

Using informal networks and other duty bearers to protect survivors of Intimate Partner Violence in Uganda

Executive Statement

The repeated and recurring violence against women caused by intimate partners necessitates action to ensure their safety and protection. However, insufficient support systems in the informal networks outside the formal criminal justice system of police, courts, and prisons, like family, friends, neighbourhoods, and social groups, preclude a more comprehensive participatory protection system for survivors. Indeed, formal duty bearers' inactiveness within the informal networks hamper an integrative policy response to alleviate the persistent suffering of survivors. This brief illustrates the importance of duty bearers within the informal networks outside the criminal justice system in providing survivors with a secure space. It identifies families, relatives and communities as critical duty bearers to protect survivors from intimate partner recidivist acts within the informal networks. A secure space for women survivors can be guaranteed by revitalising the role of duty bearers in informal networks where violence against women mostly occurs.



Introduction

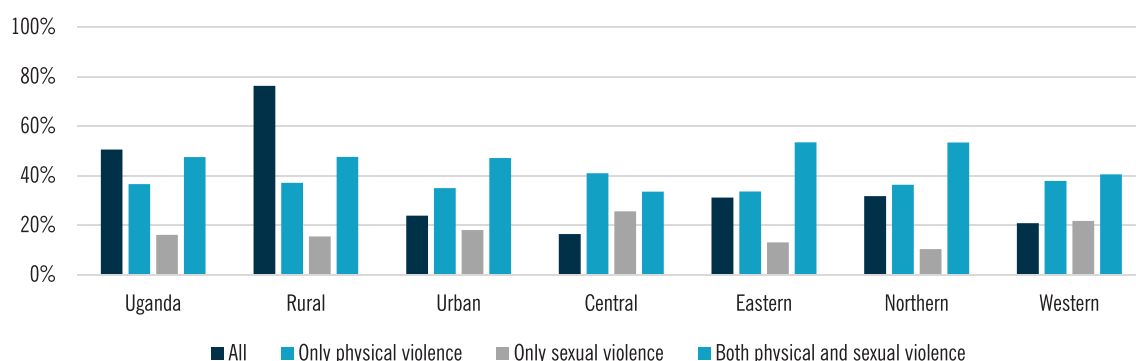
The National Guidelines for the Provision of Psychosocial Support for GBV Survivors/victims (2019) acknowledges the role of duty bears in GBV service provision. Duty bearers have a responsibility to protect women against Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)¹ by ensuring a secure space for survivors to seek relief, reconciliation, and building trust to report the violence and seek necessary help. Although most of the duty-bearers in the formal criminal justice system of police, courts, and prisons have continued to do their job, some have continued to be limited by access to spaces where violence against women mostly occurs at the family level. Introducing informal duty bearers trusted in times of violence. According to the 2021 National Survey on Violence in Uganda, the lifetime prevalence of physical or sexual

violence by an intimate partner was 56% perpetuated by their partners. Yet still, the abused women are most likely to seek help from informal networks of family, friends, and neighbours. However, the support provided to IPV victims ends up being inadequate from duty bearers in the informal networks.

The brief uses the 2020 National Survey on Violence in Uganda conducted by UBOS to highlight the duty bears within the informal networks the safe spaces and identify community tendencies to protect women from violence. The survey assessed the protection systems for women and safe spaces for partners. Community members, safe spaces, and social networks were involved in assessing these systems to trust and report partner-inflicted harm.

Social support, self-esteem, and mental health are the indicators for recovery that researchers conventionally use to examine women's relief from partner-inflicted violence (O'Doherty et al., 2014). According to the 2021 National Survey on Violence in

¹ Intimate partner violence (IPV) describes abusive behaviours between partners in an intimate relationship and can broadly be classified as abuse of a physical, emotional or sexual nature.

Figure 1: Prevalence of IPV in Uganda

Source: Authors' own construction using UBoS 2021 data

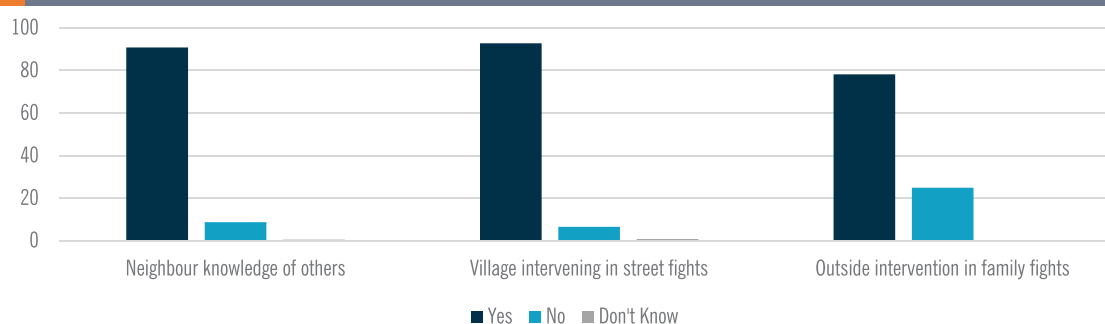
Uganda, physical abuse by partners resulted in a 41% injury rate among women at the national level. The survey also highlighted that 9.4% of women experienced physical abuse during pregnancy, and across the country, someone punched or kicked 7% of women in the abdomen. The consequences of violence among women abused and inadequate support available through safe places in the informal networks render many vulnerable. As a result, this renders many survivors suffer persistent harm caused by intimate partners. On the other hand, the silence and missing link of the informal networks and formal duty bearers to protect women against violence is exacerbated by the missing connections with the informal network. Given the above-described complexities, trusted informal networks as safe places for relief are fundamental and highlight the pathways to mitigate women's intimate partner violence. The first line of defence for IPV survivors is their informal networks, and their integration into policy responses and support systems is inadequate, making it difficult to address the implications of intimate partner violence effectively. Therefore, this brief emphasizes that survivors of IPV rely on family relations as key informal networks and recommends exploring alternative ways to strengthen informal social networks. This adds to effective support structures for women survivors to overcome damages caused by intimate partners and advance appropriate policy formulation pathways.

Key findings

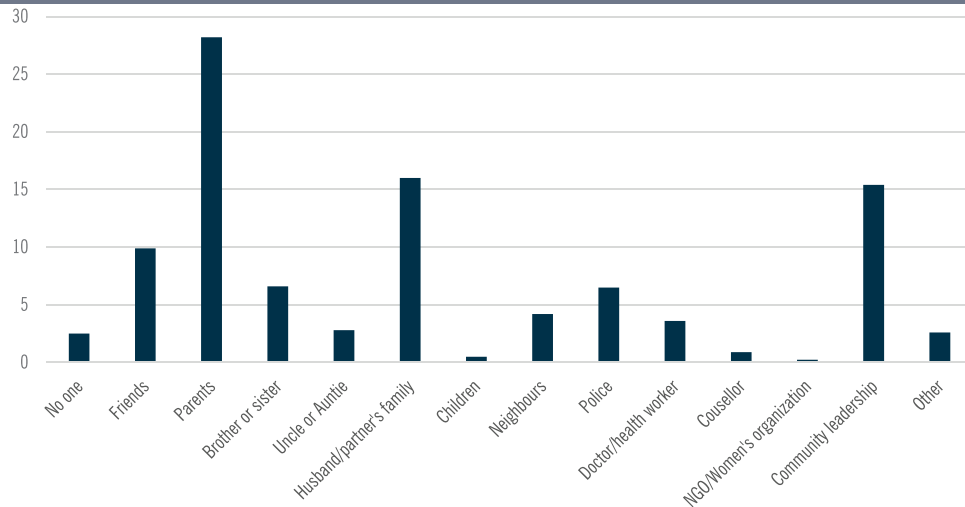
Intimate Partner violence is still rampant in Uganda, with 51% of the sampled women reporting to have experienced the same (Figure 1). This is slightly lower than 56% of women aged 15-49 years reported in the Uganda Demographic Survey (UDHS) of 2016 (UBoS and ICF, 2016). Of these women who have suffered IPV, 37% suffered only physical violence, 16% suffered only sexual violence, and 47% suffered both physical and sexual violence. The majority are in rural areas (76%). In addition, IPV is mostly evident in Northern (32%) and Eastern (31%) Uganda. Cultural attitudes about violence among both women and men, patriarchal behaviours among men, bride price (exchange of goods for a bride), and male alcohol abuse are some of the factors that contribute to IPV. IPV victims suffer various consequences, including physical consequences such as bruising, burns, broken limbs, and mental health consequences, as explained by one of the female survivors.

"It was mostly kicking and using a belt and sticks."—
(source: An extract from UBoS, 2020).

Intimate Partner Violence happens in areas with strong community relations (Figure 2). Most violence against women happens in communities where neighbours know of each other

Figure 2: Nature of the Community (%)

Source: Authors' own construction using UBoS 2021 data

Figure 3: Support Social Networks (%)

Source: Authors' own construction using UBos 2021 data

(91%). Further still, during street fights in a community and family fights when a man is beating a woman, Figure 2 shows that other people in the village intervene, highlighting community cohesion. However, most interventions from informal networks within the community are one-time interventions. As a result, this increases the persistent suffering of survivors and renders the interventions unreliable as vulnerable survivors continue to suffer since they continue to reside in places of violators.

IPV survivors often seek help from close family relations. The majority (28.2%) of the IPV survivors disclosed that they sought support from their parents, while about 16% said their husband/partner's family and 15.4% sought help from community leaders (Figure 3). The survey identified parents, husbands/partner's families, and community leaders as informal duty bearers who provide support to women affected by violence. They provide a secure place where survivors feel safe, loved, or at least provided for. This was critical in respondents' decisions to leave violent marriages as explained by one of the survivors....

"Many like me stay in their violent marriages because there is nowhere else to go, but for me, I had somewhere

to run to, which is home."

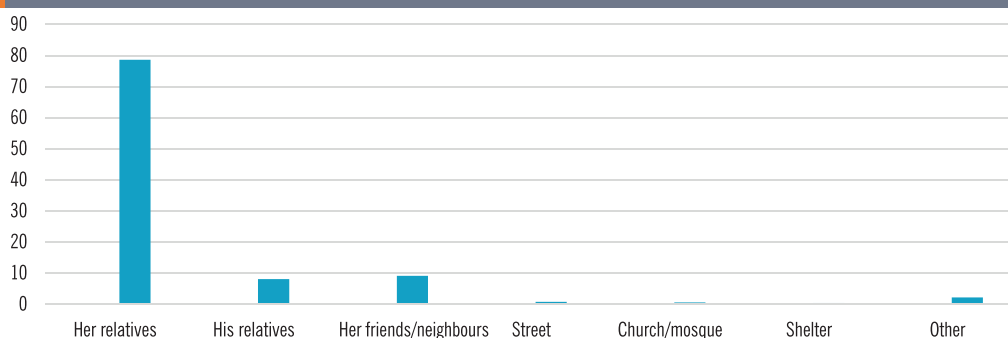
(source: An extract from UBos, 2020).

IPV survivors find it easy to disclose violence with close relations with the majority of the survivors, 78.66% indicating that they have discussed experiences of IPV with their relatives, 9.2% mentioned survivors/friends neighbours, and 8.13% resorted to violent relatives. Experiences from the 2020 Uganda National Qualitative Survey report point to the family variations reported to and noted that;

"I think we also must realise that in families where people have gone to school, there is reduced violence. But for illiterate people, there are high cases/ incidences of violence in their homes"-

Key Informant Interview (Health Official), Kiryandongo District.

Despite family and relations' role, it is essential to acknowledge that such duty bearers may not have sufficient knowledge on appropriate management and referral pathways to be followed

Figure 4: Survivors' safe space to disclose violence (%).

Source: Authors' own construction using UBos 2021 data

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to realise help-seeking fully.

Recommendations

Sympathetic and supportive skills are inadequate in the available safe places within the informal networks. Parents, relatives and community leadership have limited knowledge as the identified informal duty bearers in the informal social networks cannot curb violence against women. This necessitates policy makers response to design sympathetic and supportive programmes.

- Strengthen the capacity of informal networks like parents, relatives, and friends to support and prevent recurrent IPV. This can be achieved by wider community sensitisation of their roles and how they can act as a first line of defence when IPV is occurring.
- Empower community leadership where informal duty bearers reside. Empowering community leadership in areas where informal duty bearers reside can help survivors of intimate partner violence access adequate support easily and manage violence against women.
- Boost the work of the family-police relations department with activities that target whistle-blowing of persistent violations against women. This will increase the empowerment of relatives, friends or neighbours of violated women while tapping from police technical support. This is also likely to increase support to networks from the formal policing system with informal duty bearers of relatives, friends and neighbours.

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