

INTER-SPOUSAL VIOLENCE: A STUDY OF KENYAN WOMEN  
EXPERIENCES

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## ABSTRACT

This study is on the subject of inter-spousal physical violence with specific reference to women's experiences of physical violence within heterosexual relationships. Physical violence in domestic relationships is one of the many forms of violence played out in domestic spaces. The practice of inter-spousal physical violence is therefore examined in the context of domestic violence. Narrowing the focus of this study to inter-spousal physical violence was determined by the need to theoretically and practically differentiate acts of physical violence between spouses in the domestic space from other forms of domestic violence. Physical violence is qualitatively different from other forms of domestic violence.

The study further recognizes that either spouse in a heterosexual relationship has the potential of becoming a victim or perpetrator of physical violence. Nevertheless, overwhelming evidence from around the world shows that women are usually majority of victims where inter-spousal violence is concerned (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Counts, Brown and Campbell 1992; Davies 1994).

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<sup>1</sup> The term domestic relates to the private sphere. The term domestic can trivialize violence, placing it as a private matter that does not warrant outside intervention. The terminology has historically been associated with a dismissive attitude towards the seriousness of violence in the home thus leaving too many victims especially women unassisted in dangerous and demoralizing circumstances (DVIRC 1998).

The main objective of the study was to examine the nature and extent of inter-spousal physical violence and conflict management among spouses. The study adopted inter-methods and intra-methods triangulation approaches to data collection. Data was collected from women and men in two residential estates, i.e. Kangemi and Huruma both located in Nairobi Province. A total sample of 200 women was selected through systematic sampling. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and In-depth Interviews were conducted to complement survey data. The study sites and sample sizes were purposively selected. Findings show that inter-spousal physical violence is prevalent with majority of the respondents reporting having experienced at least one form of minor physical violence in the 12 months prior to the study. A smaller proportion reported having experienced a severe form of violence in the twelve months prior to the study. Consequently, results show that respondents experience minor forms of violence more than severe forms of violence. Some respondents reported having received severe injuries after severe acts of violence.

Several recommendations have been made on the basis of resultant findings. The government needs to quicken the adoption of the domestic violence bill, which would materialize in passage of laws designed to protect individuals from spousal violence. The government should also play its role in making law enforcement officers and the criminal justice system more accessible, especially to women and more responsive to their complaints. Supportive services such as shelter homes, childcare services, special women's courts,

medical and psychological service referrals, educational facilities and assistance in accessing financial maintenance are possible intervention strategies. In addition, public awareness campaigns; gender justice and sensitization seminars; concentrated outreach efforts such as public rallies; legal and health literacy camps directed to men and women would serve to desensitize individuals to the use of violence. In an effort to reinforce the criminalization of domestic violence police stations should be made more approachable and less intimidating to individuals reporting cases of spousal violence. The police should be trained to be more sensitive to gender-related crimes. To strengthen research in this area, a database on spousal violence should be developed and maintained.