

Introduction

The women's movement worldwide succeeded in putting the issue of violence against women as one of the priorities of the world's agenda. International conventions like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the African Charter on people's rights have been ratified and efforts are being made by African countries gradually to translate the provisions into concrete programmes and services. In 1985 the Commonwealth Ministers responsible for Women's Affairs identified violence against women as a source of concern within commonwealth countries. Since then the issue has been appearing on several agenda of the Secretariat. As a result, some commonwealth nations seem to have made some good progress towards confronting various forms of violence against women in their respective countries. In 1995 the Beijing platform for Action referred to violence against women as "a matter of concern to all states and which should be addressed". Although Ghana has not been static in this area, there is still the need for more concrete action, based on consistent research, which would ensure that Ghanaian women can effectively exercise their rights alongside men in all spheres of economic, social, cultural and political life.

Rationale of the study.

In Ghana, like many African countries, the status of women today has been determined by the kind of girlhood they have had. Traditional values, cultural norms as well as socializing processes, all appear to bestow a low status on the girl child and low status on Ghanaian women. For effective integration of Ghanaian women into the mainstream of the development process, it is necessary to identify and plan to eliminate or at least reduce the incidence of acts and situations which are dehumanizing and/or militate against the status and productive roles of Ghanaian women. One set of such dehumanizing factors derives from various forms of violence against women.

In 1997 violence against women was identified as priority area for research in Ghana because despite the fact that there have been many anecdotal and somewhat pathetic stories of Ghanaian women being violated in various forms, there was lack of evidence to substantiate these allegations. Empirical data was therefore needed nationwide to serve as convincing grounds for policy makers in order to enforce already existing laws to curb violent acts perpetuated against women. The empirical data can also point to the need for new laws to safeguard the rights of women and girls. It will also provide basis for appropriate punishment for perpetrators of violent acts against women, particularly in areas of rape and defilement of girls.

Thus a national survey was carried out by Dr Pappoe and myself, under the auspices of the National Council on Women and Development. It was sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) whilst the proposal development was facilitated by seed money from the World Health Organization.

Conceptual Definition Adopted for the Study

The conceptual definition adopted for the national study identified with the Declaration on the “Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Women”, which defined the term “violence against women” as *“any act of a gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”*

The declaration specifies some problem areas that could be considered under violence against women to include the following:-

- Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation.
- Physical and sexual violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, educational institutions and elsewhere; trafficking in women and forced prostitution.
- Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetuated by the state, where it occurs.

Scope of the study

Ghana, located along the coast of West Africa, is a typical hot and humid tropical country. With a population of 18.2 million inhabitants at the time of the survey, it comprises large number of ethnic groups giving rise to a mosaic of sub-cultures in the country. Interestingly, for most of the groups certain aspects of the traditions have close similarities and the essential elements are virtually the same. Females constitute about 51% of the country’s population and are an important human resource base of the country. The sex ratio was 102.2 in 1960, 98.5 in 1970 and 97.3 in 1984. In view of the woman’s central role in production and reproduction, her importance both as an agent and beneficiary of socio-economic development and change has attracted the attention of policy makers. All obstacles in the way of women, therefore, must be identified and either removed completely or minimized.

In 1997 when the survey started, there was a marked absence of documentation, very little literature, limited data statistics and information in general to indicate the depth of violence that women and children experience. This was compounded by a situation of profound ignorance of its consequences. Violence against women as an issue was exceptionally difficult to deal with publicly in Ghana due to cultural, social and legal practices of burying or ignoring the problem or considering it a private matter. Existing information, mostly anecdotal from case histories, from legal perspectives and newspaper accounts show a high incidence of women abused in intimate relationships, child abuse in the family and abuse of elder dependants and sexual harassment at the work place. With these in mind, the study adopted the following objectives:

Objectives

- Study and document, what constitutes ‘violence against women’ within the Ghanaian society and from the perspectives of Ghanaian men and women.
- Identify existing forms and nature of violent actions against women, girls and children.
- Determine the incidence and prevalence of various forms of violent acts against women.
- Establish the causes and/or factors and situations, which contribute to the incidence of violent acts against women.
- Determine the effects and the consequences of the various forms of violent acts against women and girls, their families and the community at large.
- Study and analyze legal and other existing measures by state institutions, to manage and redress forms of violence against women in Ghana.
- Determine the extent to which women and girls, affected by violent acts, are willing to be helped as well as identify the nature of help required.
- Make recommendations for interventions to eliminate various forms of violent acts against women and girls and/or minimize the negative consequences of such acts.
- Create and increase awareness within the population, among both men and women, regarding the existing forms of violent acts against women in the Ghanaian society.
- Disseminate, as widely as possible, any information obtained from the research.

Methodology and Sources of Information for the Study.

The triangulation methodology was used in the collection of primary data to address a group of situations alleged to occur in varying degrees in the whole country. The following methodology and sources of information were adopted for use.

Sampling procedure

Multi-stage sampling procedures were employed to constitute sources for both quantitative and qualitative data. In the absence of current population data, a combination of purposive and random sampling methods was used.

Districts, Sub-districts and Communities

- (i) Three districts were purposively selected from each of the ten regions taking into consideration urban/rural composition and accessibility.

adult men and women (25—44 years olds); and elderly men and women (45 year old and ab

Access to the people especially women, was a challenge. There was need for lengthy negotiations at both household and institutional levels because in many cases women need permission from husbands/household heads for interviews. Households also need to confer with chiefs and elders.

There were also inconsistencies in access to records in the regions and within agencies. Other areas that were identified as challenges comprise the lack of data disaggregated by sex in records of Offence Book Records of the Police Stations, hospitals/polyclinics, health centres, social welfare case registers, family tribunals/family courts and the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice Offices.

Non-coverage of violent acts in print media does not ade

percent (10%) were unemployed, 4% were housewives and 1% were pensioners. The rest included fishermen, artisans, labourers, tailors, barbers and clerks.

General findings from research

The study findings showed that violence is a reality for a substantial number of women. I

the respondents' reported that it is wrong for one to beat his wife, 8% think it is right for one to beat his wife and the remaining 4% were indifferent.

Defilement

Six percent (6%) of the female respondents stated that they had been defiled before and 78% of the perpetrators were either close relations, acquaintances or family friends. Fif

mentioned include shaving of hair, ritual bath, confined to a room for days and wearing of rope around the neck.

Female circumcision

Respondents were asked whether their female siblings have been circumcised and female respondents were specifically asked whether they have been circumcised and their feelings about this practice. Twelve percent (12%) of the female respondents have been circumcised and 10% said that their siblings have been circumcised. Sixty-five percent (65%) of the respondents who have been circumcised and those whose siblings have been circumcised said that it is a custom or tradition, and 12% stated it is to ensure a good marriage. In spite of these answers 75% said it is a bad practice.

The Gaps Identified

The survey conducted was nationwide and is considered representative of the situation so far as violence against women is concerned. Yet certain areas were not fully covered. In areas identified as gaps, research may urgently be required. Other areas outside these loci include:

- Violent acts against women in the work place
- Violent acts against women in educational institutions

Conclusion

The need for national data on violence against women in Ghana cannot be overemphasized. Our study is just the beginning, revealing many gaps in research yet to be filled. Whilst there is urgency to correct this imbalance, it is equally imperative to conduct^{ua}