in the family are perpetrators, while women and children are victims. Therefore, any man who reports abuse case to the police and other institutions is seen as a coward who is unable to take care of his family. Similarly, male victims bear the effect of abuse with anguish. Unlike women, male victims shy away from letting other people know the cause of injuries they sustained as a result of domestic violence, they sometimes ascribe physical injuries to motor accidents rather than domestic brawl. The psychological and emotional effects of violence on male victims are mostly borne in silence, this could have a more damning consequence on health situation and could result in other conditions such as high blood pressure.

This author recommends that a well thought through public sensitisation activities aimed re-orienting law enforcement agencies to change their attitudes towards male victims could be a good step forward to enhance confidence in these agencies among male victims. Such sensitization could take the form of workshops for police officers, especially, those working for the Domestic Violence and Victim's Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service and the officials of the Social Welfare Department. Public sensitization should, also, target the entire spectra of Ghanaians so as to bring about attitudinal change and defeat social stereotypes, especially, the prejudice that perceives men as the perpetrators and not as victims of violence.

It is important that the justice delivery system deals fairly with male victims. Often, there is the perception that, in family cases, the scales of justice are tilted in favour of women. Men are mostly asked to leave their abode for women and children whenever there are misunderstandings between spouses. Men pay alimony, lose custody of children and suffer insecurity when there is either separation or divorce as a result of domestic violence. It is highly recommended that male victims should be equally assisted by state institutions and other organisations to assert their rights. Because male victims shy away from reporting abuse directly to institutions, they could be encouraged to make complaints through electronic media such as emails, and other social media platforms including WhatsApp, twitter, and messenger. For instance, victim support institutions and security agencies could create a toll-free telephone line (The men's hotline) to be used by male victims.

Regular visits by practitioners, for instance, Department of Social Welfare (DSW) to the houses of male victims of violence can also aid in the assessment of how such a person is been treated by loved ones. Agencies and social welfare practitioners should ensure confidentiality in their dealings with male victims. Confidentiality could engender trust between agencies and practitioners on one side and the victims on the other side. This could encourage male victims to report cases and seek assistance promptly because confidentiality could reduce male victims' exposure to ridicule and stigma.

By and large, studies have indicated that negative attitudes against domestic violence are more pronounced in rural and less economically developed areas of the country. Therefore, sensitisation and awareness raising programmes and messages should target populations with lower economic status to enable a change in attitudes and norms that reinforce domestic violence. In this study, the author largely investigated inter-personal violence and abuse, however, domestic violence has an inter-generational vicious cycle, whereby, children who grow up in abusive families tend to be violent in both childhood and adult lives. Therefore, future studies could examine the possible measures to curb the intergenerational dynamics of the menace.

THE IMPLICATION FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

The findings of this study have various implications for social work practice and education in Ghana. Social workers as educators should start from the classroom by teaching students the essence of men reporting the domestic violence they encounter. Also, they can liaise with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and other stakeholders to provide sensitization activities that could improve attitudes of men in reporting domestic violence. More so, the mainstream media can be used by social workers to educate the public particularly men about the need to change their negative attitude towards reporting cases of violence they experience. Men are still the unheard gender and social workers in their practice and training can advocate and reinforce an improvement in the domestic violence reporting discourse by engaging men.

Additionally, social workers could help to advocate for the implementation of policy to ensure that the needs of men in terms of cases of domestic violence are met. Again, social workers can assist male victims of domestic violence by helping them to form support groups to provide readily available services and resources by way of sharing their experiences or receiving support from other group members.

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