



WOMEN COURT MEN TO END GENDER VIOLENCE

At the age of 15, Angel Nabunya (not real name) was unfortunate to become a victim of sexual abuse from a close family member. "He was so close to my mother. I could not master the courage to report him. I instead had a mental breakdown and became very sickly."

"I was afraid. But because of my rather deteriorating condition, I had to tell my mother what had happened."

Through counselling, Nabunya was able to overcome the trauma, completed high school and joined university.

Life seemed to have returned to normal that she was even able to find love or at least that is what she thought. In 2014, while in her second-year, she got married.

The marriage turned 'very abusive' just after a year and a half. The once loving husband began to beat her. She was drained both physically and emotionally.

"My mum encouraged me to pray for my husband, which I did, but eventually, I had to leave because the abuse continued."

Regardless of one's social or economic status, it is estimated that one in every three women will

WITHOUT THE MEN WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS OF SEXUAL AND GENDER BASED VIOLENCE, EFFORTS TO ELIMINATE THIS VICE SEEM TO BE BEARING NOT MUCH FRUIT. WOMEN ADVOCATES ARE CALLING FOR MEN'S INVOLVEMENT, SENSITISING THEM ON PROTECTING WOMEN. JACKY ACHAN EXPLORES THE APPROACH

experience physical or sexual abuse in her lifetime. According to the United Nations data, 19% of women aged between 15 and 49 had experienced physical and or sexual violence by an intimate partner.

Locally, statistics are not any better. The last Uganda Demographic Health Survey (UDHS) put the figure at 22% of women aged between 15 and 49 having experienced sexual violence at some point in time.

WHY PARTNER WITH MEN

As experts have always argued, it does not make sense to think that you are making milestones empowering women, yet men are left to expect an

unempowered one — one they can continue to walkover.

Patricia Humura, a human rights advocate, argues that the present perception of feminism is that it is 'a group of arrogant women'. This in itself puts off a lot of people without understanding the real objective of the feminist movement.

"It is a desire for equal rights," Humura argues, adding that there is need to create awareness so as the existing laws can make sense to everyone.

Maggie Kigozi, the Akina Mama Wa Afrika patron agrees to the notion that men can be a great resource in stumping out sexual and gender-based violence.

Her organisation, she

says, has in the past enlisted one of their tools, codenamed 'He For She' campaign. The men were asked to be in women's shoes with an objective of helping them understand why they need to protect and not batter them.

The deeply entrenched negative cultural practices and some religions continue, according to Kigozi, to perpetrate sexual and gender-based violence. It is, therefore, important that you engage the men as well for a mindset change.

"It is not only the poor woman, but even powerful and financially emancipated women are sucked into this cycle," Kigozi says.

According to Ritah Atukwasa, the executive director of the Institute for Social Transformation, even if it is just one man, they can make a huge impact.

"Society empowers men even before

they are born. This is seen by the anticipation their birth generates and yet the birth of a girl is fussed upon. It is, therefore, important to have them as part of this fight," Atukwasa says.

She said violence is not hereditary, but rather a choice. It is through deliberate engagement with men that they can choose a violence-free life. Unfortunately, it can end up as a cycle if not dealt with. She adds that it is not that men do not experience violence, but women are more at risk and statistics prove so.

Women in Uganda, according to the UDHS 2016 survey, are more than twice as likely to experience sexual violence as men. More than one in five women age 15-49 (22%) report that they have experienced sexual violence at some point in time compared with fewer than one in 10 (8%) men.

According to Nickson Ogwal, a women and girls rights champion, there is need to review the roles and responsibilities of men in the different spaces. With this, society is able to hold them accountable for their actions.

DID YOU KNOW?
THE LAST UGANDA DEMOGRAPHIC HEALTH SURVEY PUT THE FIGURE AT 22% OF WOMEN AGED 15-49 YEARS HAVING EXPERIENCED SEXUAL VIOLENCE AT SOME POINT IN TIME

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