

GENDER VIOLENCE IN THE KENYAN DIASPORA

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ABSTRACT

There is a widespread agreement among gender activist and family violence investigators that gender, cultural stigma and social-economic inequalities play key roles in activating gender violence. This study examines the extent to which gender based violence is an issue among immigrant communities for fear of community stigma and negative impact on children. The fundamentals of Kenyan culture are in conflict with values from western society as laws and immigrant cultural norms are constantly clashing. Kenyan women want more say in their individual households because they are socially empowered, have a higher economic status, career upward mobility and the ability to multitask. Men are more inclined to stick to traditional roles that uphold male masculinity, while on the other hand women are comfortably adapting and navigating the new environment with a new mix of empowerment. The gender roles in this new environment are in conflict and this provokes gender violence. By interrogating the concepts of gender traditionalism and decision-making power, the researchers Global Fatherhood Foundation(GFF) developed a short survey that was used to capture the data and show the deep disparities in domestic gender violence which need to be addressed. Violence of any sort is unacceptable, but we can only begin to address family violence through open, intelligent, reasonable debate, free from past prejudices. The random sampled survey of 205 respondents through survey monkey platform showed gender violence is a prevalent issue and 70% respondents either knew someone who experienced gender violence or are victims themselves. The results have been presented through several community forums and it is anticipated that the immigrant communities will stop denying the existence of violence in household.

Key words: gender violence

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to find out to what extent gender violence is an issue among Kenyans in diaspora and what the systematic barriers to eliminating it are. In the Diaspora, many immigrant communities do not talk about issues of domestic violence. It is not a discussion topic because people fear community stigma. With so many cases of gender violence cited as happening in the Diaspora according to social media, the core problem is usually overlooked and largely ignored by our immigrant society today. With many people living in denial, the question remains whether we are going to wait until a death occurs before we can take action. There is need to develop a platform of awareness and enable victims to raise their voice and get help. Victims have rights too. They need to heal.

The Study and Findings

Gender violence in the diaspora is rising and involves a situation where one person in a relationship is using violence to control and dominate another person. There were 205 overall respondents to the survey.

When asked about the respondent's gender

Answer Choices	Responses	
Male	46.83%	96
Female	53.17%	109
Neither	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	0.00%	0
Total		205

Of the 205 the respondents 46% included men and 53% were women.

When asked about respondent's age

Answer Choices	Responses	
18-30	13.17%	27
31-40	35.61%	73
41-49	33.17%	68
Over 50	18.05%	37
Total		205

The biggest age bracket that responded to the survey fell between the ages of 31-40 (35.61%) and 41-49 (33.17%).

When asked about their education background

Answer Choices	Responses	
No Education	0.53%	1
High School	8.02%	15
2 year College/ Technical	18.72%	35
4 Year College	56.68%	106
Master Degree	8.02%	15
Phd/Professor	1.07%	2
Other (please specify)	6.95%	13
Total		187

While it's true most victims might have highly lucrative jobs such as doctors or lawyers, corporate executives and nurses, battered immigrant victims are found in all racial, religious and ethical backgrounds as well as all age groups and educational levels. From the survey, a 4 year degree background scored very highly at 56.68%

When asked why gender violence is never discussed in immigrant communities respondents gave a variety of answers which included

Answer Choices	Responses	
Society or Community Disapproval	35.61%	73
Fear of Isolation	39.51%	81
Cultural Barriers	60.49%	124
Not sure where to get help/ Intervention Programs	30.73%	63
Unbalanced Economic Status/ Income Disparities	24.88%	51
Other (please specify)	9.27%	19
Total Respondents: 205		

The survey revealed that fear and isolation (39.51%), cultural barriers(60.49%), society or community disapproval(35.61%) and not knowing where to get help (30%) are some of the

causes preventing women and men from leaving a violent relationship.

When asked who the perpetrators of violence were

Answer Choices	Responses	
Husband	68.23%	131
Mother/Wife	51.04%	98
Step Mother/Father	21.35%	41
Sister	12.50%	24
Brother	12.50%	24
Son	9.90%	19
Daughter	8.33%	16
Boyfriend	27.60%	53
Strangers	22.92%	44
Other (please specify)	14.58%	28
Total Respondents: 192		

The survey showed the perpetrators of violence included husbands (69%), wives/mothers (51%) and boyfriends (27%), strangers (22%) and step/mother or father (21%). This shows across the board gender violence is happening in the homes of diaspora community members. As the traditional marriage is failing and as more people enter into new relationships which include stepmothers or fathers, this may also be fueling gender violence. Disagreement can occur especially how to raise children or on money matters in households.

When we asked what the respondents' marital status was

Answer Choices	Responses	
In Union/Marriage	64.74%	123
Separated/Divorced	11.58%	22
Dating for now	2.63%	5
Widowed	1.05%	2
Student	2.63%	5
Never Married	3.68%	7
Single	8.95%	17
Other (please specify)	4.74%	9
Total		190

The survey showed married respondents accounted for 64.74%, those separated or divorced were 11.58% and single respondents accounted for 8.95%. With instances of physical violence in households and communities it is unclear why so many men and women are beaten are even killed by loved ones each year and little or nothing is done to correct this violent situation in our communities?

When we asked what approximate average household income were

Answer Choices	Responses	
\$0-\$24,999	10.55%	21
\$25,000-\$49,999	25.63%	51
\$50,000-\$74,999	26.63%	53
\$75,000-\$99,999	21.61%	43
\$100,000-\$124,999	8.54%	17
\$125,000-\$149,999	4.02%	8
\$150,000-\$174,999	1.01%	2
\$175,000-\$199,999	0.50%	1
\$200,000 and up	1.51%	3
Total		199

The survey 27% of respondents showed income levels of \$50,000 - 74,999, 26% had \$25,000-49999 and 21% had incomes of 75,000-79,999. In fact most battered victims have good jobs and are found across in all social, religious and ethnic backgrounds as well as age groups and educational levels.

When asked what type of violence experienced and whether it was someone else know?

Answer Choices	Responses	
Emotional Violence	66.31%	124
Physical Violence	48.13%	90
Sexul Violence	36.90%	69
Experience No Violence	39.57%	74
Other (please specify)	1.07%	2
Total Respondents: 187		

While emotional abuse emerged as the most common form of abuse, it is important to acknowledge that other forms of abuse are just as detrimental. Nonetheless emotional violence is closely linked to verbal abuse. These continuous behaviors are also aimed at terrorizing the victim and with intention to destroy the other persons' self-esteem. On the other hand physical violence accounted 48.13% of the responses while sexual violence accounted for 36.90%. a significant 39.57% said they have not experienced any form of violence.

When asked what were the main reasons for holding on to the relationship or marriage

Answer Choices	Responses	
Kids	70.20%	139
Cultural Believes	39.39%	78
Migrations Issues	29.80%	59
Religion	27.78%	55
Family Support	24.24%	48
Economic or Fear of Intolerable Sufferings	34.85%	69
Other (please specify)	10.61%	21
Total Respondents: 198		

In other words why do battered victims stay with they were significant others? The answer has many different angles. Some stay for financial reasons while others stay because of tradition.

Children factor accounted for 70% of the reasons why victims of violence stayed. Cultural beliefs were 40% of the respondents, economic reasons or fear of intolerable sufferings were 34.85%, immigration issues accounted for 29.80% and religious reasons accounted for 27.78%.

In an community discussion forum titled 'Gender and Abuse Forum, held on Nov 01, 2015 in in Brooklyn Park Community Center, MN, a community member described her ordeal as follows: "Being beaten up is the most degrading, humiliating, crushing kind of thing that could happen to a person and took me a long time to recover/change" Another community member added:

Do you know men too are encountering domestic violence? Men are likely grossly underreported in terms of domestic violence and it is not just a women problem. Not only can men be victims but the power and control struggle continues long after the abuse ends. Let us not claim ignorance about the severity of this social problem and do nothing.

When asked if respondents knew anybody going or has gone through gender violence

Answer Choices	Responses	
YES	68.37%	134
NO	30.61%	60
Dont Know	1.02%	2
Total		196

Discussion.

Is Gender violence in the diaspora becoming an epidemic as many households experience it? According to the survey nearly 70% of men and women knew someone experiencing domestic violence or have been victims themselves. Though more women than men are impacted, this is not strength of character. It is the silent epidemic of couples that look good on the surface but whom are in the throes of violence of a silent kind. The walls hide so many household secrets.

In conclusion, this survey demonstrated the antic of domestic violence is a well-known immigrant household problem and by raising our voice we can provoke a community conversation and start opening up. Arresting the abuser might just be a short term solution. At GFF, we think the way to end domestic violence as a community is to use local county resources

to empower and give treatment to those who need it, the problem is that "most abusers do not believe that they have a problem or that there is any reason to change.

Today, as immigrants living in developed societies we have the extra ordinary power to break the cycle and have the courage to leave the abuser. You have to be determined, and resilient to say ' NO'. What good is a home if an abuser is allowed to torture and abuse the people inside it? There are methods of getting out of an abusive relationship and get help. There are clinics that specialize in domestic abuse and other abusive situations. Clinics such as The Women's Haven and MN Women Shelter are amongst the well-known resources for help in Minnesota. There are hotlines and crisis help lines that can help victims and victims have a sense of anonymity.

References

<http://www.brooklynpark.org/events/the-impact-of-domestic-abuse-on-children/>