



POLICY BRIEF

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

A HINDERANCE TO REALIZATION OF RIGHTS AMONG WOMEN AND GIRLS IN KARAMOJA AND TESO REGIONS

September 2024

Summary

Over the past years, the Ugandan government has worked towards creating a conducive legal and policy environment aimed at ending gender-based violence. While these interventions are commendable, Uganda continues to experience a high prevalence of gender-based violence¹. GBV is manifested through a multitude of actions, including forced marriages of young girls, trafficking in persons, teenage pregnancies, female genital mutilation, sexual violence, and verbal abuse among others. With technological advancements, violence against women has evolved into more sophisticated forms, with a growing number of women reporting incidents such as cyberbullying and abuse through social media platforms (OHCHR, 2019)². Karamoja and Teso regions face a multitude of Gender-based violence mainly stemming from poverty and alcoholism³.

1. Jen Ross, Uganda's violence against women survey heralds legislative and policy changes available at <https://data.unwomen.org/features/ugandas-violence-against-women-survey-heralds-legislative-and-policy-changes#:~:text=Among%20the%20shocking%20survey%20findings,since%20the%20age%20of%2015>.

2. OHCHR. (2019) Eliminating Online Violence Against Women and Engendering Digital Equality [Online]. Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/GenderDigital/DueDiligenceProject.pdf>

3. Bashford-Squires, S., Gibson, L., Nyashanu, M. (2022). Mitigating Gender-Based Violence Through the Economic Empowerment of Women: A Case Study of the Teso Sub-Region in Uganda. In: Mbah, M.F., Leal Filho, W., Ajaps, S. (eds) Indigenous Methodologies, Research and Practices for Sustainable Development. World Sustainability Series. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-12326-9_22

Background Context

Introduction

Gender-based violence is one of the most severe forms of gender inequality and discrimination in Uganda. It remains a critical public health issue, a global health concern, and one of the most widespread human rights violations in contemporary society⁴. It is an issue that affects women disproportionately, as it is directly connected with the unequal distribution of power between women and men thus, it has a profound effect on families, communities, and societies as a whole.

Gender-based violence includes acts of violence in the form of physical, psychological, or sexual violence against a person specifically because of his or her gender⁵. It constitutes one of the most widespread human rights abuses and public health problems in the world today, with devastating long-term consequences for victims' physical and mental health. Simultaneously, its broader social effects compromise the social development of children in the household, the unity of the family, the social fabric of affected communities, and the well-being of society as a whole.⁶

4. UNFPA- Addressing GBV in the workplace: population matters issue brief 11 December, 2019 a collective responsibility and an economic imperative

5. Sixteen Days of Action Against Gender-Based Violence, <http://www.refugeesinternational.org/content/article/detail/7138> (last visited June 8, 2007)

6. Violence Against Women: The Health Sector Responds (2003), <http://www.paho.org/English/DPM/GPP/GH/VAWhealthsector.htm>

Katakwi District for example has witnessed a disturbing surge in gender-based violence, with a total of 3345 cases reported between April 2023 and March 2024. The cases encompass various forms of violence, including financial, physical, and emotional abuse⁷.

To address the high rates of GBV, the government of Uganda has put in place various legislations including the Domestic Violence Act, cap 123 and subsequently the 2011 domestic violence regulations; the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act of cap 133; the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act cap 131 among others. Several policies, strategies and plans have also been established including; the National Policy on Elimination of Gender-Based Violence (2016), Uganda Gender Policy (2007), the Guidelines for the Establishment and Management of Gender-Based Violence Shelters in Uganda and the National Action Plan on Women of 2007. However, despite these efforts, GBV remains persistent and rampant with no clear funding mechanisms for the implementation of these laws, policies, strategies and plans.

Context

Welthungerhilfe under the Grow Together project, is supporting the Center for Health, Human Rights and Development, Straight Talk Foundation

7. <https://sensible-leopard-fwlwsn.mystrkingly.com/blog/katakwi-district-reports-alariming-rate-of-gender-based-violence>

(STF), and Kiyita Family Alliance for Development (KIFAD) to engage in the communities of Karamoja and Teso on gender inequalities including addressing GBV. The project is implemented in the districts of Moroto, Napak, Amuria and Katakwi. CEHURD focuses mainly on the advocacy component of the project and the major is to enable Women and Girls to articulate demands related to addressing GBV at sub-national and national level advocacy platforms. Straight Talk Foundation (STF) and

Kiyita Family Alliance for Development (KIFAD) work directly in communities of the project districts. Through the various interventions, they are able to pick out key issues that are addressed before duty bearers at different levels including subcounty and district level. This policy brief thus expounds on the key findings from the various engagements that require the attention of duty bearers at the national level and offers targeted recommendations to curb gender-based violence in Karamoja and Teso regions.

Key Findings

- 1. High rates of alcohol consumption contribute to social and economic problems;** Through the engagements in the two regions, it was noted that there are high rates of alcohol consumption especially among men. Alcohol consumption has documented impacts on health, social status, family economy, general well-being and economic development⁸. The district officials of Napak have made efforts and drafted an Alcohol control ordinance that was discussed by the district council and is still pending approval by the Attorney General. Perhaps once passed and implemented, there will be a decrease in this habit and a resultant decrease in the rates of Gender-based violence. Other ordinances still stuck at the Attorney General's office include the Education and Child Protection Ordinance; Environment ordinance; and Formative Action for Education of Children in Karamoja.
- 2. High rates of gender-based violence (GBV);** We found that the regions are fond of GBV which is mainly fueled by alcoholism and cultural norms. GBV has taken the forms of domestic violence, sexual abuse and harmful practices like female genital mutilation.
- 3. No government-owned and operational shelter for GBV survivors;** In 2013, a GBV shelter was established in Moroto district with support from MIFUMI and Action Aid. However, due to shortage of funding, the partners pulled out the

8. Wilkinson, R., Marmot, M. (2003) Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts, Geneva: World Health Organisation, 2003

financial support and currently the shelter is non-functional. This shelter provided temporary relief and was a safe space for women and girls who sought refuge when their families and community failed to shield them from violence. In its absence, it has become rather challenging for survivors of violence. We found that some girls that have boldly come out to report the cases, are attacked in the communities as they have no protection after making such reports.

4. Prevalence of female genital mutilation (FGM), especially in border areas;

Despite the country's passing of the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act of cap 133, the practice still persists. This was reported to be common among the Tepeth tribe in Tapach village and Tapac sub county, Moroto district. It is associated with health consequences including over bleeding, infections, and lifetime child bearing complications among others. It was noted that, the practice is done at night because of the vigilance within the communities. We appreciate the efforts by government and partners to address the issue. The efforts include; drastic measures by Moroto district to address the practice which included incarceration and so far, 2 have been released after serving 15, 7 years in prison and one is still serving the sentence arrested in 2022. Ambassadors were identified, for instance, the LC 3 councilor is a survivor of FGM and currently one of the district ambassadors. It was noted that the district holds quarterly meetings at the district and regional level convening representatives from West Pokot, Sebei and Karamoja. National meetings are held at the end of the year with all countries that have the practice of FGM to share the best practices. The countries are also managed by an Anti FGM board. They include Somalia, Djibouti, Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Senegal among others.

5. Child trafficking; Child trafficking was reported rampant in Napak district.

The children are mostly trafficked to Kampala, other busy towns and in the neighborhood of Kenya. The practice renders children vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation. The district has transition centers and child trafficking bye laws are popularized in communities and the district works with KCCA and CID to intercept the children in the streets. The children intercepted from Kampala and other parts of the country are collected and kept in schools i.e. Legoi and Lwendoi Primary schools, a practice adopted to avoid re-integrating the children to communities to avoid escaping back to the cities. There are no official designated places for re-settlement and clear plan/guidelines of the management of the places where they are currently kept. The welfare of children including their health is thus compromised.

- 6. Limited police stations despite the cases of gender-based violence:** Katakwi and Amuria districts still struggle with police stations. Out of the 16 sub-counties and 4 Town councils in Katakwi District for example six sub-counties of Palam, Amusia, Guyaguya, Akoboi, Getom, Okore lack police stations while in Amuria District, four sub-counties including Akeriau, Ogongora, Amolo, Olua & Kuju are yet to have police stations. The lack of these stations impacts on reporting of cases including of gender-based violence and eventual access to justice.

Policy Recommendations

- 1. Establish police stations in Uganda:** We recommend that the Ministry of Internal Affairs and establishes police stations in all sub-counties of Amuria and Katakwi as an avenue to ensuring justice for survivors of gender-based violence.
- 2. Establish fully functional re-settlement centers for children re-settled from streets:** it is recommended that the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development establishes and allocates a budget for re-settlement centers and develops guidelines for the management of re-settled children.
- 3. Prioritize the development and passing of the alcohol control bill in Uganda.** The Parliament of Uganda is recommended to revise the available Alcohol Control Bill, prioritize its passing into law and enforcement.
- 4. Establish an operational shelter for GBV survivors:** The Ministry of Internal Affairs in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender labor and social development are recommended to establish and run a government GBV shelter in TESO and Karamoja regions to provide temporary relief to survivors of violence.

Conclusion

Violence has a long-lasting effect on survivors and their families. Its Impact can range from physical harm to long-term emotional distress to fatalities. Rape and sexual assault can result in unwanted pregnancies, complications during pregnancy and birth, and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. While GBV continues to be a huge risk that women and girls face daily, there are ways to prevent it. These include and not limited to empowering women and girls across their lifetime by keeping girls in school, empowering women economically, providing women and girls with safe spaces among others. For Teso and Karamoja regions, a multisectoral approach to ending violence is recommended.

References

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2. Francis Ocen, Katakwi District Reports Alarming Rate of Gender-Based Violence, June 2024
3. Jen Ross, Uganda's violence against women survey heralds legislative and policy changes, 2015
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5. Wilkinson, R., Marmot, M. (2003) Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts, Geneva: World Health Organisation, 2003