

## The Perfidy and Ramifications of Gender Based Violence (GBV) Meted Against Women and the Girl Children in Botswana. A Literature Review

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### Abstract

Total annihilation of the phenomenon of gender based violence in Botswana would be a panacea that will help effectuate a paradigm shift towards a state of gender equality and equity, a significant score to the achievement and attainment of Millennium Development Goal number three in Botswana. This article has underpinned some factors that have been responsible for the phenomenon of gender based violence in Botswana. The article has adopted a review of literature methodology. Findings have identified the following as causative factors of gender based violence: misinterpretations of religious sacred literature and doctrines; cultural practices; inadequate institutional and legal infrastructure to face GBV; underreporting of GBV cases; and women's poverty. The article has recommended embracing and observing international, regional and national gender instruments and Mainstreaming Gender in social and public institutions as possible factors that can help in surmounting or extinguishing the state of gender based violence.

**Keywords:** Millennium Development Goal number three; patriarchy, gender mainstreaming, religious sacred literature, legal and institutional infrastructure

### 1. Problem Statement

Incontrovertibly, the country of Botswana stands to fair poorly in the Millennium Development Goal number three of achieving gender equality and equity in the just about to come 2015 stock taking by the United Nations, if the state of gender based violence is not mitigated, or annihilated altogether. Gender based violence is both painful, is horrendous and has pinching effects to the victims, and deny them their human rights to health and humane treatment. It is also an archaic and a barbaric way of expressing dissatisfaction by the perpetrator, and is hugely dehumanizing. It especially crushes the victims' social, psychological and emotional strength and autonomy. This therefore affects the victims' state of mind, her/his capacity to work as well as enjoy the rights espoused in many countries constitutions. There is therefore a dire need to look into all the possible underpinnings and if possible come with solutions, or newer perspectives to tackle the phenomenon.

### 2. Methodology

This article has immensely benefited from reviewing literature from numerous journals on gender dynamics, books, and intuition of this researcher as a gender expert. This is to make solid discourses and debates on the possible underpinnings of gender based violence and possible factors to extinguish the phenomenon.

### 3. Introduction and Background

Mitigation or total annihilation of the phenomenon of Gender- Based- violence (GBV) is a panacea that every country in the world wishes to achieve. This is because of the phenomenon's physical, psychological, and emotional perfidious effects to women and the girl children (Kang'ethe, 2014a:125). However, the act goes against the human rights and freedoms espoused in many countries' constitutions, as well as cultural rights. Definably, gender based violence inexhaustively includes all kinds of any acts or conducts of violence meted against the apparently less privileged gender by the stronger or privileged one. Such acts include but not limited to rape, beating, causing bodily harm, emotional abuse and mistreatments, which maims, causes death, or physical, sexual or psychological harm, or suffering to women/men, whether in the public or private sphere. Some studies show that most of the victims of GBV are women and

further point out that GBV subjected to men by women may be as a result of women responding to men's use of violence against them (UNDP, 2008). To the contrary, cases of GBV against men are on the rise in some countries such as Kenya (Kang'ethe, 2014a: 125)

Gender based violence need as to be tackled from all angles because of its perfidious, horrendous and pinching effects to the victims who are usually women and the girl children (Kang'ethe, 2014:125) However, this researcher finds that in Africa, the boy children appear to increasingly suffer neglect. Perhaps this may explain why more boys than girls are increasingly becoming street children (Kang'ethe & Gaseitsiwe, 2012). Some of these boys may have fled from acts of gender based violence and this would go unnoticed because of the societal stereotypical mindset that it is only the girl children and women who have to be victims of gender based violence. There is therefore an opportunity to relax this kind of stereotype and consider each case by its merit. Therefore, issues of gender based violence need to take cognizance that any gender can produce perpetrators and victims. However, currently all agendas pertaining to gender seem to be fixed on raising the life status of women and the girl children. This is apparently because in African region, it is largely the women and the girl children who are the common victims. Perhaps a human right's denial presented by gender violence occurs because the phenomenon emasculates women's opportunity for autonomy and independence as far as control of their lives is concerned (Kang'ethe, 2009). The phenomenon also has the effect of stunting the victims' capacities to contribute to their countries' Gross National Product. In many countries especially of the developing part of the world, the practices of gender based violence could be informed and not restricted to the following factors: skewed interpretation of religious doctrines; patriarchal and cultural practices; inadequate institutional and legal goodwill to face GBV; perceiving gender based punishment as a tool of maintaining family discipline; under reporting cases of GBV; women's involvement in subsistence production; slow domestication and political enforcement of gender based international, regional and national empowerment paradigms in Botswana (UNDP, 2008; Kang'ethe, 2014a:125)

A 2011 research survey in Botswana on GBV points that it has reached pandemic proportions with intimate spousal violence taking a lead. For the 1229 respondents surveyed, over two thirds of women (67%) have experienced some form of gender violence in their lifetime including partner and non-partner violence; while 44% of men admitted to perpetrating violence against women (Gender Link, 2012). The government has also recognized gender as an important component that affects not only the rights of women and children (UNDP, 2008), but also women's contribution to Gross National Product of the country (Kang'ethe, 2009, 2014a:126). The survey above agrees with a national study conducted by Women Affairs Department that showed that in 60.4% of the households surveyed, women had been subjected to gender Based violence from their intimate partners (ISA), with battering being the most common kind of abuse. The survey also found that Women do not report incidences of GBV subjected to them by their spouses for fear of economic support from men (Women Affairs Department (WAD), 2001; Kang'ethe, 2014a:127).

The following statistics released in 2008 also indicate that gender based violence showed an increasing rate from 2004 to 2007 with common assault constituting the bulk of the statistics (Kang'ethe, 2009, 2014a:127).

**Reported Cases of Physical Violence Against Women by Men 2004-2007**

Type of Physical Violence	2004	2005	2006	2007
Common Assault	10855	11,803	11081	11899
Assault Occassioning Bodily Harm	6186	5870	5343	6018
Passion Killing	56	85	62	101

**Source:** Botswana Police Statistics, 2008.

#### **4. Underpinnings of Gender based Violence in Botswana**

##### *4.1 Misinterpretations of religious literature and doctrines*

While the so called sacred literature from different religions, whether Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism, are expected to be fair and therefore allow or advocate for gender equality and equity, it is ironical that most of their literature accord women a second place in the continuum of life (Kang'ethe, 2014a:127; Kang'ethe & Rhakudu, 2010). This is succinctly vivid in Christianity that holds the belief that man came first and a woman was formed from man. This by itself has been weighty and makes men to justify their perception of a woman as a supplementary being rather than being a complementary one (Kang'ethe & Rhakudu, 2010; MacArthur, 1997). Perhaps this is central to making most societies that lean on and link with Christianity to consider and justify the in- egalitarian distribution of resources and power. In some sense, the treatment that the sacred literature from Christianity drives Christian grounded societies is not

any different from what patriarchal based societies hold for the female gender. Therefore, since Christianity has attracted more people than any other religion in the globe, unequal treatment of women as compared to their male compatriots has been a deep rooted norm (Kang'ethe, 2009, Lekoko, 2009). This has led to strong stereotypes that women are weak, are irresponsible and fear making decisions, are impatient, unwise, and cannot move on without the guidance and leadership of men. This kind of thinking can better be expressed by the Setswana proverb that indicates that "a herd of cattle can never be led by a cow" (*Ga di ke di etelelwa ke namagadi pele*) (Garegae & Gobagoba, 2009). However, as countries continue to put strong campaigns towards the achievement of Millennium Development Goal number three, these stereotypes are increasingly being weakened.

#### 4.2 *The perfidy and ramifications of cultural practices*

Despite cultures being viewed as a panacea in offering solutions to some of the challenges that bedevil societies such as moral decadence, on the other hand cultural dynamics have been perfidious with horrendous and pinching effects to societies and promotion of gender based violence (Kang'ethe, 2014b). To this end, the phenomenon of patriarchy has been pinned as a crucial factor in presenting fertile grounds of gender based violence in Botswana (Lekoko, 2009; Kang'ethe, 2009). While patriarchy is an amalgamation of traditional customs, values, norms and beliefs that give men domination over women (Lekoko, 2009), it has had perfidious effects in that men believe that women and children are subordinates to them. This, in the societies that hold the phenomenon dearly has made women's and girl children's potential to be dwarfed, stunted and their capacities to exploit, harness and tap resources for developmental purposes decreased. It is this patriarchal thinking and stereotypes embedded in them that is believed to give men a leeway to exploit women and subject them to gender based violence (Lekoko, 2009; Maundeni & Mookodi, 2009). Perhaps one of the challenges the country of Botswana faces as it struggles to heighten its chances of making a significant score in the 2015 Millennium Development Goals especially number three that envisages to raise women's equality and equity is the fact that patriarchy or its practices has skewed gender power relationship between men and women with effect that men wield immense powers in virtually all aspects of lives, whether social, economic, cultural, or otherwise. This sometimes has been interpreted as having given men power to oppress and suppress women and children (Lekoko, 2009). Perhaps another angle to understand the perfidious aspect of patriarchy is the fact that for societies that ascribe to patriarchy, gender based violence is interpreted as punishment by men to women and children as a tool of maintaining family and community discipline (Lekoko, 2009). Although this is fast changing as issues of gender equity and equality takes root, Botswana communities still hold this belief and stereotype. Social work education, advocacy and application of social justice are critical phenomena that need to be scaled up in order to reduce to size the phenomenon of gender based violence in Botswana.

Social work values of egalitarianism and advocacy for non-discrimination among all the human beings should continue to be mainstreamed, possibly in all social domains (Segal *et al.*, 2007; Sheafor *et al.*, 2008).

#### 4.3 *Inadequate institutional and legal infrastructure to face GBV*

This researcher does not know when developing countries will stop saying they cannot adequately do A and B due to inadequate resources. This is probably ironical in that developing countries have recorded the worst cases of corruption, lack of accountability and responsibility to the mistakes personalities commit, and lack of goodwill from those in higher echelons of decision making processes (WHO, 2002). However, all efforts being made to tackle some challenges such as gender based violence need to be acknowledged and appreciated (Kang'ethe, 2014a). Perhaps due to many countries leaning on patriarchy, or supporting and inculcating it in all aspects of people's lives, governments some years back had not put in infrastructure or made policy frameworks to address challenges such as gender based violence. The need and impetus to start addressing the phenomenon has been a result of international crusades and advocacy for the rights of women. It is then that most governments such as Botswana started putting in infrastructure to address the quagmire (Kang'ethe, 2014a). This points to the fact that the infrastructure, whether policy wise, skills or knowledge, or experience to address gender based violence is still at the nascent stages of development. For example, although police of Botswana have the will to protect women against being abused by men, unfortunately they are not adequately placed to professionally handle the phenomenon, rather they tend to treat it as "domestic dispute". In many cases, police normally urges the perpetrator and the victim to settle the issue outside the legal framework. At the village level where the chiefs arbitrate gender based conflicts such as intimate spousal violence (ISV), women who pursue gender based violence cases are usually blamed by the chief and his/her henchmen. This is because of the patriarchal attitudes making men perceive women as individuals to be controlled by men (WAD, 2001; Gender Link, 2012; Kang'ethe 2014a:128).

#### 4.4 Under reporting GBV cases

To say the least, the phenomenon of tackling gender based violence is still a new undertaking. Infact, many citizens especially those that ascribe to patriarchy feel that the issue is an imposition from the western based countries as they continue their campaign to flex their muscles of global leadership to the poorer nations (Kang'ethe, 2009). Also countries have not had adequate campaign that can have the effects of gender based violence internalised that it is both detrimental and perfidious with horrendous and pinching effects. Therefore, cases of gender based violence remains largely unreported to authorities (Gender Link, 2012; Kang'ethe, 2014a). This under-reporting of GBV cases in Botswana has not given GBV cases an opportunity to subside, but to escalate. Infact, most members especially those that sit in the traditional courts, or the *kgotla* (traditional chiefs court where cases are heard) do not appear to encourage cases of gender based violence. This is perhaps because of the traditional society being deeply immersed in patriarchy (Iekoko, 2009). Largely, cases of especially intimate spousal violence (ISV) have been perceived as a community embarrassment when reported to either the traditional or modern law enforcement agencies. In a GBV survey done in 2011 in Botswana, one third of women who participated (29%) experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) in the 12 months to the prevalence survey. In contrast, only 1.2% of Botswana women reported cases of GBV to the police in the same period. Findings and conclusion of the survey indicated that the prevalence of GBV reported in the survey was 24 times higher than that reported to the police (Gender Link, 2012; Kang'ethe, 2014a).

#### 4.5 Women's poverty

It is ironic to say that despite the country of Botswana being graded as upper middle income country, poverty, especially of women remains a serious challenge (Sebudubudu & Botlhomilwe, 2012). Despite the higher gender development index displayed by Botswana women, indicative of their competitiveness in the socio-economic ladder, the bulk of women compared to their male counterparts, especially in rural areas, are poor and engaged in peasantry farming activities, mainly for subsistence survival (Kang'ethe, 2014a). However, women are also involved in household chores and various aspects of nurturance. Perhaps the effect of women poverty is exacerbated by the fact that most women are single but have families. This has increased the phenomenon of feminization of poverty and could also inform increased cases of feminization of HIV/AIDS (Kang'ethe and Mafa, 2014; Kang'ethe, 2013; Musekiwa, 2013).

### 5. Measures to Surmount / Extinguish the Phenomenon of GBV in Botswana

#### 5.1 Embracing and observing international, regional and national gender Instruments

Since issues of gender equality, equity and issues surrounding them such as gender based violence have been part of the global and regional campaign machinery, perhaps embracing and observing all the requisite international, regional and even national instruments that will guide the implementation of the processes to address gender based violence would be a welcome gesture. To this end, the country needs to be praised for making some steps in recognizing the importance of global gender international instruments such as MDGs, CEDAW, Beijing Platform of Action, Nairobi Declaration, Cairo declaration, to just name a few (Kang'ethe, 2014a). However, the country has been accused of dragging its feet as far as signing the SADC gender protocol is concerned. This if signed will signal commitment to the country to allow at least 30% of its civic and parliamentary seats to go to women. This will be a gigantic step towards the realization of Millennium Development Goal number three that envisages the realization of gender equity and equality as well as any other gender empowerment package (SADC Gender protocol, 2008).

#### 5.2 Mainstreaming Gender in social and public institutions

Even though gender empowerment process is still dragging its feet in that the government machinery to address the phenomenon was established recently through curving a department called women Affairs Department from the Ministry of Housing and Labour (WAD, 2001), the government of Botswana, after realizing the perfidious and horrendous effects of gender in development and in oppressing and suppressing the rights of women and the girl children has undertaken the programme of mainstreaming gender education especially in the institutions of learning. This has seen the introduction of the module "politics of gender" that cuts across many disciplines at the University of Botswana as a strategy or intervention to disseminate gender based education. The realization of the impacts of gender dynamics to the poverty of women, dubbed feminization of poverty and also women's increased infection by HIV/AIDS compared to their

male counterparts has also attracted the attention of addressing gender based challenges such as gender based violence. Social workers need to be in the frontline in advocating for gender empowerment so that all the people can realize their potentials fully and contribute to national development (Kang'ethe, 2014a: 130).

## 6. Conclusion

Incontrovertibly, although the country of Botswana is among the countries in Africa that enjoys a higher gender development index (GDI), it is perturbing that issues of gender inequality and inequity as well as the ramifications that surround them such as gender based violence continue to weigh down its gender empowerment efforts. Appreciably, the government needs to be appreciated for making huge efforts in domesticating most of the international and regional instruments to bolster and guide the implementation of gender empowerment process in the country. However, the phenomenon of gender based violence needs to be tackled from a multifaceted front, through the synergy between the government, NGOs and individuals themselves. It is important that the identified underpinning factors of gender based violence such as patriarchy and some religious beliefs and practices are diluted to an extent of effectuating a paradigm shift that will make men accept equality and equity in gender continuum; and also have women internalize the fact that the two genders can co-exist and operate at equal power dynamics, without any complaint. There is therefore a strong need to expedite and mainstream gender based education to all the social and private institutions.

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