COVID-19 pandemic and Gender-Based Violence in Africa

Mzikazi Nduna, WITS University
Oyama Tshona, Independent Consultant: GBV, Equity, SRHR - Pro-feminist Gender Blogger: Thetha Ntombi!: oyamatshona@yahoo.com
Nokhetho Mhlanga, mhlanganokhetho@gmail.com

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SRH Rights, Unintended Pregnancy & Schooling, Gender-based Violence & Disability
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 \textit{an act which is forced upon a child and is for the gratification of the perpetrator}
  • It includes both penetrative and non-penetrative \textbf{sexual acts}: including digital, vaginal, penile penetration and oral sex
  • Includes the involvement of a child in the production of, or exposure to, \textbf{pornographic material}
  • \textbf{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
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

• 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women victims of DVAW</th>
<th>Women at risk of DVAW</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency increased</td>
<td>Tensions escalated and led to new incidences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severity increased</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No access to <strong>informal</strong> sources of help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formal sources of help, other than health and police services, closed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Separation and divorce halted by slowed down services</td>
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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
References


