

# Police Housing: An Instigator of Sexual Violence against Women and Girls In Uganda

STEDIA ASIIMWE <sup>1</sup>

VICTORIA FLAVIA NAMUGGALA<sup>2</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*The increasing number of recruits into the Uganda police force has not been matched with proportionate housing facilities. Consequently, police officers (including those with families) have to share houses, some of which are single rooms. Drawing on a larger qualitative study which employed case study design to assess female survivors' experiences of intimate partner violence, this paper argues that housing conditions have exacerbated violence within the barracks. Central to us is sexual violence against girls and women who are in relationship with male police officers. Women and girls are vulnerable to rape and defilement respectively from Police officers and their sons due to proximity brought about by sharing houses and rooms. Sexual violence is further interconnected with economic, emotional and physical violence. The paper recommends designing strategies to enhance police officer's knowledge about sexual violence, government to allocate funds for improving housing, and tapping on internal resources of police officers as a source of labor for constructing more houses in the barracks.*

**Key words:** Police, housing, sexual abuse, vulnerability

---

<sup>1</sup>PhD student at School of Women and Gender studies, Makerere University and lecturer at Kyambogo University Department of Sociology and Social Administration [stedia.asiimwe@gmail.com](mailto:stedia.asiimwe@gmail.com)/[stedia.asiimwe@yahoo.com](mailto:stedia.asiimwe@yahoo.com)

<sup>2</sup> (PhD), Lecturer at School of Women and Gender studies, and member of Makerere University School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, Makerere University, Kampala. [vickatende@gmail.com](mailto:vickatende@gmail.com).

## **Introduction**

This paper discusses police housing as a challenge and an instigator of sexual violence against women and girls in Jinja police barracks in eastern Uganda. The paper illuminates the strategies utilized by Police administration to reduce the housing challenge and how these strategies have instead triggered sexual violence against women and girls. Although men too experience sexual violence, the rates are low. The study findings indicate that women and girls suffer the consequences of inadequate housing due to their vulnerability to sexual harassment, violence and abuse. We contend that there is urgent need for government to address the housing crisis in police barracks so that residents can live with dignity and in a safe and secure environment.

## **Background**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the right to housing as an important component of human rights, and access to adequate housing is considered as a basic human right that is essential for the well being of all mankind (United Nations, 2015). Adequate housing as interpreted by the United Nations (UN) includes security of tenure, facilities and infrastructure, affordability, habitability, accessibility and location (Saber, 2018). It is further elaborated that the right to housing should not be interpreted narrowly, but rather it should be seen as the right to live somewhere in peace, security and dignity (Saber, 2018). Housing is one of the basic human needs that have impact on the health, welfare, social attitudes, economic productivity of the individual and it is one of the indicators of a person's standard of living and his or her place in society (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2014:44). Spouses of Police officers are specifically vulnerable to sexual violence resulting from inadequate housing and their access to justice is constrained due to the power position their abuses hold in society.

## **A Historical Context of Housing Policies In Uganda**

The Government of Uganda recognizes housing as a basic right for all citizens in line with the International declarations, such as The Istanbul declaration 1996, The Millennium Development Goals, 2002 and the World summit on Sustainable Development, 2002 (National housing policy, 2016:1).

As cited in National Housing Policy (2016:1), before the current housing policy was implemented, several policies had been put in place but had not improved the housing conditions of most Ugandans. These include: Colonial housing policy; whereby prior to World war 11, colonial housing policies catered for only Europeans and to a small extent Asians. Housing was characterized by physical separation of Europeans (senior quarters) and Asians (junior quarters). The rest of the Ugandans and other Africans provided themselves accommodation at the periphery of the urban areas and consequently developed informal settlements and slums. Accordingly, this was followed by the Post-Independence housing policy where houses that accommodated colonial expatriates were taken over by senior Ugandan civil servants while the general public remained not catered for.

As cited in National Population and Housing census (2014:4), some housing policies were drafted in 1970s and 1980s, but as a result of social economic and political instability that characterised 1970s and 1980s, little was done to implement them. The overall housing situation has been characterised by inadequate housing in terms of quality and quantity both in rural and urban areas with a deficit of 1.6 million housing units (National Housing Policy, 2016). Uganda police force has expanded from 14,000 to 38,000 in the last four years yet there are only 8,000 housing units for the force (The New Vision, 13<sup>th</sup> June, 2011).

## **Understanding Housing and Sexual Violence**

Housing conditions can never be divorced from factors of sexual violence because sexual relationships mainly take place under a shelter or physical structure commonly referred to as a house, and the conditions of the house may protect or expose family members to sexual abuse. According to National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC), (2014), inadequate housing is associated with increased risks of sexual violence. Sharing houses and rooms by different families is bound to fuel sexual violence because members of different families have different backgrounds, may hold different values, goals, and have different needs. The relationship between housing and sexual violence has not been given adequate attention by scholars and this paper addresses this gap.

Sexual violence is one of the forms of intimate partner violence (IPV), a broader concept that includes physical, psychological and sexual violence perpetrated by a former or current partner (Niolon, Keams, Dills et al., 2017). Gender and sexual violence are forms of global terrorism that claim millions of lives every year, yet at the family level sexual violence remain largely invisible (Aulette, Witner and Blakely, 2009). In this paper, we adopted the definition of sexual violence as used by Breiding, Basile and Smith(2015), whereby sexual violence is conceptualised as a sexual act committed against someone without that person's freely given consent. Inadequate housing coupled with patriarchy are significant factors in understanding sexual violence against women and girls. A victim of domestic violence who is living with her partner is faced with two choices: Leave her abuser or stay and take the abuse. Leaving the abuser is likely to result in subsequent homelessness, specifically if the house is in her abuser's name or if she cannot afford to pay rent without the income of her abuser (Amanda, 2018).

## **Feminism and Sexual Violence**

Feminism argues that sexual violence against women mainly happens because of power imbalances between men and women (Aulette, 2009). Within the feminist paradigm, IPV is seen as an outcome of power imbalance between men and women, where men exert control over their female partners in relationships (Dardis, Dixon, Edwards and Turchik, 2015). Patriarchy prescribes roles and power within the domestic setting and authorizes and legitimizes men's use of violence against women (Ulibarri, Salazar and Syvertsen, 2018). Men hold power advantage over women and consequently use violence to maintain that power advantage both at home and outside the home. One of the most prevalent myths about rape is that rapists hide in the bushes yet in reality sexual assaults and rapes are normally perpetrated by persons known to the survivor (Aulette et al., 2009). Women rarely complain publicly about their ordeal because sex related issues are considered “private” in most African culture. Conjugal rights are framed around the idea that the domestic setting and marriage in particular, constitute a space of unfettered and divinely sanctioned and privileged male access to their spouses (Ulibarri et al., 2018).

## **Methodology**

This paper draws from the ongoing PhD work study titled “Assessing Female Survivors' experiences of Intimate Partner Violence and Access to Justice in Uganda: A case of intimate relationships involving male Police officers in Jinja Police barracks.” In this study, Police housing emerged as a significant trigger of sexual violence against women and girls. Data collection methods included individual interviews with survivors of intimate partner violence, key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Several methods were used for purposes of

triangulation. Due to unavailability of records regarding sexual violence in the barracks, coupled with the sensitivity of the study, survivors of sexual violence were selected using snowball method.

Key informants and FGD participants were selected through purposive sampling. A total of 49 participants participated in the study. This was because researchers reached saturation level whereby there was no new information coming up. 12 key informant interviews were conducted (6 for men and 6 for women), and all were selected basing on their knowledge about the study problem, since they held positions of responsibility in their communities. In addition, 6 FGDs were conducted (3 for men and 3 for women), and 31 in-depth individual interviews were conducted. Data was thematically analyzed whereby data was organized under relevant themes. With a clear elaboration of the methodology and epistemological approaches informing the study, we now discuss findings from the study.

## **Presentation of Finding**

The study gleaned important insights into the living conditions of the police officers in Uganda. The following section presents these living conditions.

### **Sexual violence in shared houses**

Behind the scenes of shared houses lies serious sexual abuse mainly against women and girls that go unreported and unpunished in Jinja Police barracks. Some officers both married and unmarried share houses and this arrangement has been a fertile ground for sexual abuse against women and girls. House sharing is a result of inadequate housing facilities compared to the number of employees. In a bid to reduce the housing crisis, Police

administration has improvised strategies to help accommodate the growing numbers of officers. These strategies include; housing several officers in one room and dividing up two roomed houses originally meant to be a sitting room and bedroom for one officer to accommodate two officers, one taking over the bedroom and the other occupying the sitting room respectively with their families.

While these strategies reduce the problem of inadequate housing, they create new challenges most central to this paper being sexual violence. These strategies have triggered sexual abuse mainly against women and girls in that some families share the entry/ exit door, which makes access to each other's rooms easy and increases the vulnerability of women and girls to sexual violence. Women were more vulnerable to sexual harassment and rape at night when their husbands were out for night duty and they had to open the door for a police officer that shared with them the house. A woman shared her experience as thus:

One officer that we shared a house with kept demanding for sex from me until I got tired and decided to inform my husband about it. One morning, he did not know that my husband was still around, so he came and offered me two hundred thousand shillings but I refused his offer... my husband came out of the bed room and they started fighting. I got scared and called the OC barracks to help because I thought my husband was going to shoot him. What annoys me today is that my husband keeps blaming me for it and he thinks I am interested in that man (*Individual interview with a female survivor of IPV*).

Some officers were not sensitive and brought in prostitutes, yet the housemate had young children.

Sharing a house with another family is a very bad arrangement. We are sharing our house with another police officer, but he brings prostitutes and sleeps with them when

our children are seeing. When my husband told him to stop the behavior, he threatened to sleep with our daughter since we did not want him to sleep with other women. We decided to leave him alone because we did not want him to turn to our daughter who is only fifteen years (*Individual interview with a female survivor of IPV*).

Sharing houses hindered free sexual expression on the side of the women.

Sharing a house with another family has made me hate sex. We have funny housemates. When my husband comes back during day, the officer's wife and her brother start making funny statements such as 'the man has come to change oil' (*to have sex*) and then they will come and sit near our room so that they can hear whatever goes on in our bed room. They will not leave until my husband has gone back. They make me so un comfortable (*Individual interview with a female survivor of IPV*).

Inadequate housing had embarrassed many officers including superiors who took advantage of their colleagues' wives and consequently broke their families as explained:

Due to shared accommodation, our superiors sleep with our wives and we cannot do anything to them... there is a superior who used to put one of our colleagues on duty both day and night because he was interested in that officer's wife. One day when that superior entered the bedroom of the housemate, friends informed him on phone...he came back to the barracks and got them in his bed... unfortunately, colleagues disarmed him before he could enter his house for they knew he would shoot them... he entered the house, looked at them 'doing it' from his bed, and just came out crying... he later sent away his wife, but could not do anything to our superior (*FGD with male Police officers*).



Some officers and their sons also target the young girls from families they share the house with and the girls easily fall prey due to proximity. Both men and women's discussions revealed that defilement had led to unwanted pregnancies, abortions and dropping out of school due to early pregnancies. Many officers who had impregnated girls below the age of 18 years had opted to marry them, while some had been asked to pay fine by the girls'parents. This implies that although officers are responsible for keeping law and order, they are at times the law breakers themselves who may easily go unpunished because of the power position they occupy in society. It was noted that many of the officers had settled such cases out of court due to the need to protect the name of a fellow police officer.

These findings bring out the damage on families resulting from sharing accommodation and the dire need for adequate accommodation for officers and their families. Further still, findings do not only point to vulnerability, powerlessness and exploitation of women and girls in police barracks, but also to victimisation of women who are blamed for the sexual abuse they suffer. Due to victim blaming, women fear to talk about the abuse or seek justice. This finding agrees with findings from another study which asserts that those who get married to a police officer, marry into the police family and are expected to adhere to the values and norms of its subculture, and that spouses of police officer are expected to be loyal and not to report family problems to police authority(Goodmark, 2015). This state of affairs implies that some abusers who belong to the police fraternity go scot free which further sustains their abuse of women.

Sexual violence against women is largely a power issue that was fueled by inadequate accommodation. This was demonstrated by the fact that inadequate housing had also exposed police women,

both married and unmarried to sexual abuse from male officers. Due to shared accommodation, officers sexually harassed and raped female officers who also remained silent for fear of embarrassment and in order to protect their marriages. Police officers looked at female officers as mere women rather than fellow police officers. Goodmark, (2015:1212) advances related arguments that female officers were privately classified by their male counterparts as 'bitch', 'whore', 'dyke', or 'prude' and were never seen as just another officer. Sexual abuse of the female police officers confirms the feminists' argument that sexual abuse against women is a result of power imbalance between men and women that goes beyond women's social and economic status.

Officers who are expected to protect women and children against sexual violence instead protected fellow police officers who perpetrated sexual abuse. Officers protected each other's name as a duty and at the expense of their wives and daughters' dignity and human rights. They instead blamed women and girls that were abused and settled sexual abuse informally. Officers' failure to handle sexual abuse formally may be resulting from fear of the consequences of reporting abusers who belong to law enforcement and are of a higher rank, and the need to protect the name of a fellow police officer. According to Goodmark, (2015), reporting creates risks for the reporting officer particularly if the alleged abuser is of a higher rank since such an officer may be threatened and not backed up by other officers. Another study found that secrecy is seen as the glue that binds Police solidarity, and that in exchange for their own protection, officers agree never to blow the whistle or testify against a fellow Police officer (Johnson, Todd, & Subramanian, 2005). This implies that sexual abuse and other forms of violence against women go unreported and unpunished in police families.

Despite the above sexual abuse, most women preferred silence in

order to keep their marriages. This is because some husbands did not want to understand the circumstances under which their wives were raped, but rather hurried to divorce such women. Divorce is socially un-accommodated and a sign of failure on the side of women. Divorce results in negative effects on children and women. Thus, women felt it was their duty to guard against these effects. Effects that women pointed out include: children suffering in hands of another woman, dropping out of school, sons becoming thieves and street children, daughters becoming prostitutes or getting pregnant at an early age and the affected women becoming homeless.

### **One Room- Multiple Families**

There were situations where officers shared a single room. In such cases, administrators instructed police officers not to bring their spouses to the barracks accommodation. This instruction however was rarely adhered to. Due to sexual starvation, officers often bring in their spouses and have sex with them as colleagues look on. At the time of the survey, one room was occupied by about fifteen (15) Policemen and officers admitted bring in wives and prostitutes. Police officers argued that getting a house was a long term process that might take even more than a year and therefore bringing female spouses to the shared room from time to time was inevitable despite having no privacy. Officers argued that bringing in their spouses served the purpose of reducing the risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS, helps them keep connected to their spouses and limits the use of prostitutes whom they found expensive.

According to some women who had lived in shared rooms in the past, having sex in the open was not pleasurable because it robs women of their dignity, bars them from sexual pleasure and reduces them to mere sexual objects without control over their bodies. Women had to endure sex and the shame of having it from

an open place because rejecting sexual advances from their husbands led to physical emotional and economic violence. A woman shared her experience:

When we were transferred to Nagulu Police barracks it was too much for me... We were put in one room and we were about ten families. We would be eating supper with children and we hear a Police officer calling his wife loudly to come for sex. As if it were competition, a second and a third couple would also start. Noise would come from all corners... Men do not care, it is us women who would feel embarrassed. Sometimes I would take my children outside and we complete our supper from there. I would wait for them to sleep and bring them inside one by one (*Individual interview with a female survivor of IPV*).

Sharing a room with many other officers who bring in their spouses or prostitutes and sleep with them while others are looking on, was not a new experience as one officer stated:

This is not the only barracks where police officers share one room. In 2015, I was in a certain barracks and I stayed in a room which was shared by fifty (50) police officers. After staying for long and nobody was providing better accommodation for us, officers started bringing in their spouses and girlfriends, and they would sleep with them in presence of their colleagues... You cannot stop them. They will tell you to mind your own business (*FGD with male police officers*).

Officers emphasised that life in the shared room was degrading and dehumanizing.

Nothing is as painful as watching and listening to a couple having sex when you do not have a partner. It is a very painful experience that harms and tortures psychologically, and it is very dehumanising. This pain can only be understood by those who have ever gone

through it. It is worse when a colleague brings in a woman who makes too much noise. (*FGD with male Police officers*).

Due to frustration, some officers use open provocative sex as a strategy to get their own houses.

Some officers bring their wives or prostitutes and they will intentionally make a lot of noise during sex, disorganize and put every officer in mood for sex. Those who cannot endure the situation and have some money, will get up and rush to Jinja town to buy themselves prostitutes whom they will also sleep with as their colleagues look on. *Those who chose to endure the situation will increase the volume of their radios and pretend to be sleeping.* When roommates complain about such officers, the administrators are forced to find for them separate accommodation (*Individual interview with a male Police officer*).

These findings brings out the psychological torture that officers and their spouses endure while staying in the shared rooms. The findings further confirm the existence of sexual abuse against men in the barracks since some men are exposed to unwanted sexual encounters by their colleagues. However, most police officers were willing to tolerate colleagues who bring spouses to their shared room for sex as long as it is for a few days. Possibly this tolerance is exercised because anyone of them anticipates to inconvenience colleagues any time when they bring their own spouses. Police housing is an institutional matter that could not be handled at the individual level and thus continued to traumatize families.

From the shared experiences, it is evident that officers had lost dignity and respect for colleagues. Whereas sex is generally a private matter, it had become a public matter in police barracks due to inadequate housing. Women are used to achieve goals such as in

cases where officers wanted their own houses and they have no power to reject the sexual advances from husbands. This is partly because these women were unemployed and depended on men for financial support. An earlier researcher observed that taking a sexual partner in exchange for a place to live in or food to eat may be the only way some women can support themselves and their children (Aulette et al., 2009). Additionally, due to power imbalances, men determine the rules that govern the game and women abide by those rules. Sexuality gets framed as a male domain, in which men control and set the terms, and women must be inducted and guided (Arnfred, 2004)

Additionally, despite lack of privacy, women simply gave in to husbands' sexual advances due to fear of violence. This is because women were brought up to believe that husbands have a right to sex anytime regardless of the prevailing conditions. Men on the other hand were brought up to be aggressive and can easily become violent when denied sex. A related study revealed that men's control over women's sexuality is reflected by the hostility and coercion women face when they reject husband's sexual advances (Muhanguzi, 2014). She further asserts that whereas it is easy for husbands to get away with ignoring their wives' sexual demands, wives' refusal to sexual advances from husbands usually resulted in marital rape, violence, and verbal threats. On the other hand, Officers seemed to have normalized sexual abuse against women and the trauma that women experience was not an issue to them. Women pointed out that men did not care having sex in the open and in presence of children, neither did they feel embarrassed as women did. According to Holmes (2015), sexual abuse has been trivialized and normalised in many communities in Uganda and it is not looked at as an anomaly but as a common experience for women that is perceived to be part of womanhood.

Inadequate housing contributed to excessive alcohol consumption

as a copying mechanism for officers, thus increasing sexual violence against women and girls. Officers believed that alcohol and drugs helped them to have sex in the open without feeling shame. However, excessive alcohol consumption triggered both physical and sexual violence against women. This finding resonates with findings by other researchers who found that Police officers who drank alcohol were more likely to abuse their partners (Oehme, Donnelly and Martin, 2012). It is also affirmed that law enforcement officers frequently use alcohol and often struggle with alcoholism (Violenti, Slaven, Andrew and Homish, 2011). In a barracks situation where houses and rooms are shared, excessive alcohol consumption can only worsen the already bad situation.

### **Marital Rape in the Barracks**

Marital rape is another form of sexual violence that women battle with in the barracks resulting from inadequate housing. Parents and children shared the bedroom only separated by curtains. Parents engaged in sexual activities as children watched because some children had cut holes in the curtains in order to have a clear view of their parents actions. Women, for fear of being embarrassed before their children accepted to be raped by husbands who were rushing back for duty. The situation was worsened by the fact that neighbors were too close especially in situations where a small unit was shared by two families. Women feared to raise their voices because they did not want neighbors to know what was going on in their bed rooms. Women confirmed that marital rape was a common occurrence yet hard for women to report or even talk about since sexual matters are culturally considered private. Experiences were shared as thus:

My husband forces me into sex immediately after opening the door for him. I have wounds in my private parts most of the time. I am thirteen years in marriage, but I have never enjoyed sex. One night I told him that it would be good if

we started with foreplay, but he almost strangled me.. He shouted at me ...“ who is that man that you are sleeping with? Who taught you about fore play?” I explained that I had studied about it in my secondary school biology lessons, but he did not believe. Then he threw me on the bed and shouted at me “Just give me the thing and I go away. I have no time to waste.” (*Individual interview with a female survivor of IPV*).

Officers believed that women had no right to refuse sex and that those who denied husbands sex, lacked understanding as stated:

An understanding wife should just give “the thing” ( sex) to her man so that he can quickly run back to the duty station. It is every woman's duty to prepare herself for her husband despite the housing challenge. Issues like not being in mood or wait for children to sleep should never come up if you know you are married to a police officer (*Individual interview with a male Police officer*).

Officers blamed marital rape on inadequate housing and women's failure to read husband's signs as asserted:

Sometimes you have escaped from duty and you are even forced to do it quickly as if you are a thief... you do not have time even to bathe or find out who is in the house because your job is at risk... If she does not read the signs and she remains outside cooking, I am forced to go for her... the challenge is that children, relatives and housemates may be in the house and the marital bed is almost in the sitting room... whether she likes it or not, I have no option... I just need 'relief' (*FGD with male Police officers*).

The above findings point to the fact that women were used as sexual objects and were not treated with respect. This is reflected in officers' actions and in the language that was frequently used while



referring to women's bodies (*the thing*). Furthermore, women had no power to determine when and how to engage in sexual relations with husbands. This finding resonates findings by Shefer (2001), who argues that due to power imbalances, men determine the rules that govern the game and women abide by those rules. In many societies, men's use of force to have sex with women is part of being men and many women lack the capacity and social support to challenge it. In a related study, it was established that women do not have the necessary level of social power and they believe that men's need for sex take precedence and they have a right to demand sex from wives and girlfriends even by force (Aulette et al., 2009).

Women engaged in sex with husbands as a duty and for purposes of satisfying husbands even if they (women) did not benefit from it. In order for women to be fully involved and benefit from a sexual encounter emotionally, ample time, privacy and consent are essential. Officers failed to understand this, as they expected wives to be ready for sex all the time. Officers did not care to sexually satisfy their spouses. Lack of sexual satisfaction on the side of the women has potential to result into infidelity which may also breed physical violence against women. Men's failure to mind sexual satisfaction of their spouses was alluded to in an earlier study which affirms that some men do not care whether their spouses get sexually satisfied or not as long as they get satisfied and that women's sexuality is about giving and pleasing the men, while men's sexuality is about their own experience and power (Muhanguzi, 2014). These findings confirm feminist's theorizing that sexual violence against women results from male power and dominance over women.

Contrary to the women's views that sex is a private matter, Policemen on the other hand exercised sexual freedom and openness and forced women into sex despite the surrounding

circumstances not being conducive for women to freely engage and enjoy sex. This is because society encourages boys and men to be bold on sexual matters. Male officer's attitudes towards sex agree with Caldwell's argument that African sexuality was characterized by permissiveness, and that having sex was as simple and straight forward as eating or drinking (Caldwell, Caldwell and Quiggin, 1989).

Police officers are deeply rooted in their cultural beliefs and practices that promote violence against women, despite being stewards of law and order in the country. Police officers just like many men argued that there was no marital rape in African culture and that culture demanded that wives must be ready for sex any time since it was the main reason they were married. When dealing with women and girls in the barracks, police officers remove the attire of law enforcement and replace it with the 'traditional mask,' which makes them feel safer and secure to sexually abuse women. This cultural grounding in patriarchy and its oppressive nature denies women a space where they not only can negotiate their sexuality, but also perform their own power as women in the private sphere. Women are oppressed even in a sphere that they have been relegated to by cultural patriarchy. An earlier study found that IPV finds more fertile terrain in male based cultures and can be applied and justified even by those who are charged with law enforcement such as the Police (Baldrey, Pagriaro and Porcaro, 2013).

Culture is not only usually used to defend men's abuse against women and girls, but it is also used to manipulate women to accept violence and keep silent about it. In a related study, it was asserted that culture contributes to silencing of women, convincing them to accept the cultural beliefs about their role and place within the family, and to endure the marital violence for the sake of the family

(Kyomuhendo, 2014). It is worse for women in relationships with police officers since culture, power and position in society combine to fail access to justice by spouses of police officers. In many societies, married women chose to suffer sexual violence in silence, while men take advantage of the silence and push acts of violence against women to higher levels that are so dehumanizing. In Africa, sexuality is often wrapped in taboos, silences, privacies and acts associated with sexualities are often highly stigmatized and criminalized (Tamale, 2011). Additionally, culture has taught women not to wash their dirty linen in public, and in many African societies it is assumed that a husband especially after he has paid bride price, has purchased his wife's sexual services, and her obedience and consent (Kasente, 2011).

Women's economic dependency on men partly conditioned them to bend to marital rape. In order for women to be able to take independent decisions and to be able to control their bodies, economic empowerment must be part of the equation. Failure to achieve this means that women will always accept to be sexually abused and emotionally hurt rather than displease their financial providers who take care of their survival. Discussions with women revealed that some husbands refuse to buy food for the family as punishment for women who deny them sex while others asked their superiors to deploy them day and night for a week or more and left the family with no food as a way of punishing wives. The economic dependency generated by poverty is a significant factor for understanding violence against women (Ajayi and Soyinka-Airewele, 2018).

Police as an institution is highly patriarchal and silently facilitates women's silence about violence. This is evident in the way that violence against women was handled. For example, when conflicts persisted, it is the women who mainly suffered the

consequences. Women revealed that when a couple keeps fighting or quarreling, rather than using the law to resolve the conflicts, the officer is instead advised by the administrators to send his wife to the village. Women feared consequences of being separated from their families and resorted to silence. This revelation is similar to findings from a related study which argued that when a landlord's solution to domestic violence is an eviction, victims must make the difficult choice of enduring the abuse (Amanda, 2018). This calls for sensitization of Police officers on how to handle matters of violence against women in a more serious and fair manner.

## **Conclusion**

Inadequate housing in the barracks has narrowed the physical gap between men and women of different families in the barracks, through proximity resulting from shared accommodation which has rendered residents vulnerable to sexual abuse. Sexual abuse in the barracks is an incredibly pertinent issue hidden behind culture and patriarchal power imbalances. These power imbalances are manifested in acts of marital rape, rape of colleagues' wives and defilement of young girls, and consequently the women's inability to report the abuse and seek justice. Patriarchy uses sexuality as a tool to create and sustain gender hierarchy through enshrouding it in secrecy, and taboos and thus sexuality becomes a critical site for sustaining patriarchy and reproducing women's oppression. (Tamale, 2003).

As shown in this paper, inadequate housing has resulted into frustration among officers, and has stripped officers of their sense of dignity and self- respect. Further still, respect for colleagues, spouses and children is constrained as they are forced to engage in sexual encounters with spouses in congested rooms that are shared with their children, their workmates, and where there is free entry

and exit for both members and non members of their families. Some officers have resorted to excessive alcohol consumption as a way of dealing with the housing crisis that seems not to be within their means to solve. This has resulted into multifaceted forms of violence against women and girls. Due to the position officers hold in society, and within the criminal justice system, access to state based systems of justice is limited for their spouses.

The need for redress strategies is glaring and according to participants, government needs to act urgently. In order for women, children and police officers to live a dignified and more productive life devoid of sexual abuse, conflicts, shame and guilt, inadequate housing must be addressed. Benefits from adequate housing will motivate and facilitate officers to serve the nation more efficiently. The government of Uganda may for instance come up with low income housing schemes where smaller semi-detached housing units can be constructed in a phased manner and be offered to government civil servants including the police.

Jinja police barracks is on a relatively big piece of land and part of this land is being utilised by police officers and their families for agriculture. Police as an institution may prioritise construction of houses for officers and their families through mobilizing police officers to lay bricks using materials from police land and also solicit for government assistance in terms of cement and sand so that officers can provide a bigger part of the required labor for constructing their houses.

While there are interventions to reduce violence against women in several communities mainly by NGO, similar programs have not been implemented in Police barracks. The study has demonstrated need for police leadership to organise programs for sensitising

officers and their spouses about sexual violence and its effects on women, men, children and performance at work. Such programs can be implemented in conjunction with the relevant ministries, NGOs and academic institutions.

### **Declaration**

We declare that there was no conflict of interest while carrying out this study. The study was approved by Makerere University, Makerere Ethics committee, National council for science and technology and Uganda Police Force. Confidentiality was ensured and participation in the study was voluntary. The study was sponsored by the Government of Sweden (SIDA), a supporting agency for the PhD program at Makerere University.

## References

- Abasa, N. (2011, June 13th ). *Police officers deserve better accommodation*. The New Vision, Retrieved from <https://www.newvision.co.ug>
- Ajayi, L., A., & Soyinka-Airewele. (2018). *Triggers of Domestic violence in Ghana: A victim centered analysis*. *African Population Studies*, 32(1).
- Ali, P. A., & Naylor, P. B. (2013). Intimate partner violence: A narrative review of the feminist, social and ecological explanations for its causation. *Aggression and violent Behavior*, 18, 611-619.
- Amanda, A. S. (2018). *Case Note, Personal Safety or Homelessness: The choice a domestic violence victim has to fight an eviction proceeding without counsel*, 58 SANTA CLARAL. REV.345. <https://digitalcommons.law.scu.edu/lawreview/vo58/iss2/5>.
- Arnfred, S.,(2004). *African Sexuality: Tales and Silences, Re-Thinking Sexualities in Africa* ISBN 91-7106-513-X
- Aulette, J. R., Witner, J., & Blakely, K. (2009). *Gendered Worlds*. New York: Oxford University press.
- Baldrey, C. A., Pagriaro, S., & Porcaro, C. (2013). The rule of law at time of masculine honor: Afghan police attitudes and intimate partner violence. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 16(3), 363 - 374 . doi : 10.1177/1368430212462492
- Breiding, M., J, Basile, K., C., & Smith, S., G., (2015). *Intimate partner violence surveillance: Uniform definitions and recommended data elements* (N. c. f. I. P. a. Control, Trans.). Version 2.0: Atlanta(GA).
- Caldwell, J., Caldwell, P., & Quiggin, P. (1989). *The social context*

*of AIDS in sub-saharan Africa, Population and development review* 15(2).

Dardis, C. M., Dixon, K. J., Edwards, K. M., & Turchik, J. A. (2015). *An examination of the factors related to dating violence perpetration among young men and women and associated theoretical explanations: a review of the literature. Trauma Violence Abuse, 16*(2), 136-152. doi:10.1177/1524838013517559

Goodmark, L. (Ed.). (2015). *Hands up at Home: Militarized Masculinities and Police officers who commit Intimate Partner Abuse*: BYUL.

Holmes, C. (2015). *Justice seeking Power of Women who experience Sexual violence in Uganda: Independent study project (ISP) collection paper 2173*.

John M. Violanti, James E. Slaven, Luenda E. Andrew & Gregory G. Homish (2011). *Police and Alcohol Use: A Descriptive Analysis and Associations with Stress Outcomes. American Journal of Criminal Justice, Volume 36 Number 4 AMJ Crim Just (2011) 36: 344-356, DOI 10.1007/s121*

Johnson, L. B., Todd, M., & Subramanian, G. (2005). *Violence in Police Families: work-family spillover. Journal of Family violence, 20*(1). doi: 10.1007/510896-005-150-4

Kasente, D. (2011). *Eradication of gender-based violence in Uganda*. Kampala: Fountain publishers.

Kyomuhendo, G., B., (2014). *A Woman does not fall sick: Negotiating the Care Economy and Merternal Health in Hoima District, Uganda. In B.G. Kyomuhendo, S. Gerrald and J. Ahikire, Gender, Poverty and Social Transformation*, Kampala: Fountain Publishers.

Muhanguzi, F., K., (2014). *Sex is sweet: Low income women in Uganda Talk about Sexual Desire and Pleasure. In B.G. Kyomuhendo, S. Gerrard and J. Ahikire, Gender, Poverty*



- and Social Transformation*, . Kampala: Fountain Publishers.
- National housing policy*. (2016): Ministry of lands, housing and urban planning: The republic of Uganda.
- National Population and Housing Census.(2014), *The Republic of Uganda National Sexual Violence Resource Center*. (2014): [www.nsurc.org.resources@nsvrc.org](http://www.nsurc.org.resources@nsvrc.org)
- Niolon, P. H., Keams, M., Dills, J., Rambo, K., Irving, S., Armstead, T., & Gilbert, L. (2017). *Preventing intimate partner violence across the lifespan: A technical package of programs, policies, and practices*. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Disease Control.
- Oehme, K., Donnelly, E., A., & Martin, A. (2012). *Alcohol abuse, PTSD, and officer- committed domestic violence. A journal of Policy and Practice*, 6(4), 418-430.
- Tamale, S. (2003). *Out of the closet: Unveiling sexual discourses in Uganda The New Vision*, Retrieve from <http://www.newvision.co.ug>
- Tamale, S. (2011). *African Sexualities: Researching and Theorizing Sexualities in African*. Cape Town: Pambazuka press. *The Constitution of The Republic of Uganda*.(1995). Kampala.
- Uganda Bureau of Statistics. (2014). *Uganda National Population and Housing Census*, Kampala.
- Ulibarri, M. D., Salazar, M., & Syvertsen, J. L. (2018). *Intimate Partner Violence Among Female Sex Workers and Their Noncommercial Male Partners in Mexico. Violence Against Women*, 1-23.doi: 10.1177/1077801218794302
- United Nations, (2015). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UDHR Booklet, United Nations*. <https://www.un.org/en/udhr-booklet-en-web.pdf>