



Beyond the Laws: Analysing Police Intervention Strategies for Handling Domestic Violence in Ghana and Nigeria

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Abstract

Substantial research has demonstrated that the police are critical agents in dealing with the problem of DV and reducing its overall prevalence. The passage of the DV laws in Ghana and Nigeria made the police the primary agency to respond to DV; however, there is limited research on how police handle domestic violence in the two countries. This study, therefore, critically interrogated police intervention strategies in handling DV and their effectiveness in Ghana and Nigeria. In-depth interviews were conducted with 100 female victims of DV who have utilized police services and 30 police officers who handle DV cases. In addition, ethnographic observations were made in the police stations. The study found that arrest and detention, prosecution at the law court and the use of caution letters are the major conventional strategies used by the Ghana and Nigeria police to handle domestic violence. The two police institutions also adopted culturally sensitive approaches such as mediations, invitation letters and the use of minor punishment to deter offenders and potential offenders. There were few variations in how the two police institutions handle domestic violence. The Ghana police utilized invisible arrest to preserve family relationships while the Nigeria police adopted naming and shaming of perpetrators to deter the public. The effectiveness of the interventions were mixed, depending on cultural acceptability, victims' needs and impact on perpetrators. Police interventions emphasized punishments, and this often brought swift changes in offender's behavior but the changes were not sustainable.

Keywords: Domestic violence, policing, gender, interventions, victimization.

Introduction

Since the ¹Battered Women's Movement, the struggle against domestic violence (DV) continues to dominate international and national debates. Domestic violence is a precarious social menace with devastating health, psychological, economic, and death consequences.

¹ Battered Women's Movement was initiated in the 1970s in the United States as part of feminist movements to campaign against domestic violence and demand support for battered women. Its primary aim was to provide assistance for abused women and change gender misconceptualizations and promote equality (Dobash and Dobash, 1992)

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Defined as a pattern of violent behavior or acts that occur among family relations or people living together in a household as well as those who are or have been in an intimate relationship, domestic violence is one of the world's most committed crimes (Dickson et al., 2020). DV is compromises women's physical and mental health, increases their risk to sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2006). According to the World Health Organization (2021), 38% of all murders of women worldwide result from intimate partner violence. Domestic violence is prevalent in Ghana and Nigeria partly due to heavily patriarchal cultures and a cultural belief that men have the right to physically discipline their wives. Available statistics reveal that one-third of Ghanaian women have been victims of domestic violence (Ghana Statistical Services, 2014), while in Nigeria 33% of women have experienced domestic violence (National Population Commission, 2013). A major approach to deal with this menace involves the enactment of legal frameworks that criminalize domestic violence. The argument for laws against DV is based on the premise that placing punitive measures on acts of domestic violence will deter offenders and potential offenders. Therefore, the criminal justice system has increased its role to enforce laws that view family violence as a criminal act. The entire criminal justice system, especially the ²police are major stakeholders in the fight against DV. Houston (2014) contends major agents of change in dealing with the menace of DV. Police interventions in domestic violence facilitate access to justice and further support for direct and indirect victims (Abioye and Abiri 2012). The quest for policing domestic violence hinges on the rationale that holding abusers accountable will prevent impunity (Karmen, 2007). Similarly, Delahunty and Crehan (2016), and Effah-Chukwuma and Asiwaju (2006) also argue that police involvement in domestic violence will instill confidence in victims, promote the rights of women and portray DV as an unacceptable act. The role played by the police is very critical in either preventing domestic violence or further promoting or encouraging it. Markowitz (2001) establishes that the prevalence of domestic violence increases when the abuser is ignored and police fail to punish offenders. When this happens, the perpetrator learns that his behavior is valid and accepted.

In the past, the Ghana and Nigeria police considered DV private and often refused to take action in spite of the increased brutalities on women (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014 and Effah-Chukwuma and Asiwaju, 2006). Police stance on DV led to a public outcry and civil society demonstrations against the incessant brutalities on women by family members and police indifference to them, regarding them as being family matters. In Nigeria, the climax of these outcries was a feminist uprisal for justice for Titilayo Omozoje, a banker who was murdered in cold blood by her husband on 24th June 2011 in Lagos. This uprisal stimulated public demand for police to take domestic violence cases seriously and a national law on domestic

2 In the context of this study, police refer to national institutions or organisations responsible for the enforcement of national laws, maintenance of order and the protection of lives and properties. Policing is defined as the mandates and functions of national police institutions

violence, resulting in the creation of the Family Support Unit (FSU) in the Nigeria Police Force in 2012 and later the passage of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act 2015 of Nigeria. In Ghana, public demand for punitive measures for domestic violence and police interventions were embedded in calls for a national law on Domestic Violence. In 2007, the Domestic Violence Act 732/2007 was passed into law. In addition, the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) was created within the Ghana Police Service. The domestic violence laws in Ghana and Nigeria demanded a shift of police disposition to DV, mandating them to take serious actions of arrest, investigation and prosecution of perpetrators, as well as to provide support services for victims. The special domestic violence units were tasked with handling domestic violence and sexual offenses in order to encourage DV victims to seek help, promote the safety of women, and reduce offender recidivism and the overall prevalence rate. While these laws and measures have been lauded for being positive initiatives to dealing with the DV, available studies reveal that the greater proportion of domestic violence victims still refuse to seek police assistance. A quantitative study on policing domestic violence in Nigeria revealed that almost 80% of all DV cases go unreported to the police (Abioye and Abiri, 2012). Similarly in Ghana, studies demonstrate that although the awareness level of (DOVVSU) is high (85%), only 24% of domestic violence victims seek police assistance (Ghana Statistical Service, 2015). These clearly demonstrate the need for a critical investigation into how police handle domestic violence in order to identify some of the factors that undermine its use. Studies on policing domestic violence in Ghana and Nigeria have examined victims satisfaction with police involvements, police masculine culture, the challenges of the DV units as well women's perception about police interventions in domestic violence (Mitchell, 2011, Adu-Gyamfi, 2014 and Yalley and Olutayo, 2020). There is however, minimal empirical data that critically investigate the intervention strategies employed by the police in handling domestic violence and how these intervention strategies could contribute to women's unwillingness to seek police assistance. Fleury-Steiner et al. (2006, p.329) contends that "an understanding of interventions and their outcomes is critical to ending violence against women". This study therefore interrogated police intervention strategies for handling domestic violence, examined the modalities of the interventions and their effectiveness in dealing with domestic violence. I specifically study the different strategies used by the Ghana and Nigeria police to also draw similarities and differences in the operations of the two police institutions. Although the Ghana Police Service and Nigeria Police Force share similar colonial history (British colonies) which includes similar colonial policing ideology and practices, these two police institutions have differing gender practices. Unlike the Ghana police which has no specific restrictive law against female police officers, the Nigeria police has stipulated laws which restrict and are discriminatory to women and female police officers. The Nigeria Police Regulations Act (2004) prohibits the recruitment of married women while married

men are allowed into the police profession. Similarly, policewomen who wish to marry are not allowed to marry without the consent of the police commissioner and unmarried women who become pregnant are automatically dismissed. Young (2011:3) and Yalley and Olutayo (2020) contend that “the beliefs, and practices of the institution influence the police officers” and that police organizational culture influences police attitude to gender-based crimes. Thus, these institutional practices could as well be replicated in how domestic violence is viewed and handled by the police, making a comparative study more insightful into the institutional dynamics of police interventions in DV.

Materials and Methods

Research Design and Study Area

The ethnographic research design was employed to explore the intervention strategies utilized by the Ghana and Nigeria police in dealing with domestic violence. Data was collected through in-depth interviewing, participant observations, and photography. This holistic data collection method granted me (the researcher) in-depth information on how police handle domestic violence by observing the everyday practices in the police stations and interviewing victims, police, and other relevant informants. The study concentrated on three major forms of abuse – physical, sexual, and economic abuse. Employing an ethnographic research design positioned me as a co-producer of knowledge who’s stance and background experiences could influence the data. Being a female raised in a patriarchal culture in Africa with limited rights women’s rights, I was mindful of how my perception and background could influence the data. To address these potential biases and ensure objectivity, I employed diverse data collection methods such as unstructured interviews with diverse groups and photography. The study was conducted in six domestic violence units in the Ghana Police Service and Nigeria Police Force. In Ghana, the study was conducted in the DOVVSU unit in Nsawam police station in the Eastern Region, the Western Regional DOVVSU Headquarters in Sekondi, Western Region, and the Greater Accra Regional DOVVSU Headquarters in Accra Central Police Station. The study in Nigeria was conducted in in the Family Support Units of Isokoko Police Divisional Headquarters, Ilupeju Police Divisional Headquarters, and the Gender Office of the Lagos State Police Command. The selection of the police stations was based on the vast number of cases they handle, making it ideal to access domestic violence victims with a diverse range of experiences.

Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of female victims of domestic violence who had sought police assistance as well as complainants who reported cases of abuse to the police. This explored their experiences and views on how police handle domestic violence cases. Also, police officials who also work in the domestic violence units were interviewed to ascertain how the police operate and handle cases of DV. In addition, social workers who directly or indirectly work with the police and had in-depth knowledge of police interventions and domestic violence were also interviewed. Purposive sampling was employed to select the appropriate respondents for the study. Creswell (2014) contends that “the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites (or documents or visual material) that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question.” Interviews were conducted with 50 female victims of DV in Ghana and 50 victims in Nigeria, 30 police officers (15 in Ghana and 15 in Nigeria), and four social workers who worked with the Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF) Ghana, Hurds Foundations in Ghana, National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons in Nigeria and Rape Relief in Nigeria. The choice of this sample size was guided by the concept of saturation—a technique used when the collection of new data does not shed any further light on the issue under investigation. Charmaz (2006) indicates that in qualitative research, the researcher stops collecting data when the themes are saturated: when the acquisition of fresh data does not spark new insight. Hence the researcher stopped collecting data when the gathering of new data did not disclose new information. This sample size was therefore deemed sufficient to fully reveal all the nuances of police interventions

Procedure for Data Collection

The researcher began the study by first seeking approval from the Ghana Police Service headquarters in Accra and the Nigeria Police Force Headquarters in Lagos State. When the approval was received, the researcher further sought permission from the police chiefs in charge of the selected police stations and the police heads in the DV units. The researcher was then introduced to all the police officers and investigators working in the DV units. This was proceeded by a thorough articulation of the purpose and the rationale of the study. A personal desk was allocated to the researcher in the DV units to facilitate the observation of police procedures and operations in handling domestic violence. Consents were sought from individual police officers and interviews were scheduled and conducted upon the agreed times. The researcher also approached female victims who had reported their cases of abuse, introduced the study purpose, and sought their consent for participation. Once their consents were received, the researcher interviewed them in the police stations. The interviews began after the initial stage

of complaint making at the police stations and follow-up interviews were conducted after the sessions in the police stations to ascertain the level of success of police interventions and also examine the sustainability of intervention outcomes. The follow-up interviews were conducted in victim's homes and also on phone which also allowed victims to express their opinions about the police freely without any fear and prejudices. The interviews with the social workers were conducted in their offices and on phones after their consents were sought. The duration of the interviews was about one hour thirty minutes. Interviews in Ghana were conducted in Akan and English languages, while English and Pidgin English were used to conduct the interviews in Nigeria. Participant observation was undertaken by the researcher to collect information on the procedures or interventions for victims, services available for victims, how domestic violence cases were handled, mediations, perpetrators' attitudes, and general or everyday practices in the police stations. Observations on the prosecution of domestic violence were also made in the Accra Circuit Court, the Gender court in Sekondi, Samuel Ilori Magistrate Court in Ogba, Lagos, and Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Court in Ikeja, Lagos. The researcher took field notes from the observations and also collected photographs that demonstrated the work of the DV units and visual materials such as posters and flyers.

Research Ethics

The researcher observed all the ethical guidelines throughout the data collection process. Firstly, the researcher sought and received approval for the study from the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan. Additionally, ethical approval for the conduct of the study was granted by the Ghana Police Service and the Nigeria Police. The researcher again sought the authorization for the collection of data from all the police commanders in the selected police stations, as well as the police heads in the domestic violence units. Also, interviewees were informed about the rationale of the study, guaranteed the confidentiality of their information while their consent was sought before conducting interviews. An optimum sense of anonymity was maintained to prevent stigmatization. Hence, the identities of victims are concealed, and the data were utilized only for the research after which they will be appropriately discarded after some time. Participation in the study was voluntary and also without remuneration. Data were collected between May 2017 and July 2018.

Data Analysis

The data collected from recorded interviews were transcribed, translated into the English language, and merged with field notes from the observations, and analyzed using the thematic analysis technique. The data were grouped into emerging themes and sub-themes.

Findings

The study objective was to explore the strategies employed by the Ghana and Nigeria police in handling domestic violence and examine their implications on domestic violence victims who seek police assistance. The major thematic findings from the data analysis are presented in the subsequent sections

Arrest and Detention/ Invisible Arrest

The criminalization of domestic violence required that the police could arrest DV perpetrators. The Ghana and Nigeria police employed the use of arrest and detention mainly in major grievous offences such as sexual violence, harmful assault with severe visible wounds, homicide and in cases where the life of the victim was threatened as well as economic abuses where the use of caution had failed. The police also arrested offenders to prevent them from absconding before prosecution. According to the police officers interviewed, arrest and detention instilled fear in perpetrators and sent signals to offenders and the public on the seriousness of DV thereby deterring other members of the society from perpetrating DV. Although the entire statistics of crime rate was not available, the Nigeria police indicated that there was a drastic reduction of Rape cases when they began taking action by arresting rapist. The following extracts from the interviews revealed the impact of arrest:

Sometimes we have had reports where people begged when they were arrested. They beg that they will not do it again and truly they don't. You know many people are ignorant of the law. They don't even know that beating their wives is wrong and an offence. When we arrest them they sit up and know the gravity and seriousness of the offence (Police officer, Nigeria)

The traditional method of policing is more effective, the arrest I mean. The perpetrator needs to be arrested and given small torture to reform. Arrest deters criminals. The fear of sleeping in the cells, the discomfort that comes with it puts fear in the perpetrators. (Police officer, Ghana)

Here in Isokoko, before the FSU was established, rape was very rampant. But as soon as the law was passed and we started arresting the perpetrators, the whole incidence reduced. In the past, the minimum number of reports of sexual violence was about 20 in a week. These days the highest number we receive in a week is just about three. (Police officer, Nigeria)

Some victims of economic abuse also revealed that arrest and detention were relatively effective in bringing a sudden change in offender behavior and this was purely induced by fear. However, it was less effective in ensuring a sustainable change in offender behavior.

My children's father has refused to provide economically for his children. All efforts to make him care for his children have failed. So when I brought him

here, the police cautioned him that he should maintain the children, but it did not work. So they now arrested and detained him in the cell, when this happened, he immediately called his family members to bring money for the children's maintenance so that he can be released. But after that, he didn't continue caring for the children again. (Victim of economic violence, Ghana)

The deterrence impact of arrest is consistent with the findings of Cho and Wilke's (2010) quantitative study on the impact of arrest in the United States of America. Their study found that arrest of perpetrators reduced revictimization by almost 50%. Similarly, Maxwell et al. (2001) also found in their analysis of data from domestic violence arrest experiments that arrest reduced perpetrators' recidivism. The researcher also observed that perpetrators who were arrested and detained regretted their actions after detention in the police cells. Some of the perpetrators who sometimes challenged police authority for countering their disciplinary actions- battering their wives- begun to beg after spending a day in the cells. However, arrest and detention of family members irrespective of the type of abuse, often broke family unity, leading to a stigmatization of victims. During an interview with a social worker in Ghana (Hurds Foundation), she revealed that

"Sometimes, the victims face family and societal stigmatization when the police arrest the perpetrators. A victim of rape was seriously stigmatized and blamed by the community for the arrest of the perpetrator".

This could be attributed to the fact that arrest and, detention in domestic matters are culturally unacceptable in African. This has been corroborated by Mogstad et al. (2016) who also revealed that arrest of DV offenders in South Africa was considered disloyal to family values and violated culturally correct procedure to handling domestic matters, including DV. Fleury-Steiner et al. (2006) notes that community support is crucial for victim's willingness to involve the criminal justice system. Thus, the impact of the community cannot be overruled in victim's experiences with the criminal justice system. In spite of the impact of arrest, most sexually abused victims and women who had divorced, separated, those looking for an escape out of their marriages as well as those who felt the breakup of the marriage or relationship has minimal impact on them preferred arrest to other methods of response. The following narration by a victim confirmed this.

This is not the first time he has beaten me, I didn't want them to arrest him because at that time I was living with him and I was afraid he will leave me if they arrested him.

Besides, I didn't want to have children with different men so I endured it. But now we are no more together so I want them to arrest him. (Victim of physical violence, Ghana).

This illustration confirms the fact that victims of intimate partner violence were well conscious

of the effects of arrest in breaking marital unity. This has been corroborated by Iyengar's (2009) study that discovered that the reporting rate of intimate partner violence declined because of the perverse effect of mandatory arrest policies.

The study found some variations in the method of arrest employed by the Ghana and Nigeria police. Unlike the Nigeria police, the Ghana police adopted the invisible arrest mainly to instill fear in perpetrators, preserve family union and to reduce offender recidivism. It takes a different dimension from the regular arrest where perpetrators are handcuffed by police officers or detained in cells. With invisible arrest, perpetrators were only quarantined in the DOVVSU offices for about five hours without movement and only released upon signing of a bail bond by a third party. The researcher observed that 'invisible arrest' was mainly employed in intimate partner violence, economic violence, and other minor physical violence. It was effective in reducing the family separation and contentions that often resulted from the traditional arrest and detention. Invisible arrest was however mainly based on police discretion making it less formal and subjective. While the impact of police discretionary powers in 'invisible arrest' in the study could not be ascertained, it posed the danger of demeaning the gravity of DV, thereby increasing revictimization. During the interviews, victims disclosed:

This is not the first time I have come to the police to report my husband's abuse. But every time they will just quarantine him and release him. When he comes home he will just be saying 'what did they do to me, what did they do to me? they did not do anything to me!' Because of this he keeps assaulting me and I am tired. If they had arrested him, he would have known the gravity of the offence and I believed he would have stopped. Now I have decided not to bother to go to the police again. (Victim of physical violence, Ghana)

I reported my husband and his brother to the police for beating me up. But because the police just quarantined them and released them, when we came home, they were laughing at me and mocking me. They said the police did not do anything to them. Now the situation is even worse. (Victim of physical violence, Ghana)

The above extracts from the interviews demonstrate that invisible arrest had no deterring effects on perpetrators thereby affecting victims' willingness to report subsequent abuses to the police.

The Concept of Prosecution

The Prosecution of offenders at the law court is a central focus of police work and also constitutes a major tool in the fight against domestic violence in Ghana and Nigeria. The prosecution of offenders in both countries depended on the severity of the abuse together as

well as the consent and support of the victim. However, in sexual abuse against children, the prosecution of offenders was mandatory. Police and some victims expressed contradictory opinions on prosecution. While successful prosecution of perpetrators was the yardstick for determining justice by the police, some victims considered prosecution less relevant. These victims rejected prosecution because it was unhelpful to them. The following extracts from the data revealed this opinion:

I don't want them to send him to court. If they send him to jail how can he work and take care of the child? I want him to take care of his child that is why I brought him here. He cannot do that in jail. (Victim of economic violence, Ghana)

The boy (25 years of age) is my junior sister's boyfriend. He impregnated her and when I called him he denied the pregnancy. I begged him and warned him but he didn't accept it that is why I brought him to the police station. That they will make him accept the pregnancy so that he can take full responsibility. Now he has accepted it but the police are saying because my sister is 16 years they are sending the boy to jail. Now, who will take care of my sister and the baby? (Complainant, Sexual violence Nigeria)

From the above narrations, it is evident that some victims found prosecution unhelpful to them. A study by Fleury-Steiner et al. (2006) also revealed that the fear of losing economic support for victims and their children compelled some victims to reject prosecution. Thus, the considerations for economic empowerment and reformation of offenders are key factors to women's decision to seek help.

Most victims of economic violence in Ghana viewed prosecution as useful only after other intervention strategies proved unsuccessful. Their preference was however based on the assumption that the fear of imprisonment (not imprisonment itself) will compel offenders to provide for their children's financial needs. In an interview with a victim, she disclosed:

I want them to take the case to court. At court, he will have to pay or go to jail. The fear of going to jail will compel him to pay the children's school fees and their upkeep. That is the only solution because he is stubborn. This is the third time I'm bringing him here. (Victim of economic violence, Ghana)

This is consistent with findings of Ford's (1991) study which also found that some victims used prosecution to threaten their offenders into behavioural change as well as resource negotiations. Preference for prosecution was mainly expressed by victims of sexual violence. They depicted a strong desire for revenge and justice which could mainly be attained through a successful prosecution. In responding to the question "what do you want police to do for you?", a victim responded, "I want him to go to jail. For all that he did to me, he must be punished severely for that. That is what I want".(Victim of Rape, Nigeria).

In Ghana, all sexual violence victims indicated their desire for the prosecution of the perpetrators. In Nigeria however, some victims of sexual abuse refused prosecution because their abusers were the breadwinners, and therefore prosecuting them will cause more financial vulnerability. In an interview with a 14-year-old sexual violence victim, she revealed:

My stepfather started having sex with me since I was 9 years old. Whenever my mother is not around, he will have sex with me. Although my mother knew about it she never

reported him to the police because she was afraid. My stepfather is the one taking care of all of us. (Sexual violence victim, Nigeria)

In this case, justice will impede their survival and this prevented them from reporting abuses to the police. According to Cho and Wilke (2010), if the involvement of the police disadvantaged victims they will be less likely to report subsequent abuses. These disadvantages could include shelter, revictimization, or financial implications.

The study also discovered that religious beliefs and doctrines were other major reasons behind the rejection of prosecution by victims in both Ghana and Nigeria. Religious beliefs of faith, persecution, endurance, forgiveness, mercy, submission were defining factors in victims' acceptance of abuse which is also sometimes born out of patriarchy. During an intervention of a sexual violence case, a complainant explains to the police

The bible says we should forgive one another so even though this man has sexually abused my daughter I forgive him. I want to withdraw the case. (Father of a sexually abused child, Nigeria)

Another victim corroborating the above maintains that

Vengeance belongs to God. There is no need to prosecute him. I will leave him for God. God's punishment is more grievous than court punishment (Victim of physical and economic, Ghana).

Westenberg (2017) notes that the probability of Christian women remaining or returning to abusive relationships is higher than non-Christians. She contends that religious languages and virtues of forgiveness, mercy, and the value of suffering are used to condone domestic violence. Police officers' negative attitude, the long and tedious process of prosecution, and the ineffective nature of the entire criminal justice system were some other causes that led victims into assigning their cases to God for judgement. Mercier et al. (2018, p.4) note that "belief in a controlling God increases in uncontrollable situations". When people's needs are unmet by the responsible institutions, they resort to supernatural powers for a solution, in

this case, God. Whitehead and Bergeman (2011) also contend that humans' belief in God is a palliate to dealing with the impact of negative life circumstances. In Nigeria, the lack of adequate protection for victims during and after prosecution made victims more vulnerable, contributing to victims' rejection of prosecution.

“For some victims, prosecution made them more vulnerable. Those area boys have groups and when they hear about the prosecution of a member, their group members sometimes harm the victim. There have been some incidences like this” (Police officer, Nigeria).

While prosecution may be unfavorable for some victims, the vulnerability of victims in these circumstances rather reveal the inadequacies of the police to offer adequate protection for victims. From the interviews with the police in both Ghana and Nigeria, there were no direct protection measures to safeguard the lives of victims who might be endangered by police interventions. When this happens, a reduced confidence in the police is inevitable—leading to a reduced reporting rate. “Victims who fear that prosecution may lead their assailant to retaliate” are unlikely to report abuses to the police (Fleury-Steiner et al., 2006, p.328).

Prosecution was also perceived to break the family apart. Culturally, prosecution was viewed as an unacceptable way of resolving family problems and victims who opted for it were seen as unreasonable by society. The severity of the punishment for sexual violence victims (15 years and 25 years of imprisonment for rape and defilement respectively in Ghana; 25 years and life imprisonment for rape and defilement respectively in Nigeria) was seen as grievous and detrimental to the perpetrator. Victims were rather blamed and stigmatized, and the fear of further blaming prevented victims from reporting cases which demanded mandatory prosecution to the police. The following account by a police officer buttresses the fact.

Because many of the perpetrators are either good neighbors, brothers, uncles, or friends, people in the community or society see such acts of prosecution as unthinkable or unjust or acts of unforgiveness. So victims and their family members are ostracized. Fear of prosecution is one thing that sometimes prevents people from reporting. Many times we have to threaten victims and their families with court punishment before they follow us to court. Also, some married women are afraid of what society or people will tell their children when they grow. That their mother sent their father to court. The family members will stigmatize the woman for sending her husband to court. (Police officer, Nigeria)

I handled a case of sexual violence in Daboasi and the perpetrator was arrested, prosecuted, and imprisoned. After the prosecution, the whole community has now turned against the mother of the child that they are wicked. The woman eventually relocated (Social Worker, Hurds Foundation, Ghana)

I want to withdraw the case. I do not want you to prosecute the boy because the boy in question is my best friend's son. We have been friends since childhood and I don't want to cause separation because of this. (Father of a victim of defilement, Nigeria)

Many victims found prosecution to be expensive and this was a hindrance to many poor women. In Ghana, poor women could not have access to justice because they were unable to afford the cost of obtaining a medical report costing between 100 to 200 (\$40 to \$70) which was mandatory for a successful investigation. Also, the cost of transport for both arrest and visit to the crime scenes, photocopies, pictures, the filing of the cases in courts, and the transporting of perpetrators to the prisons were all paid by victims in both Ghana and Nigeria. Most victims could not afford the cost of processing a case to court. The investigation and trial were also seen to be time-consuming and bureaucratic. In Nigeria, the minimum years of trial for sexual violence were between two to five years. This was because the prosecution sexual violence cases in Nigeria were subjected to the scrutiny and approval of the Directorate of Public Prosecutions (DPP) before the actual commencement of trial. The duration of scrutiny was not less than one year. As a result of this, many victims get discouraged because the expenditure on prosecution increased as the time of trial increased.

In addition to the expensive nature of prosecution, some victims opined that police were corrupt and partial. All these led to some victims' abandoning their cases in court. The following extract from the interviews attested to the tedious nature of prosecution:

See madam, I don't have money again. I have spent all my money on this case. I had to pay for transport to arrest the boy, transport to the hospital, and also to take the boy to the court. At this time I said I don't have any money and the policewoman became angry shouting at me and treating me anyhow. She has now sided with the boy and his family against me and my daughter. Even at the court, she was asking me money for photocopy, files and transport of N7000 ((\$30) to take the boy to Abeokuta correctional centre and when I told her I don't have money she became angry. She is rather helping the perpetrator rather than helping me because they have given her money. I have decided to leave everything for God to judge. I will not go to court again am tired" (Mother of Rape Victim, Nigeria)

The Notion of Minor Punishment

The use of minor punishment was one of the strategies used in dealing with cases the police less grievous cases in both Ghana and Nigeria. According to police officers who were interviewed, minor punishments deterred offenders from repeating the abuse and served as a deterrent to other members of the community. Ogbé et al. (2020) contends that good

interventions should hold offenders accountable. Minor punishments used included fines to compensate victims especially of physical abuse, payment for all loss suffered by the victim as a result of the abuse, all costs of medical reports and care, cost of the police investigation, transportation and expenses incurred by the victim in the police station. Other punishments included requests for frequent visits to the police station to waste the time, money and energy of perpetrators. In response to a case of physical abuse, a police commander instructed:

“Just ask him to be reporting to the policing station every day for about one week. By the end of the one week, he would have learned his lessons” (Police Officer, Ghana).

Another police officer recounted:

“Some victims just want police to use their powers to intimidate perpetrators, educate the perpetrators on the laws and to make offenders pay fines” (Police Officer, Nigeria).

Few minutes in detention cells, restriction of movement, threats, verbal harassment, insults and ridiculing of perpetrators were among the minor punishments used. The displeasure that comes from these minor punishments deterred the public. During a mediation in Ghana, a family member noted:

You see it is because of all these that I don't want to get any issue with the police at all, all your money will be wasted, including your time and energy. Since morning we have been sitting here. For the past one week, I have left all my business to deal with this matter. I have vowed never to touch a woman no matter how she provokes me. (To perpetrator) Learn from it. (DOVVSU, Ghana)

Married women attested that the minor punishment broke their relationships with their husbands. Some victims lost their relationships because perpetrators felt they had been punished and viewed victims as enemies rather than lovers. When asked if minor punishment was effective in ending abuse, a victim noted:

Partially: because he gave me the key, brought the children, and didn't stop me from doing my business but his verbal abuse and behavior have even worsened. It's like going to the police has even worsened the whole situation in my marriage. I'm confused right now. All my in-laws are against me for bringing the matter to the police. I don't know what to do. Since we came to the police all the family are against me now. All of them. It was even the mother who asked him to lock me up because she said I have sent my husband to the police station. They said why did I send their son to the police, so all of them have turned against me now. (Victim physical and economic violence, Nigeria)

This was corroborated by a key informant in Ghana:

The moment you invite a man to the police it's seen as a disgrace. The man will say 'if you like me would you have taken me to the police station?'. Culturally anyone who hears that a matter of marital abuse has been reported to the police knows that the victim is not in for a better resolution. (Social Worker, WiLDAF, Ghana)

In Nigeria, naming and shaming were among the minor punishments used that differed from Ghana. The pictures and names of perpetrators of sexual violence were placed on police notice boards as a way of disgracing offenders and deterring potential offenders. In an interview with a police officer she noted:

We capture pictures of perpetrators and paste them on our notice boards. We want the public to know them, and shame them. It will also let the public know that if they also abuse women, their pictures will be placed here. This will put fear in them because nobody likes to be disgraced like this (Police officer, Nigeria)

The Concept of Invitation and Caution Letters

The concept of invitation is a major unique strategy utilized by the Ghana and Nigeria police which differs from the traditional police practices. Letters of invitation are issued to perpetrators to appear in the police stations for discussions usually in marital violence of either physical or economic violence (non-maintenance of children). The invitation concept was however executed differently in the two police institutions. The Ghana police worked with social workers and community leaders to deliver invitation letters to offenders. In Nigeria however, invitation letters are pasted on offenders' houses, breaching it confidentiality. Nonetheless, most invitations were honored. Invitations encouraged willingness for participation and interventions from the perpetrators without the use of force.

Many victims revealed that the invitation letters encouraged positive change in perpetrators attitude. According to victims "some perpetrators brought money", some immediately "came with elders to beg" while others "begun the resolution process" when invitation letters were issued. This came as a result of the fear of possible punishment from the police as well as the power exerted on victims through police support.

When he saw the invitation, he immediately went and brought his uncle to come and beg us that the pregnancy is his. He accepted to take care of me and the pregnancy until I give birth. He even gave me money. So everything was solved when they gave him the invitation letter from the police. We just came back to withdraw the case from here (police station) to settle it at home. (Victim of economic violence, Ghana)

Another victim indicated “the moment he saw the invitation letter he came with elders to beg me”. However, In Nigeria, letters of invitation caused initial conflict and separation of couples and in-laws. The success of the union, therefore, depended on how the case was handled by the police. This speaks to the fact that the invitation letters compromised the confidentiality that marital abuse required. In Africa, marital violence is still viewed as a private affair. This is consistent with the findings of Tenkorang et al. (2013) and Nwabunike and Tenkorang (2017) study on domestic and marital violence that marital violence is perceived as a private affair in Ghana and Nigeria.

Perpetrator were sometimes warned through a caution letter, mainly in physical violence cases involving married couples. According to police respondents, it is meant to instill fear and prevent revictimization without resorting to the use of force or violence. The caution letter contains an undertaking, binding the abuser to refrain from abusing the victim. When the agreement in the caution letter was breached the perpetrator would be subjected to arrest and prosecution. Many victims of marital abuse in Ghana and Nigeria revealed during the interviews that they sought police assistance mainly for the police to use their authority to force their husbands to stop the abuse. Some women attested that this strategy was very successful in ending the abuse and also helped to preserve their marital relationship. However, some battered women in Nigeria were of the view that the caution letter was too liberal. Some perpetrators constantly defied the undertaken severally, yet the police failed to prosecute such cases, which gave more power to the abusers.

Mediation

Mediation was one of the major intervention strategies practiced by both Ghana and Nigeria police. The process of mediation involves narrations by both the victim and abuser, interrogation by the chief police officer to ascertain the criminality of the abuse, and the resolution stage which centers on actions that will end the violence. Actions identified in the study included; issuing of caution letter or signing a bond of good behavior; detaining perpetrator; payment of compensation or fine for medical costs and other losses resulting from the abuse; verbal cautioning; agreement and arrangement on maintenance order is issued by the police. The observed trend revealed caution letters and financial compensations as the dominant actions of resolutions in both countries. Also, in most cases, successful consensuses were reached and parties were united. During mediations, parties were also educated on the law and rights of women and children. The findings of the study reveal that mediation was successful in resolving marital violence and reducing the tensions between perpetrator and victim. The following accounts buttress the fact:

When we came, the policeman explained the gravity of his actions. He has now agreed to accept the pregnancy, take care of me until I give birth and also see my family for other customary rites. (Victim of economic violence, Ghana)

Ever since the police invited him and sat on the case he has changed. They warned him not to beat me again, and he vowed he will not beat me again, and he hasn't. (Victim of physical violence, Ghana)

My husband's family members were causing problems for me and my husband. They got another wife for him and he was not taking care of me and his child again. When I brought the case here, they invited the whole family and my husband to discuss the matter. The police warned them not to interfere in my marriage again and since then, they have not. My husband is now taking care of me. I'm happy so anytime I come around here, I come to greet them. (Victim of economic violence, Nigeria)

There was a couple who had separated for years and all efforts by pastors, families and community leaders have proved futile. When they came here I did mediation for a whole month. And in the end, they reunited and I was so happy. (Police Officer, Lagos)

As demonstrated, mediation was relatively successful in resolving family disputes and separation that usually resulted from arrest or prosecution, fostering understanding and mutual agreement to end the abuse, thus involving the perpetrator in the intervention process. It was however observed that the root causes of the abuse were not tackled which made resolution unsustainable. Also for victims of repetitive physical violence, mediation proved ineffective. Fulu (2014) has ascertained that good social protection interventions address the root causes of violence. He further emphasizes that interventions that have the potential of reducing the prevalence of domestic violence are those that address the direct and indirect root causes.

Mediation by the Nigerian police was typically based on police discretionary powers, therefore police dominated, hasty, and enforcement of patriarchal ideologies of female subordination. This speaks to the patriarchal culture still dominant in police practices in Nigeria. This often compromised the rights of the victims and affected its overall success. Unlike Ghana, the Nigeria police employed the use of civilians for mediations. The Nigeria police focused more on reconciliation and allowed religious leaders, traditional rulers and family leaders to lead mediations in the police stations to resolve domestic violence. This often brought in traditional ideologies on gender, which also compromised women's rights. The police themselves were unable to enforce the rights because they themselves believed and practiced patriarchy. These cultural and religious norms become problematic because their patriarchal nature is itself a danger and fuel for DV (Sherman 2018, Yalley and Olutayo 2020, Med 2015)

Conclusion

This study interrogated police interventions for handling domestic violence and their impacts on domestic violence victims in Ghana and Nigeria. The traditional and regular policing methods were found to have been transferred into policing domestic violence in the two police institutions which were more reactive than proactive. These were arrest and detention, prosecution, punishment and caution letter. Other culturally sensitive methods which were not typical of policing such as mediation, invitation letters and invisible arrest were adopted by the domestic violence units and proved to be more successful in minor cases and also preserved family unity but proved ineffective for victims who experienced repetitive abuses. Religion was a key factor in victims' perception of abuse and willingness to accept the prosecution of offenders. Religious beliefs in forgiveness and God's sovereignty were cited as key reasons for victims' rejection of prosecution in both countries. Also, the study established that victims whose financial dependency on perpetrators were high were less likely to seek prosecution..Unlike previous studies that proved the use of arrest as effective in stopping abuse, this study found that although arrest was effective in stopping the particular abuse, it exposed victims to more psychological and emotional abuse resulting from the cultural misconceptions about arrest of family members and policing in general. This study adopted the qualitative research methodology to explore police interventions in domestic violence in Ghana and Nigeria. While the qualitative research method provided in-depth data and analysis of policing domestic violence, it had a comparatively smaller sample size and therefore cannot make generalisations. Therefore quantitative studies with a large sample size are recommended for a greater generalisation of findings.

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