

More action is needed to fight gender-based violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains one of the most pervasive and entrenched human rights violations in Uganda. It cuts across all regions, age groups, and social classes, manifesting as physical, sexual, emotional, or economic abuse. Despite notable policy reforms and advocacy campaigns, the scale of GBV continues to threaten Uganda's social stability, public health, and economic growth.

According to the 2016–2022 national report, about 56 percent of Ugandan women aged between 15 and 49 have experienced physical violence, while 22 percent have experienced sexual violence. The 2023 Uganda Police Annual Crime Report recorded 14,846 cases of sex-related violence and 10,741 child-related offences, reflecting both the persistence of GBV and its devastating reach. Further, research by the Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE) revealed that approximately 33 percent of Ugandan households report having experienced some form of gender-based violence. Another national survey by UN Women found that 56 percent of married women between the ages of 15 and 39 have suffered violence at the hands of their partners.

The forms of GBV in Uganda are diverse, including intimate partner violence, rape, defilement, sexual harassment, economic deprivation, and harmful traditional practices such as early and forced marriages. Although the prevalence of female genital mutilation (FGM) has declined nationally, it remains a pressing concern in some districts. The persistence of these forms of violence is deeply rooted in gender ine-



quality, patriarchal norms, and cultural beliefs that tolerate or justify abuse. Many Ugandans still perceive domestic violence as a private matter rather than a criminal offence, with about 62 percent of respondents in a Women's Rights and Legal Aid Forum survey agreeing that domestic violence should be handled within the family.

Economic hardship and poverty further exacerbate GBV in Uganda. Financial dependency often traps women in abusive relationships, while limited access to education and employment reduces their ability to seek justice or escape cycles of violence.

Weak law enforcement also remains a major challenge. The UN Women report shows that only 26.6 percent of GBV-related cases reported to the police are investigated, and merely 4.8 percent result in convictions. This

discourages victims from reporting, perpetuating impunity and silence.

The consequences of GBV are both personal and national. Survivors suffer long-term physical injuries, emotional trauma, stigma, and diminished participation in education and the workforce. Families and communities experience disintegration, broken relationships, and disrupted child development.

The national economy bears a heavy toll as well. A 2023 report by FOWODE estimated that Uganda loses about 31 trillion Ugandan shillings annually nearly 15 percent of its GDP due to GBV-related costs such as lost productivity, healthcare expenses, and legal proceedings.

Although Uganda has enacted strong laws such as the Domestic Violence Act and the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act, implementation remains

inadequate. Limited funding for survivor shelters, legal aid, and psychosocial support, especially in rural areas, undermines the country's capacity to respond effectively. Cultural resistance to change, poor coordination among institutions, and insufficient data collection further weaken national efforts.

To end GBV in Uganda, prevention must take centre stage. Changing societal attitudes that normalise violence requires continuous public education, community dialogues, and the engagement of men and boys as allies in promoting gender equality.

Strengthening access to justice and ensuring survivor-centred services should become government priorities, supported by increased funding and effective accountability systems. Better data collection and reporting are also essential for guiding interventions and tracking progress.

Gender-based violence in Uganda is not merely a women's issue, it is a national crisis that undermines human dignity, public health, and economic development. The statistics paint a grim picture of a society still battling deep-seated inequalities.

Unless deliberate, coordinated, and adequately funded actions are taken, Uganda risks losing more lives, more potential, and more of its future to an entirely preventable problem. Ending GBV must therefore remain a moral and national imperative for Uganda's sustainable development and the well-being of its people.

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