



Gender Based Violence in the Sub-Saharan African Context and Diaspora: What more can be done to address GBV Against Women?

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Gender-based violence (GBV) includes various forms of violence such as sexual violence, intimate partner violence, female genital mutilation, murder, and psychological/emotional abuse (Carillo 1992; Heise et al 2002; World Bank ND). While men and boys can be targets of GBV, women and girls are disproportionately affected as 1 in 3 women, or more than 1 billion, have experienced either physical and/or sexual violence in their lives (UN Women).

Evidence on the impact of GBV points to far reaching implications for women and girls impacting their health and wellbeing across their lifespan. Negative consequences range from health issues, such as unintended pregnancies, gynaecological problems and sexually transmitted infections (including HIV), to economic and social costs for women, girls and their communities, all limiting their full participation in matters affecting them (Carillo 1992; Heise et al. 2002). This is because GBV affects women's health by causing chronic sapping of their energy, compromising their physical health and in some instances causing physical disability, physical and sexual abuse increases risks of unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, sexually transmitted infections and adverse pregnancy outcome whilst also eroding women's self-esteem thereby leading to such issues as drug and alcohol abuse and depression (Carillo 1992; Heise et al, 2002).

Further, although rarely acknowledged, GBV has a great implication on the morbidity and mortality of women and their children (World Bank ND), including on maternal and child morbidity and mortality, access of crucial health care services among other impediments (Dunkle et al 2004; Dunkle et al 2004). The main culprits impacting women's health arise from the rape and violence aspects of GBV (REF). Other implications of GBV include on the economy and the social fronts, include the inability to properly contribute to these spheres due to such aspects of GBV as violence, rape which undermine women's physical and psychological health and thus, confidence to engage in these sectors (Carillo 1992).

Although the implications of GBV on women's health are clear, most societies not just in sub-Saharan Africa, but in many communities around the world, seem to sanction acts of violence directed at women, by men. These societies seem to obscure, deny and even legitimise GBV towards women, even in instances where such acts would have been punished in other settings including work environments (Heise et al, 2002).

Although there have been efforts around the world by various groups, including grassroots organizations, NGOs and advocacy groups to address issue of GBV against women, the issue persists. Many efforts have been taken to support abused women including providing shelter, legal aid, health care and even counselling (World Bank ND). As a result of these efforts, there is increasing recognition of GBV as an issue requiring attention. For instance, there is increased vocalization of the matter, many national surveys now gather data on GBV and there is more attention, through funding, to the issue (Morrison et al 2007). In some countries, government departments have been set up to address



issues of GBV against women. There is also increased research on the matter. The challenge however still remains that whereas these efforts are being undertaken, in many ways, they are fragmented. For instance, statistics indicate that more women of African descent around the world than their counterparts experience issues of GBV yet this inter-continental connection is seldom made.

More therefore still needs to be done to increase awareness of the dangers and effects of GBV to women and children, give more support to those affected and increase funding and have dedicated expertise addressing issues of GBV in a consolidated approach.

at the Forefront (atF) is an advocacy organization seeking to increase awareness of issues that women of African descent experience whether on the sub-Saharan continent or in the diaspora. GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response forms one of the critical focus areas of atF's Strategic Framework. Drawing from the lessons of the transnational anti-apartheid movement, atF strives to strengthen solidarity across borders. Through building and enhancing existing anti-GBV social movements led by women of African descent across the world, atF's GBV strategy aims to increase the visibility and coverage of three main areas:

1. GBV experiences of women and girls of African descent within the global discourse;
2. Survivor-centered and community-based approaches to GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response
3. Survivor-led, human rights-based efforts to strengthen informal and formal justice mechanisms to investigate GBV incidences and perpetrators.

We seek to do this by:

- Providing analytical research, data and reporting on the disproportionate levels of GBV against women and girls of African descent and the subsequent impact on their lives (e.g. sexual and reproductive health issues, psychosocial consequences, socioeconomic challenges, etc.);
- Documenting existing GBV strategies and best practices developed by feminist activists of African descent, and women's rights and youth organizations in sub-Saharan Africa and the diaspora;
- Facilitating knowledge exchange on GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response amongst a global coalition of women of African descent and ensuring that women have the forums to share their experiences;
- Increasing knowledge of target women and their social influencers of what constitutes GBV
- Making information on available support institutions and tools available and accessible to women and girls (such as health and psychosocial services, legal aid, financial support and)

atF's GBV prevention advocacy strategies include:

- Messaging, guidance and motivational information provided to target groups and their social influencers
- Demystifying such harmful social norms as gender-based violence through advocacy campaigns

The atF leadership is keen to share these initiatives with fellow advocacy groups at the Women and Girls Summit (WAGs).



References

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