

COVID-19 pandemic and Gender-Based Violence in Africa

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SRH Rights, Unintended Pregnancy & Schooling, Gender-based Violence & Disability



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Presentation outline

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Violence against women**
- 3. Child sexual violence**
- 4. How and what do we know about GBVAW**
- 5. Covid-19 Lockdown**
- 6. The home**
 - Gender-based violence during the lockdown**
 - Child sexual violence during the Covid-19 pandemic**
- 7. Limitations of what we know about domestic violence during the lockdown**

"Violence against women"

- “All acts perpetrated **against women** which **cause or could cause** them physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm, including the threat to take such acts; or to undertake the imposition of arbitrary restrictions on or deprivation of fundamental freedoms in private or public life in peace time and during situations of armed conflicts or of war”
- Perpetrator is not mentioned
 - It is mainly perpetrated by men: **cis hetero men**
- The target is ‘women’
 - This social category is not elaborated on to include the diversity in **sexual orientation and gender identity**
- Definition highlights **the consequences** rather than the action (*or intentions*)
 - It is survivor/victim centered
 - Focuses on the consequences for the woman

Child sexual violence

- The Maputo Protocol Article 1, k) also includes ‘girls’
 - is defined in many ways and the definitions have evolved over time
- In this paper a child sexual violation refers to *an act which is forced upon a child and is for the gratification of the perpetrator*
 - It includes both penetrative and non-penetrative **sexual acts**: including digital, vaginal, penile penetration and oral sex
 - Includes the involvement of a child in the production of, or exposure to, **pornographic material**
 - **Statutory rape** - a sexual act with an individual below the age of 16 years, *despite consent of the child to engage in the act*

How and what do we know about GBVAW

Data sources:

1. Examine **routinely collected** service data

- Police Services, Health, social services
- Domestic violence Call Centres
- GBV civil society services

2. **Research studies**

- Survey research
- Intervention research
 - Qualitative and quantitative approaches

Covid-19 Lockdown

- Globally, business as usual ceased for many as the novel corona virus (Covid-19) forced the global society into country-wide **lockdowns**
- Public health measures adopted to regulate the spread of the novel corona virus *restricted movement*
- *This meant that women at risk of domestic violence were stuck at home with an abusive partner*
 - **Feminist wisdom** - a violence spike was expected and predicted
- *‘as people spend more time in close proximity in household isolation...**women and children are at risk** of experiencing **higher levels** of violence’*



Google reports 75 per cent spike in searches for help with domestic violence

30.03.2020



- The number of women calling domestic violence support services was reported to have risen significantly in various countries across the globe
 - SMS and emails to support services increased
 - In the first days of confinement **Increase in domestic violence** were reported in many places

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- In Zambia, Vesper Chisumpa's paper: an increase in gender-based violence
 - School closures exposed young girls to GBV
- In Nigeria, Akiode A Akorede's paper: the lockdown increased girl's vulnerability to GBV
- In Zimbabwe, Talent Tapera's paper: the national GBV hotline (Musasa) recorded an increase in GBV calls: 4, 047 SGBV calls from the 30th March to end July: an increase of 70%

Gender-Based Domestic Violence during the lockdown in South Africa

- reported that Police statistics for the first week of the lockdown showed that more than 2300 complaints of gender-based violence were recorded
 - *For SAPS, this suggested a reduction in reported cases of domestic violence in South Africa during the lockdown*
- The GBV Command Call Centre in South Africa, suggested a surge of gender-based violence since the implementation of the national lockdown, with 87 000 gender-based violence complaints in the first month
- The increased GBVAW was confirmed by people who work on violence against women on the ground

Gender-based violence during the lockdown

| Women victims of DVAW | Women at risk of DVAW |
|---|--|
| Frequency increased | Tensions escalated and led to new incidences |
| Severity increased | |
| No access to informal sources of help | |
| Formal sources of help, other than health and police services, closed | |
| Separation and divorce halted by slowed down services | |

The home

- ‘Home’ is often a contested site for unequal power and gender relations
- Violence in the home is sustained by the existence of age, gender, income and status power dynamics complicated by **relationships of trust**
- In the home there is **emphasis on obedience** and men’s supremacy as ‘head of the household’
- It is at home that children are exposed to adults’ domestic violence
 - Interpersonal or Intimate PV
- It is at home where sexual violation of children predominantly occurs
 - The unsafe nature of the home is depicted by the (*unknown*) number of cases of incest
 - Statutory rape (unrelated older male perpetrators) also happens in homes
- Most Intimate Femicide incidents also occur within homes
 - Preceded by long periods of domestic disputes and violence “*the time bomb*”
 - Children may be victims

Child sexual violence during the Covid-19 pandemic

- Essential workers were allowed to work during the ‘hard’ lockdown
- ***‘Essential worker’***, in a gender stereotyped world of work, results in many women working in the health, social services, hospitality, retail, and community volunteering
- The period which *the mother* was away may have created a window of opportunity for the child(ren) to fall victim of sexual violence from people within (and outside) the household
- Perpetrators of child sexual violation include
 - children known to the child, such as friends, playmates and romantic partners
 - Adults known to the child as relatives, family members, acquaintances, neighbors

Limitations of what we know about domestic violence during the lockdown

- Gender-based violence is often surrounded by complexities that impede on reporting of the case to authorities, such as
 - the concealment of incest, statutory rape, child and forced marriages threats
 - the absence of a specific crime category: domestic violence, hate crime, femicide
- The regulations that restricted movement during the pandemic further impeded on the reporting of these crimes
 - The Covid-19 pandemic made it difficult to acquire comprehensive information on the extent of the prevalence of abuse
- media reports allowed for a glimpse of the situation; are inherently biased
- Online data collection for GBV against women is at its infancy

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