
Psychological Impacts of Gender-based Violence against Women in Hula Community

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Abstract: This paper examines the issue of Gender-based violence (GBV) as a serious problem that affects women psychologically in Papua New Guinea (PNG). These effects include hindering freedom of movement and community participation by women. The aim is to develop an understanding of such negative effects on women and girls, as a case study that was conducted in Hula village of Central Province, PNG. The purpose of the study was to identify the main forms of violence against women in the community, the possible causes and their psychological consequences, identify and recommend strategies to reduce and prevent these captioned issues. The research involved 20 key informant interviews with community leaders and three focus groups within a small group of men and women including the teachers from an elementary school in the village. The main findings from the study highlights the psychological effects of gender-based violence committed against women, either single or married. The major contributing factors of gender-based violence identified are lack of food and money, alcohol consumption, pure jealousy, adultery and other contributing factors such as misuse of social media. These contributing factors have extensively contributed to gender-based violence having greater impact on women's mental health. Consequently, the women are unable to participate fairly in social activities. The study is important as it highlighted the proportion of GBV prevalence at the community level.

Keywords: psychological violence; psychological effects and social media

Author Biography:

My name is Aiga Ian and I am recently being appointed as a *Teaching Fellow* with the Social Work Strand at the University of Papua New Guinea. I have a *Bachelor of Arts in Social Work* and *Bachelor of Arts with Honors in Social Work*. I worked as a part-time Project Officer with Equal Playing Field, local Non-government Organization from 2017 – 2019 assisting in the project delivery of Equal Playing Field for Schools program and School Action Groups. I also assisted in Monitoring and Evaluation, Child Protection, Office Administration, Events organization, Training and Facilitation of change-makers and teachers. I was involved with National Statistical Office when they rolled out the Population Data Project called Socio-Demographic and Economic Survey project in partnership with United Nations Population Fund in 2022. I took part as a Field Data Collection Officer, which the project was a success (See UNFPA Papua New Guinea Website for the report).

In addition, I have volunteered and engaged in community service with different organizations such as PNG Olympic Committee at 2015 Pacific Games (July 4 2015 – July 18 2015), Young Women's Christian Association (July 13 – July 14 2017), Sanap Wantaim Campaign under United Nations Women's office (April 2016 – December 2018), Equal Playing Field (April 22 2016 – May 19 2017), Public Service Sports Program PNG Sports Foundation (October 12 2018), Trukai Industries Limited Fun Run (June 16 2019) and currently volunteers with Scripture Union PNG Port Moresby and Central area (February 2020 – Present) bringing the gospel of Jesus Christ to primary and secondary schools in Port Moresby and Central province. My research interest areas are Gender-based violence, youths, governance, climate change, social welfare issues, and labor mobility.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender-Based Violence occurs in all societies of the world in all forms, within the home or in the wider community and it affects women and girls disproportionately. While Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is frequently directed at females, it can also be directed at other men and boys (Mkandawire, 2009; Eves, 2006, p. 13). Although GBV is difficult to measure, small-scale studies and evidence suggest that GBV is severe and widespread, and in some instances worsening (Goa, 2009). Despite the Government interventions to address Gender-based violence through the Papua New Guinea National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based violence 2016 – 2025, Family Protection Act Amended 2022 and other relevant laws and policies, there remain several or many challenges that inhibit the substantial reduction of GBV (Goa, 2009).

Therefore, it was the intention of this study to investigate the psychological impacts of GBV on women, aiming to (1) to explore the major contributing factors of GBV on women, (2) to identify the main psychological impacts of GBV on women and (3) to propose solutions to address psychological impacts of GBV against women.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

GBV in Papua New Guinea (PNG) is multifaceted. There are many studies on gender-based violence (Mboho & Udoh, 2018; FHI 360, 2019; Ganster-Breidler, 2010; Mkandawire, 2009; Gibbs et al., 2020; Medecins Sans Frontieres, 2016). Among these studies, Mboho & Udoh (2018) specified GBV as encompassing physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, and financial violence. Social violence is among the other types of violence (Consultative Implementation & Monitoring Council, 2017) women and men experience in PNG, particularly in families and communities.

The contributing factors of GBV are numerous. For instance, lack of economic empowerment and economic independence leaves many women experiencing GBV (Macintyre, 2000; Goa, 2009; Mboho & Udoh, 2018). Furthermore, there are harmful traditional practices (Mkandawire, 2009) that tolerate GBV in our communities. These can have negative psychological impacts on women. In addition, many perpetrators use male privilege and normative use of violence in relationships (Gibbs et al., 2020) to get away with GBV.

The magnitude of the GBV problem is remarkably high. Human Rights Watch (2015) reported that PNG is one of the world's most dangerous places for women to live in. Intimate relationship physical violence is accompanied by psychological abuse (Mkandawire, 2009). Moreover, the perpetration of GBV against women by men affects women's health and well-being (Ganster-Breidler, 2010). Ganster- Breidler (2010) used a cross-sectional survey covering four PNG provinces i.e. Western Highlands, Eastern Highlands, Madang and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. Some of the major health and wellbeing issues associated with violence against women that were highlighted in the survey were depression, suicide, murder, sexually transmitted diseases (HIV/AIDS), substance abuse, physical injuries, high mortality rate, sudden death of women, high blood pressure and mental health issues (Ganster-Breidler, 2010). Similarly, a report by Médecins Sans Frontières (2011) further confirmed that victims of IPV and sexual violence in PNG risk “serious long-term physical and emotional harm”, with many survivors suffering from “depression, suicidal thoughts and attempts, anxiety, phobias and post-traumatic stress disorder”, as well as risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (p. 2). Existing literature highlights GBV’s relations to poverty, alcohol abuse, and patriarchal structures (Jewkes et al., 2017; Ganster-Breidler, 2010), however limited knowledge gaps identified on the impacts of GBV on women’s mental health. By positioning survivors’ expressions, this study addresses these gaps and aligns with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on gender equality and well-being.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative research approach where collection of data and analyzing of data were non-numerical (Bhandari, 2020), with purposive sampling of 44 participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 key informants representing the twelve sections of the community. In addition, three focus group discussions consisting of male group, female group and community elementary teachers were conducted.

In this study, the method of data analysis utilized is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for

analyzing qualitative data that entails searching across a data set to identify, analyze, and report repeated patterns (Braun and Clarke 2006). First, data collectors prepared, organized the data collected in the field, transcribed the interviews and typed up the field summary notes. Then data collected was reviewed and explored. The data was examined for patterns or repeated ideas that emerged. After data was reviewed and explored, a data coding system was developed. Based on the initial ideas, a set of codes were established that applied to categorize the data collected. Key informant's interviews were coded KII and focus group discussions were coded FGD. The next process was assigning the codes to the data and identifying recurring themes. Codes were linked together into cohesive, overarching themes (Bhandari, 2020; Braun and Clarke 2012).

This research progressed after receiving research ethical clearance from the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS) Research Ethics Committee at the University of Papua New Guinea. The research was carried out in Hula community. Data collection only proceeded with informed consent from the participants and participants' anonymity was ensured. In addition, the potential of biased opinions was expected, thus, research assistants were recruited to address biased information. The current sample of the study is a great representation of the community.

4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The key themes that emerged from data analysis on the research topic were major contributing factors to GBV with four sub-themes, the effects of GBV on women's mental health and GBV barriers on women.

Major contributing factors to GBV

The key informants and focus groups were asked to highlight the major contributing factors to GBV against women in the community. The key informants and focus groups highlighted four major contributing factors: alcohol consumption; adultery offenses; shortage of money and food; and pure jealousy in relationships; as well as other contributing factors that impact women.

GBV Associated with alcohol consumption. It is highlighted that there is a relationship between alcohol consumption and GBV. Alcohol consumption contributes to the prevalence of GBV against women by men (Jewkes et al.'s, 2017). The key informants' and focus groups emphasized that alcohol consumption was common in the community, both factory-produced and homemade, contributed directly and indirectly to many problems including GBV against women. For instance, alcohol consumption led married couples to fight from drinking together. Some married women drinking with other men obtained beat ups from their men (partners). In addition, one of the focus groups reported that alcohol consumption was the main contributing factor to GBV. For instance:

Focus group members mentioned, "drinking is the main contributing factor to gender-based violence" (FGD 2).

GBV and shortage of money and food. The key informants and focus groups mentioned that shortages of money and food contributed to GBV in families, especially against women. For instance, lack of money leads to gender-based violence (KII01). Ganster-Breidler (2010) reported that men who had money problems somehow caused GBV. Although the impacts on women were not clearly outlined, the research finding clearly affirms the research proposition on the above.

Furthermore, women expect men to provide for them on most occasions. It is evident in the natural ability of men to provide for women (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Genesis 3:17). When men are not responsible to provide for women, then women find alternative means to survive. For example:

When men fail to provide necessities or there is no provision of money for women, women go out of their way to have sexual affairs with other men □ i.e., just to find money to provide food for their survival and of their children (KII13).

Violence is not always caused by stress but may be one way that some people respond to stress (Seltzer & Kalmuss, 1988). Couples in poverty may be more likely to experience domestic violence, due

to increased stress and conflicts about finances and other aspects (Jewkes, 2002).

GBV and pure jealousy in relationships. Furthermore, pure jealousy within marriages was discovered to be also one of the major contributing factors of GBV based on key informant interviews and focus group discussions. In terms of jealousy, women may go out and spend time with their families, and upon returning, men may have a lot of questions about their whereabouts. There may be disagreement between the two parties. One party might not agree with the other party □ i.e., further resulting in violence.

The respondents further stated that men did not want women to hang around because other men would see them and take an interest in them. This was men's pure jealousy over women. These findings also further confirm the impacts of jealousy by men on women psychologically resulting in lack of freedom of movement, arguments, and violence.

GBV and adultery offenses. In addition, adultery offenses were discovered to be one of the main contributing factors of GBV against women in key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Men towards women and vice versa committed adultery offenses. One of the many reasons for adultery offenses was the dissatisfaction feeling some men and women had in marriage that led them to commit adultery. For example:

...Some of them have extra marital affairs in the community. If they are not satisfied with one partner, they decide to go find another partner (KII12).

Adultery offenses associated with womanizing was part of the reason why women are bashed up. For instance:

Womanizing can be part of it, if they are having an affair with someone else; the wife gets the beating for an unsuccessful relationship (KIII6).

Overall, key informants and focus groups stated that the prevalence of adultery offenses was mostly linked to food and money shortages and the avenging of affairs. As a result, men committed physical violence against women.

Other GBV contributing factors. The other contributing factors also highlighted by the key informants were too much freedom of movement, a lack of parental guidance and assistance, negative social learning in family upbringing (Viejo et al., 2018), lack of respect, and misuse of social media platforms. These other contributing factors were briefly mentioned and not discussed in-depth.

4.1 Impacts of GBV on women's mental health

The key informants and focus groups were asked to also highlight the impacts of GBV on women's mental health in the community. This question was asked to address the research question and gap on impacts of GBV on women's mental health (Ganster-Breidler, 2010; Richardson et al., 2018). Drawing from the respondents' answers, there were a number of negative psychological impacts highlighted.

The continuous beating by men led to women experiencing depression, overthinking, excessive worry, thoughts of committing suicide, suicidal attempts and committing of suicide. The continuous beating by men caused women traumatized mentally, did not look after their children well and did not make decisions well. They had mental illness and mental suppression, had self-preservation, lived in fear and pain, troubled and were careful not to make mistakes. Women were not sure what to do, they did not seek assistance, they did not seek the right people and they thought that people hated survivors. Women did not share their problems with the service providers and their families.

They suffered and were silenced to think that no one will assist (Hermkens, 2008). They were socially isolated and there was no sense of enjoyment. They kept their talents hidden and did not participate in development activities and lacked progression. They developed trust issues and behavioral changes in the community. Health wise, women lost weight, got physically sick, they had anxiety and some eventually die (death) (Ganster-Breidler, 2010; Medecins Sans Frontieres, 2016). Women lacked personality and outspokenness, psychotic; out of control mentally, shameful and women left abusive relationships for better mental health reasons (Hermkens, 2008).

Interestingly, GBV instilled doubt in some young women, so they are scared of getting married in the future.

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

GBV is evident in the communities supporting other empirical research evidence (Fox, 2011; Darko et al., 2015; FHI 360, 2014; Medicines Sans Frontiers, 2016). GBV is evident in the sense that not only physical violence is accounted for; however, it includes emotional or psychological violence, sexual violence, financial violence and social violence (PNG National Strategy 2016-2025; McCloskey, 2016; Mboho & Udoh, 2018; Equal Playing Field, 2019; Consultative Implementation & Monitoring Council, 2017; KII05; Care 2015, p. 3). In addition, the key informants and focus groups highlighted four major contributing factors to GBV in the Hula community. The main findings are alcohol consumption (Jewkes et al., 2017), adultery offenses, shortage of food and money (Ganster-Breidler, 2010), and pure jealousy in relationships (Ganster-Breidler, 2010) with other contributing factors like misuse of social media.

Alcohol consumption, both from factory-made and homemade i.e., contributes directly and indirectly to GBV against women. The study revealed that men under the influence of alcohol, resort to violence, disturb women's peace, sometimes abuse women, and misuse money on alcohol not providing sufficient family needs for their families (KII01; KII03; KII06). The present results agree with Jewkes et al.'s (2017) empirical evidence on alcohol consumption outcomes. According to Jewkes et al. (2017), the number of drinks typically consumed, binge drinking by men and women, caused failure to do what was normally expected, and guilt or remorse after drinking. Alcohol consumption leads men and women to unnecessary acts, including, perpetration of violence out of unconsciousness.

Furthermore, food and money shortages contributed to GBV against women. These results are consistent with the claim that food and money problems lead to GBV occurrence (Ganster-Breidler, 2010). It is evident in this study that life is difficult in the village with everything dependent on money. The people in the Hula community rely on their marketing, fishing, fuel businesses, small trade stores and other little businesses to generate sufficient income for their survival. Most people in the community do not make gardens and work the land (KII03). There is also a land shortage in the community and life becomes difficult for them because of lack of food and money. With the money shortage experienced in some families, it then leads to violence against women (Jewkes, 2002). Similarly, women commit adultery with the hope of gaining monetary funds to survive. They see that they do not get the sufficient support from the men; instead, they get into adulterous relationship to make pressing ends. Consequently, the pressure of food and money shortages always leads to GBV.

However, adultery offenses are one of the major contributing factors of GBV. This finding was disturbing and shocking. According to Eves (2006) & INA (2000) cited by Acosta (2019), sexual jealousy, including the husband's adultery, is a common cause of family violence against women, particularly in rural areas, and the wife is beaten if she complains or enquires about it. Although, this is similar in nature as "womanizing can be part of it, if a man is having an extra marital affair with another woman, his wife is bashed for an unsuccessful relationship" (KII16). This study demonstrates that women affected by GBV related to adultery are unable to participate and express themselves freely in the community. The conduct of adultery acts in the contemporary village setting has worsened the social and psychological wellbeing of women and children. This study confirms that adultery acts committed against men by women exist for two reasons. First, women face financial difficulties in order to support their family's daily food budget and their children. For instance, some women do not receive financial support from men, or men do not provide for them. The second reason is married men going out of marriage and lying to young women or single mothers. It further evident that some women taking revenge on men for marriage affairs and womanizing they committed. It clearly shows that sometimes acts of adultery offenses committed by women are forced upon them because of the situation they encountered with the means to survive, family negligence, and parental responsibilities. Overall, it can be concluded that adultery offenses often resulted in arguments and jealousy and the majority of such cases, have seen men committing physical violence against women.

Furthermore, pure jealousy within marriages was discovered to be a contributing factor to GBV against women. This finding is supported by Ganster-Breidler (2010). Ganster-Breidler (2010) briefly highlighted jealousy as a contributing factor to GBV. Obviously, women need their social space to relax and have a good time. Women may go out and spend time with their families, and be involved in other social activities. Upon returning home, men may have many questions about their whereabouts (KII07). This shows that men are jealous and

overprotective over women. However, it may not be true to some men. Interestingly, some men do not want women to hang around because other men would see them and take an interest in them (KII03). Women's social interactions are severed with the ill-treatment they experience from men. They get cut off from everyone because men's jealousy occurs frequently or multiple times. Nevertheless, there may be disagreement between the two parties. One party might not agree with the other party, further resulting in violence. The jealousy trend might be the other way around. Women may be jealous of the men, which could lead to more arguments and further resulting in violence. Therefore, men and women should control their jealousy and bad thoughts (KII06) to avoid GBV prevalence.

5.1 Impacts on women's mental health

The research highlights the various psychological effects of gender- based violence (GBV) on women's mental health. The perpetration of GBV against women by men affects women's health and well-being (Ganster-Breidler, 2010). Tenacious abuse, particularly physical violence, causes significant emotional pain, resulting in depression, anxiety, and thoughts of suicide (Ganster-Breidler, 2010). Women endure trauma that disrupts their daily functioning, influencing their parenting, decision-making, and overall mental health. The descriptions of mental suppression and self-preservation indicate a state of hypervigilance, where women exist in continuous fear and suffering, further increasing their psychological suffering (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2011). This is consistent with existing research (Ganster- Breidler, 2010; Hermkens, 2008), which highlights how GBV challenges women's independence and mental strength, leaving them ensnared in cycles of abuse and silence.

The reported experiences of social isolation and a lack of enjoyment demonstrate that GBV damages not only the individual but also disturbs community engagement and development. Women withdraw from social interactions, hide their abilities, and avoid participating in developmental activities due to shame, fear, and distrust. This isolation fosters a sense of hopelessness, as women feel unsupported and believe that seeking assistance is meaningless (Hinton & Earnest, 2010). The changes in behavior and issues with trust further distance them from their communities, continuing cycles of abuse and marginalization. The physical health consequences, like weight loss and chronic illnesses, intensify their mental health challenges, creating a vicious cycle where psychological and physical decline are interconnected (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2016).

Importantly, the consequences of GBV as a long-term ripple effect on future generations, as young women who are exposed to or witness such violence develop fears about marriage and intimate relationships (Viejo et al., 2018). There is internalized doubt that shape how they view relationships. Furthermore, the choice of some women to leave abusive relationship for mental health reasons, although a positive step emphasizes the drastic measures needed to escape such circumstances (Hermkens, 2008). These findings highlight the critical need for comprehensive interventions that not only ensure immediate safety but also provide long-term mental health support, enhance community awareness, and foster systemic changes to dismantle the structures that sustain GBV (Richardson et al., 2018).

5.2 Limitation of the study

Research respondents provided the expected answers to the research questions. The study's primary flaw was the selection of research techniques that were used. Data for the research project were collected using focus group discussions and semi-structured questionnaire interviews with key informants. The key informants actively participated, whereas focus group discussions saw less involvement.

5.3 Further Research

The social and psychological welfare of women and children was poor because of adultery actions being committed in the modern village environment. Further research is required on GBV against single mothers contributing to rising adultery issues in the community setting. Further in-depth research is also required on GBV impacts on men and women's mental health in Papua New Guinea.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this research provide supporting evidence that GBV is evident in communities and that women suffer most from the prevalence of GBV, whether in public or private life. The main research findings on the contributing factors are contributing to the existing knowledge on alcohol consumption, adultery, food and money shortage and pure jealousy. Alcohol consumption of both factory and homemade beverages lead men and women to committing GBV. The adultery acts ended up in women avenging the affairs of men leading to GBV. Shortage of food and money are a major contributor to the increase of GBV. This clearly demonstrates that women primarily are affected when they do not receive the appropriate support from men, which controversially resulted in men getting jealousy, and put restriction on women to socialize. This was evident in this case study, which resulted in GBV issues in marriage relationships. The negative impacts of GBV on women's mental health include suicidal thoughts and attempts, trauma, death, anxiety, depression and self-preservation. Women leave abusive relationships to get away from being abused. Women also suffer the most in terms of emotional, psychological, and physical abuse. The findings in this case study provide the analysis on the ways in which to address GBV in the community and other communities. It is therefore important to take note on the following recommendations:

- 1) Conduct more regular awareness and advocacy on GBV emphasizing negative psychological impacts. Strengthen law and order in the community inclusive of tougher laws to prosecute perpetrators.
- 2) Churches should prioritize GBV, preach more about GBV; church must take the lead. Church to continue to run crusades, outreach programs, counseling and bible classes. Establish a Council of Churches in the Hula community.
- 3) Build safe houses for women, which can include counseling centers, and to engage professionals to manage it and be supported by the government. Survivors of violence must be placed in a conducive environment to share their narratives (Acosta, 2019)

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