

Factors Influencing Help Seeking Among Battered Women in Spousal Relationships In Nakuruwest Sub County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Family stability is the heart to a stable society. Wife battering has been recognized as a hindrance to this stability because it not only negatively affects the women who are its primary victims but also their children who depict the continuity of any society. This paper was motivated by the fact that even though wife battering has for long been recognized as not only a health hazard but also a grave violation of human rights, it continues to be prevalent in many families. Nakuru West Sub-County was purposively selected because though the vice occurs in many families in the area, very few cases are reported in the area thus making it necessary to identify factors influencing help seeking choices among battered women. The study was guided by two theories; Battered Women Syndrome Theory and Survivor Theory. Snowball and purposive sampling methods were used to identify the sample size required. A qualitative research methodology employing an Interview Schedule, Focus Group Discussions and Key Informants Guides was employed as the tools of data collection and data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS version 17) was used for analysis. The study found that majority (80.0%) of the battered women do not always seek help. The respondents argued that a variety of factors prevent help seeking including concern for children, protecting family, mistrust, fear, culture, personal beliefs just to mention but a few. This study recommends social solutions to wife battering because findings conclude that it is a social problem. The study also recommends that policies to curb battering be more stringent in order to deal with the menace thereby empowering women who are key pillars to family welfare and by extension stable society.

KEYWORDS; Wife battering, Spouse, Relationship, Victims

INTRODUCTION

According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009) wife battering can be defined as the physical aggression committed by a husband to a wife. *In addition, the study states that wife battering manifests itself in a variety of forms throughout the world that range from a single episode of hostility like slapping to ongoing mauling.* The study further postulates that the abuse is the single greatest cause of hurt to women. Disclosures by Yasir (2011) indicate that wife battering exists in many cultures and is often considered a private matter. Further Adams *et al* (2007) notes that the vice is the most widespread and publicly tolerated way in which women are deprived of their basic human right. Moreover, Dutton *et al* (2005) views it

as a wrongdoing committed every fifteen seconds with a woman and possibly her children being victimized, most often in the one place where they should feel safe...the home. Crichton *et al.* (2008) corroborates the above cited authors and go further to say that experience of violent intrusion - or the threat of such intrusion - is a common thread in the fabric of women's everyday lives in many societies around the world. Moreover available evidence discloses that statistics exemplify that there are large numbers of women in marital unions who are enduring the vice (World Health Organization, 2013; Murdaugh *et al.*, 2004). In addition notable is the reality that wife battering is a public health problem in many societies which has for long gone unnoticed, been tolerated or has been given attention sporadically (de la Rosa *et al.*, 2015). Moreno (2013) observes that just as it took many years for the public recognition of child abuse and neglect to emerge, the recognition of spouse/partner abuse has also been a long time coming.

In the United States, estimates of the prevalence of violence against wives suggests that between nine hundred thousand to three million women suffer physical cruelty at the hands of a partner each year (United States Department of Justice, 1998). In Europe, numerous studies on the prevalence of wife battering reveal the rifeness approximations ranging from 6% in Switzerland to 26.2% in the Netherlands (Romkens, 1997). In Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, reports show that it is difficult to get scientific information on the prevalence of violence against women, as it appears to be extremely under-reported (Porcerelli *et al.*, 2003; Chan, Ko, 2011; Manjoo, 2012).

In sub-Saharan Africa, experiential proof disclose prevalence estimates for South Africa as 46 %, Tanzania 37%, Ethiopia 49% to point but a few (Moreno, 2013). In addition Edelson *et al.* (2007) argues that studies emerging from sub-Saharan Africa reveal under-reporting of the vice and therefore this paper notes that based on the common occurrence of under-reporting in many studies in Africa, it would be safe to assume that the true frequency estimates in most countries are probably higher than what is reported and therefore the need of this analysis to establish factors determining actions by victims of wife battering in Kenya and more specifically the area under study.

Runguma and Mwabu (2015) reveals violence against wives as a significant problem in Kenya. It is within this background that FIDA-Kenya, in partnership with Equal Rights Trust (ERT) developed the "Improving Access to Justice for Victims of Gender Discrimination Project" in 2011, now implemented in 33 counties across Kenya. In a midterm evaluation undertaken between March-April 2015 the analysis reports that 2,225 women are survivors of physical violence. While validating the previous study, in their annual reports on complaint on violation of human rights KNCHR (2014) recorded a slight increase of 39 female complaints on battering from the previous year. The report stresses that most complaints were from the Rift valley region followed by Nairobi while the least number of complaints was received from the Western region. A 2013 study by Gender Violence Recovery Centre (2013) exhibited that majority of gender-based cases (about 64 per cent) occur within the victims' homes by their spouses and adds that physical violence around the country varies with Nyanza being the highest at 54 per cent, Western is at 50.1, Rift Valley at 39.8, Central at 35.1, North Eastern at 32.8, Eastern at 31.5, Nairobi at 24.6 per cent and Coast Province with the lowest at 18%. In addition a survey by Ministry of Health (MOH), Kenya (2013) revealed on average that 113 cases of physical assault against women are recorded daily on the daily occurrence register at the gender recovery desk at the level four hospital. The current study argues that based on the views of the above cited authors it is evident that spousal brutality is significantly rampant in the rift valley and more so in the area of study. However there were limited documentation on

the subject of wife battering in the rift valley and more so the area of study thereby the need for this study.

Problem analysis

Family stability is core to a functional society. Spousal harmony and coexistence is fundamental to family stability and consequently a healthy society. Wife battering is a threat to family stability in that it not only adversely affects victims directly but also indirectly affects their children who are the futurity of any society. The vice is highly prevalent in Nakuru West Sub-County as evident in the background to the study. Efforts by government and other stake holders to encourage help seeking by battered partners have yielded very little. Hence the need to carry out an analysis to understand the factors that influence help seeking among battered women in spousal relationships in Nakuru West Sub County.

METHODOLOGIES

This study used a descriptive survey design. *Shaughnessy et al (2011)* describes a descriptive survey as a method for collecting information that demonstrates relationships and describes the world as it exists. Research participants answered questions administered through interviews and FGD guides after which the researcher described the responses given. The survey research design was a valuable tool for this study because as O’Leary (2004) and Tashakkori and Creswell (2007) argue it offers the advantage of assessing opinions and trends as it evaluates thoughts, opinions, and feelings. Also this study deemed the design instrumental because the method places social interactions, processes and changes at the center of the analysis and emphasizes both situational and structural contexts of social phenomena. This method helped to capture the complexity of women’s responses to battering and the impacts of various socioeconomic and cultural factors on their help-seeking behaviour.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Whether Battered Women always Seek Help

In order to a deep understand on whether battered women seek help, this study sought to establish whether women always seek help every time they are battered. Table 1 gives a summary of the findings.

	Frequency	Percent
No	48	80.0
Yes	12	20.0
Total	60	100.0
Total	60	100.0

Table 1: Whether Battered Women always Seek Help

Majority 48 (80%) respondents indicated that they do not always seek help while only a minority 12 (20%) respondents said that they always seek help in response to battering. The results of the current study established that even though battering is common in the area, majority of the victims do not always seek help. These results are in agreement with the findings of earlier studies which established that wife battering is highly prevalent in many societies but is an under reported issue (Bibi *et al.* 2014; Akers & Kaukinen 2009).

Why Battered Women do not always Seek Help

As table 1 above reveals majority 48 (80%) respondents do not always seek help. It was therefore vital to establish why battered women do not always seek help despite the pain inflicted on them through battering. The results are presented in table 2 below;

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Concern for children	48	12.4%	100.0%
Financial dependence	40	10.3%	83.3%
Hoped battering would cease	36	9.3%	75.0%
Culture	36	9.3%	75.0%
Family	36	9.3%	75.0%
Fear	34	8.8%	70.8%
Personal Beliefs	32	8.2%	66.7%
Love for spouse	30	7.7%	62.5%
Mistrust	28	7.2%	58.3%
Not aware of available help	26	6.7%	54.2%
Self blame	22	5.7%	45.8%
Isolation	20	5.2%	41.7%
Total	388	100.0%	808.3%

Table 2: Why Battered Women do not Seek Help

Concern for children: Majority 48 (100%) responses were given spotting at concern for children as the main obstacle to help seeking. In response to the question how concern for children deterred help seeking all the 48 (100%) respondents said that seeking help would mean exposing their children to ridicule and stigma among their peers and other members of the community. All the respondents expressed a common view that they proffered to persevere physical pain from the spouse rather than expose their children to anti-therapeutic feelings. The respondents also reported fearing that seeking help may lead separation with their spouse thus initiating a legacy of family instability in the family tree which they felt would be socially and emotionally unhealthy to their children. In addition the respondents argued that seeking help would lead to separation or divorce thereby depriving their children of the opportunity to grow up in a stable family. The victims also expressed fear that help seeking would lead them to lose custody of their children. Results from this study could be interpreted to mean that battered women uphold family continuity and protection of their children over the physical suffering of mauling they suffer. The findings are in agreement with a study by *Plichta and Falik (2001)* which argues that concern for children indicates the salience of abused women's protective attitudes towards their children. The results are also consistent with *Wolf et al. (2003)*, which observe that fear of losing child custody, might prevent help seeking. However, the results are inconsistent with those of *Popescu et al. (2010)* which asserts that children's observation of violent incidents significantly increases victims' likelihood of seeking help.

Financial Dependence: A total of the 40 (83.3 %) responses revealed that battered women do not seek help because they depended financially on their spouses. All the respondents who gave this answer held a common view that they feared that their spouses would desert them and they may not have an income to fend for themselves and their children since they were either unemployed or in casual low paid jobs. Most of the respondents said that by not seeking help they hoped to secure their children's financial support. In addition they noted that they lacked finances to place a case in a court of law. These results could be interpreted to denote that the economic reality for an unemployed woman is a bleak one. The implication of such a situation is despair which presents inability to seek help. These results are consistent with the argument of *Fanslow and Elizabeth (2010)* which reported that factors such as unemployment and low economic status are identified as obstacles to disclosure of domestic violence. Results on financial dependence as an obstacle to help seeking, reinforce *Barnett (2000)* which illustrated that for many battered women, since their husband had paid a bride price to their

families or had paid for their wedding presented a sense of financial obligation to their husbands that they could not pay back thus discouraging help seeking.

Hope that battering would cease: 36 (75.0%) responses were given to indicate that the victims do not seek help as they kept hoping that their spouses would change and stop beating them. They further noted that they believed that no problem lasted forever and battering was not an exceptional. In addition the respondents said that they prayed and trusted that someday things will change. Results presented above could be interpreted to mean that religion is a cornerstone to women in crises. The findings are consistent with Wange *et al.* (2009) which observed that battered women like any other person experiencing stress rely heavily on religion as a way of solving problems.

Culture: In response to the question why battered women do not always seek help 36 (75.0%) responses were given which indicated that culture is a key deterrent to help seeking. All the respondents who gave this answer identified societal tolerance on wife battering as common when the woman wronged her husband and thus could not seek help. Findings from this study revealed that wife battering is at times an essential element contributing to societal functionality in some cultures in Kenya. The results from this study could be interpreted to mean that help seeking could be discouraged by commonly accepted aspects of culture. Such an implication could mean that in such cultural contexts, endurance and persevering through pain and suffering without complaining or disclosing abuse are highly valued. Results in this study conform to those revealed by Moe (2007) which argued that strong values on emphasis on cultural beliefs may pressure women to refrain from seeking outside assistance thus illustrating a socio-culturally rooted meaning of seeking help. At the same time results from this study on the subordinate role of women reinforces Gondolf (2005) which found that, due to the fact that historically, African cultures had no acknowledgement of women's individual human rights and rights to equality within male/female relationships, the battered women may have been less likely to react actively to spousal abuse.

Family as an obstacle to help seeking: A total of 36 (75.0%) responses given indicated that help seeking could mean undermining a battered woman's reference for family and the institution of marriage. The respondents, who gave this view, acknowledged that family should be protected by all means. It also came out that battered women do not seek help from husband's family because the latter were partisan and often favoured the batterer and blames victims as the cause why it happens. Furthermore they indicated that wife battering is a private matter that can only be solved through dialogue between the partners. The results from the current study could be interpreted to denote that battered women fail to seek help because they view it as an aspect of exposing and endangering their families and marriages to the outside world. The results are consistent with findings from previous studies which reveal saving the face of the family as a value that guides the behavior of many battered women (Burgess-Proctor, 2012; Dasgupta, 1998).

Fear as an obstacle to help seeking: Fear as an obstacle to help seeking was mentioned 34 (70.8) times. All who gave this answer indicated that they feared that help seeking would lead to separation or divorce which was an unfamiliar situation to them. They argued that it's better to put up with the known however grave it is rather than venture into the unknown. Findings from the current study could be interpreted to imply that being uncertain of the unknown is an obstacle to help seeking. Despite the fact that fear as an obstacle is a key finding in this study it is inconsistent with the results by Love and Richards (2013) which pointed at fear of not being believed by others and fear of the consequent isolation as common obstacles to help seeking.

How Personal Beliefs Inhibits Help Seeking: Results shown in table 4.9 indicate that 32 (66.7%) responses revealed that personal views and beliefs are core obstacles to seeking help. The respondents said that women should be submissive to their husbands and help seeking is an aspect of disobedience and contrary to their personal beliefs. It can therefore be said from this study that gender inequality and the acceptance of women's roles as secondary in society deters victims of battering from help seeking. Such an implication could mean that help seeking could mean failure on the part of a woman. These results concur with Herring, (2014) which acknowledged patriarchy as a notion which appears deep rooted in generational understandings about the role of women and their duty to be obedient and in their ultimate responsibility when the peace and order of the household was broken.

How Love for Spouse Influences Help Seeking: Table 4.9 , above shows that 30 (62.5 %) responses were given stating that victims do not always seek help, because they love their spouses and thus cannot expose them for fear that they will be jailed, ridiculed or punished. It can be said from these results that battered women sacrifice their own welfare for the comfort of their spouses who they adore. The results from this study strengthen those of Akers and Kaukinen (2009) which confirmed that when women witnessed police brutality toward an abusive spouse, they expressed fears about harm that might result from police violence and thus could not seek help.

Mistrust as an obstacle to help seeking: Table 4.9 outlines mistrust is a core obstacle to help seeking with 28 (58.3%) responses. All those who gave this answer indicated that they used to seek help from friends but at some point realized that the latter advised them to leave their spouse which was against their intention for help seeking. Further they said that they no longer seek help from friends as they are judgmental and often viewed them as the cause of why their spouses battered them. In addition the respondents said that they stopped seeking help from police as they were unnecessarily authoritative and domineering thereby demeaning the victims who were already demoralised, thus intimidating them further. They explained that the police often asked them for exhibit which was hard to acquire and thus discouraged consequent help seeking. Information from a key informant revealed that filing a case in a court of law may be discouraging as the case may take a long period to be determined and battering issues are urgent matters. In addition they said that they failed to seek help from local administrators because they were not impartial in determining the cases and were at times bribed by the batterer. Results from the current analysis could be interpreted to imply that help seeking for a battered woman was possible when those they ran to were trustworthy and vice versa. These findings are consistent with Newman and Dunlop (2005) who noted that justice system response did not only emerge as one of the most significant systemic help-seeking barriers for battered women but also observed that police brutality toward an abuser was generally seen as something that worsened the situation for the victim, either because it increased the abuser's rage or because they did not want the abuser to be hurt. In addition the research findings reinforce Bent-Goodley (2001) who argued that local leaders were not always trusted because these officials were partisan and could be bribed by the perpetrators.

Lack of awareness on available help: 26 (54.2%) responses were given indicating that battered women do not seek help as they are not aware that there is help for victims of battering. All the respondents affirmed that this was accelerated by the fact that everybody in their locality accepted wife battering as right when she did a mistake. Results outlined above could be interpreted to mean that wife battering is common and accepted and men believe it is their right to use violence and women accepted it as their fate. These findings support a prior research which found that some African women believed abuse was justified, while men

supported and perceived abuse as a legitimate means of control in spousal relationships (Abrahams et al., 2006).

Self blame as an obstacle to help seeking: According to table 4.9, self blame got 22(45.8%) responses. All who identified this obstacle observed that if a woman felt that she was battered due to her wrong doing they could not seek help. They all said that they felt that if they changed their behavior, their spouses will not beat them. The results from the current study could be used to imply that feelings of self-blame led victims to think that they should have been able to change their abuser's behaviour by altering their own by being more submissive or compliant. It can then be said that in such a situation the victims accepted their own role in triggering the battering due to their disobedience. These findings of self-blame are similar to those from other researchers which identified self-blame as an important factor preventing women from seeking timely help (Signal and Taylor (2008). At the same time a point of contrast appears between the study cited above and results of the current study because the former found out that victims think their husbands go too far in other cases and therefore may seek help. Results from the current study also differ from the opinion of Dasgupta and Warriar (1996) which opined that survivors of battering do not seek help as they believe that the abuse was a trade-off for not being single.

Isolation as deterrent to help seeking: 20 (41.7%) responses were given identifying isolation as an obstacle to help seeking. All the respondents who gave this answer said that their spouses do not allow them to associate with friends or relatives. These findings reinforce the views of a key informant who observed that an isolated woman may not have information on available help. These findings could be said to mean that an isolated person may lack information on what to do and this acts as an obstacle to help seeking. The results are in conformity with previous literature which highlighted isolation and lack of awareness regarding support for domestic violence victims as hindrances to help-seeking (Reina *et al.* 2014).

Why Battered Women Seek Help

As indicated in table. 1 on page 38, a minority 12 (20 %) respondents said that they always seek help in response to battering. This study was therefore interested in understanding factors that encourage help seeking among battered women in the area under study. The results are presented in table 3 below;

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Mitigate suffering	12	11.3%	100.0%
Trust	12	11.3%	100.0%
Problem taking too long	12	11.3%	100.0%
Psycho- social support	10	9.4%	83.3%
Employment	10	9.4%	83.3%
Barterers' reference for family members	10	9.4%	83.3%
Severity and frequency of battering	9	8.5%	75.0%
Empathy	9	8.5%	75.0%
Socio-economic support	8	7.5%	66.7%
Success of a previous help seeking experience	8	7.5%	66.7%
Awareness of available help	6	5.7%	50.0%
Total	106	100.0%	883.3%

Table 3: Why Battered Women seek Help

Mitigate suffering: Table 3 above shows that 12 (100%) responses were given indicating that women seek help so as to mitigate on the effects of physical assault. In response to the question how help seeking would mitigate suffering, the respondents said that by seeking help the batterer is punished and this deters battering or reduces the frequency and intensity of battering, thereby reducing the anguish inflicted by the assault.

Trust: Table 3 shows that 12 (100 %) responses were given identifying trust as a factor that encourages victims to seek help. The respondents said that they sought help from family members, neighbours or friend when there was mutual trust between the victims and people they sought help from. This study therefore concludes that trust encourages help seeking. The results are inconsistent with Rose *et al* (2000) which asserts that majority of battered women in their study expressed fear that family members would not be supportive if they talked about experiencing violence.

Problem taking too long: Respondents gave 12 (100%) responses identifying the fact that when battering takes place over a long period it may cause a victim to seek help. All the responds who gave this answer, explained that they sought help from friends and relatives. Further the respondents noted that they reported battering to the police as a last resort. The findings reveal help seeking as reactive step to long term suffering in the hands of a batterer. The results concur with Beaulaurier *et al.* (2007) which argued that many victims view reporting to the police as the logical external resource for obtaining at least long-term assistance for spousal violence.

Empathy: Findings presented in table 3 above specified 12(100%) responses, pointing at empathy as a reason why battered women would seek help. Earlier findings in this study show that battered women tend to seek help from people who are not judgmental but affiliate with their plight. The results of this study could imply that battered women like anybody else in a crisis seeks understanding.

Barterers' Reference for Family Members: As Table 3 shows when the batterer references his relatives the battered wife got the courage to seek help as this would help solve the problem permanently. All the respondents observed that they seek help from their natal parents, since the husband would fear to case with their in-laws and therefore it would discourage future battering. They also said that they sought help because a battered woman's relatives would come out strong in support of the victim and the batterer could fear that he might lose his wife therefore eliminating the vice. From this study it is evident that when a battered women notices that the batterer references his or her parents, she was likely to seek help. Again results in this study reveal that support by her natal family is likely to encourage help seeking. These results are incoherent with the views of Ellsberg *et al.* (2001) which found that victims of domestic violence may not seek help from their own families as they force them to drop legal charges against their spouses or to reconcile with their husbands.

Frequency and Severity of the Battering: A total of 9 (75.0%) responses were given indicating that when battering was very frequent or caused serious injuries victims were likely to seek help. All the respondents who gave this answer said that even though wife battering was accepted and condoned in many cultures it becomes an issue of concern when it leads to severe injuries and may lead the victim to seek help from relatives, in laws, friends, local administrators, and clergy or from medical practitioners. The results were in agreement with the opinion of a key informant who noted that victims seek help only after it becomes a nightmare and could not tolerate it any more. Results from this study could be interpreted to mean that wife battering could be tolerated except in severe circumstances that could lead to

help seeking. These results are in agreement with earlier studies that enumerated some reasons for seeking help as having been badly injured, fearing death or just not being able to endure more in the hands of the batterer (*Barrett and Pierre, 2011; Fanslow and Elizabeth, 2010*). In addition the findings concurs with other scholars who revealed that severe beating is more likely to cause serious injury and is more intimidating for the woman who may see it as an intolerable problem, thereby seeking help from the police (Naved and Persson ,2006; Bonomi *et al.* 2006).

Psychosocial Support: Results shown in table 3, shows that 10 (83.3%) responses indicated the reason encouraging them to seek help as receiving psycho-social support. All the respondents who seek help said that they did so because of the support they got from clergy, friends, family, local administrators or counsellors. They all argued that battering is emotionally disturbing and the counseling they get is therapeutic and increases their capacity to solve future differences with their spouses and not just to resolve the problem at hand. The respondents further noted that the clergy offer religious teaching which advocates for perseverance and submission of wives to their husbands which is in line with their culture which consequently affords resilience thus giving them hope for change and stability for their family. The results from this study could be interpreted to mean that social support especially from clergy is instrumental in creating resilience in battered women, which is critical especially as they try to resolve problems in their marriages. The findings from the current study complement (Newman and Dunlop, 2005) which stated that in many circumstances, clergy reinforce religious beliefs and encourages the victim to continue staying with the abuser in the hope that abuse will cease some day. In contrast to the results from the current study other studies found that religious practices offer little or no practical assistance to battered women (Odhiambo, 2005).

Employment: Table 3 indicates that 10 (83.3%) responses were given, identifying employment as a contributing factor to help seeking. In response to the question how employment influences help seeking the respondents said that when one has a paying job they were financially independent and therefore support themselves and therefore were more likely to seek help and vice versa. These results could be interpreted to mean than employment is key determinant to help seeking since those who have jobs are financially independent and thus can seek help unlike those who are jobless and therefore are in a state of despair, discouraging help seeking. These results confirm findings by other researchers which outlined factors such as unemployment, economic dependence and experiences of violence as obstacles to disclosure of violence (*Barnett, 2000; Plichta and Falik, 2001*).

Socio economic support: Results in table 3 show that 8(66.7%) responses identified the socio economic support got by battered women as a key encourager for help seeking. The respondents argued that they sought help from friends, natal family, and from Philadelphia Women's Crisis Centre, because they got temporary shelter and financial support which helped them stabilize before they visualized the next step in their lives. The respondents further said that they sought help from Philadelphia rescue centre because the home offers entrepreneurial and financial management skills for battered. The respondents further said that this enabled women to begin their own businesses thus giving them financial liberty. The respondents said that at Philadelphia they got support for their children. At the same time the victims said that as they related with other women who had recovered from the ordeal of assault at Philadelphia crisis centre, they felt encouraged. In summary they asserted that they received psychosocial and financial which in a way reinstated their confidence and self worth which had been eroded by spousal battering.

Success of previous help seeking experience: 8 responses accounting for 66.7% indicated that battered women are likely to seek help if previous help seeking experience was successful and positive. All the respondents who gave this response indicated that if they reported battering to in-laws, friends, neighbours or local administrators and they got the intended assistance they were likely to report the vice at a future date. This finding reinforces the results of trust as a catalyst to help seeking.

Awareness of available help: Table 3 indicate that 6 (50.0) responses, pointed at awareness of available help as a key trigger to help seeking. All the respondents who gave this response argued that when someone knows where to take refuge they were likely to seek help and vice versa. These findings can be used to conclude that very few battered women seek help perhaps because they do not know that they can get assistance. These findings are in agreement with Fugate et al. (2005) which demonstrated that a key prerequisite for battered women's decisions to leave an abusive relationship was the availability of reliable, solid social support and the knowledge that others were willing to help them combined with continual links to formal organizations, services, and ongoing support.

The second objective of this study was to explore factors that influence help seeking among battered women in spousal relationships in Nakuru West Sub County. Factors influencing help seeking was defined as those issues that influence the choice of a help seeking strategy. For this study factors entailed the subject that either encourage or hinder help seeking. The factors were therefore categorized into those which enhanced help seeing and those which discouraged the same. Data on this objective was analyzed on the questions; why battered women do not seek help and why battered women seek help. Data analysis and presentation in conjunction with findings from FGDs revealed that a number of factors influence help seeking choices of a battered woman. The results are in agreement with Pence & Paymar (1993) who noted that several factors have been highlighted as being instrumental in the choices pursued by a victim of battering.

For example in response to why battered women do not seek help a participant in a FGD said;

I cannot talk about battering with my in-laws because they obviously side with my husband. They have always viewed me as unfit for their son. They even view me as the troublemaker and therefore think that the batterer is justified.

Another respondent in the same FGD observed the following in response to the same question;

If you are born in a family with many girls and all your other sisters are properly married and settled in peace with their spouses, when you experience spousal battering one may be shy to seek help because you will appear to be the odd one out and no one may understand you. In fact you may fear being viewed as a source of disgrace to your family.

A third respondent had this to say in response to the same question;

I cannot seek help from my natal home because my brothers cannot accept me back to our family. This leaves me to suffer and persevere in my state however bad it is.

The narrations highlighted above could be used to conclude that battered women do not seek help because there of mistrust between them and the relatives either from the marital or natal relatives. At the same time the narrations show that help seeking is deterred by consideration for the preservation of the family name. The situations conveyed in these narratives portray a state of helplessness by the victims. This situation confirms the battered women syndrome theory as stated by Walker (2006) which hypothesizes the aspect of learned helplessness as

instrumental in showing how a battered woman's condition when enhanced by despair may lead her into believing that they are powerless to escape thereby subjecting themselves into a continuing pattern of uncontrollable violence and abuse. In addition the findings corroborate Waltermaurer (2012) which found that in the domestic abuse ambit, sporadic brutality, perceptions of powerlessness, lack of financial resources and the superior strength of the batterer all combine to instill a feeling of helplessness in the victim.

Other obstacles to help seeking identified in this study include cultural beliefs. A participant in a FGD observed;

If you keep telling people that you were battered everyone will tell you that you don't know how to stay with a man. A husband is allowed to beat you since he is the head of the family. A good wife is supposed to submit to her husband.

Culture as an obstacle to help seeking was pointed by the views of the following three participants from three different cultures;

Like us Luos when a man marries he moves out his father's homestead and establishes his own, he must look for a reason however minute it is to beat the wife before he beats his child in the new homestead. It is an abomination for a man to discipline his child before his wife;

Among the Luhya it is important that a man beats his wife before he dies, because in case he dies without doing so his corpse will be forced to slap the wife to fulfill the requirements of culture. If a wife dies before she was battered by the husband, the latter would have slap or pinch the corpse before the burial rites are performed. In fact one day my husband beat me and I could not talk to him or anyone for one month because I could not understand why he did it. One day he bought a present and apologized for battering me but I enquired why he did it. He disclosed to me that he beat me because he was advised by other men from the community that it was an omen not to beat ones wife. He tried to explain to them that he could not find a reason to beat me but was advised to identify one however minor it was;

Among the Agikuyu wife battering is accepted and condoned as a sign of love. If a wife was not battered in the traditional Kikuyu believes she believed that she wasn't loved. At the same time battering was seen as a tool for punishing disobedient wives. My grandmother wronged my grandfather and she was not beaten for two days and on the third day she went mad and to date the statement she utters is when I shall be beaten

These narratives represent explanations on how wife battering uphold key cultural elements that foster functionality of the community, thus enforcing the vice. The results reinforce researches by other scholars which asserted that strong cultural values which emphasise on endurance and persevering through pain and suffering without complaining or disclosing the vice, may pressure women to refrain from seeking outside assistance illustrating a socio-culturally rooted meaning of wife battering (Clements & Sawhney, 2000; Fraser et al, 2002). In addition the results corroborate Macy *et al* (2005) whose arguments was that many Africans seem to accept wife battering as part and parcel of African culture.

Despair as a result financial dependence came out a key obstacle to help giving. For example one respondent was asked why she does not seek help she said;

One day as usual my husband beat me so much that I decided enough is enough. I went to the neighbor and told her about it. My neighbor took me to a village elder. My

husband abandoned me and the children without even food for days and when I realized that the suffering was too much I had to beg him to provide for us with a promise to keep personal matters to myself in future.

This victim like many others views herself as disabled and sees no hope for the children and so her only predicament is to suffer in the hands of an abusive partner. The narrative also explains that concern for the welfare of children tethers battered women in abusive relationships without seeking help.

Other reasons that deter women from seeking help according to this study's findings were love for the spouse and stigma for women who left their marital homes. One respondent in the FGD in response to the question why she doesn't seek help said;

We started our marriage when we loved each other. With the passing of time he started beating me, but I still love him. He continues to beat me so intensely until one day I felt enough is enough. I took my belongings and went to my auntie's house near Rhoda poster in anticipation that I will go to my parent's rural home the following day but I could not sleep away from my husband's house so I took my belongings and went back to my matrimonial home at 11 pm.

The view of this respondent was held by the minority but it illustrates how hard it is for battered woman to abandon her spouse in spite of the agony of assault

Stigma of walking out of one's marital home is characterized with negative terms in many African cultures thus discouraging exposure of spousal abuse. For example *Gichokio* among the Agikuyu, *Ritinge* among the Abagusii and *Odhi Odu:go* among the Luos to name but a few. Other factors that deter help seeking according to this study are isolation of victim, fear of intensified battering and lack of awareness of available help.

Isolation was also identified as a deterrent to help seeking. For instances FGDs respondents' testimonies highlighted their abusive husbands' efforts to deliberately isolate them from other people in the community and in many instances to deliberately limit their contacts. One woman said,

He does not allow me to go to church or make friends with other ladies; he says that people gossip about others and I should avoid them. I do not have any friend.

This narrative proves how men use isolation to enhance on battered women's ignorance as a strategy to keep them in abusive relationships and to isolate them. The narrative also infers that many times, a partner's rigid rules and controlling tactics not only instill a deep sense of fear, but depletes the woman's confidence in themselves and reinforce their cultural belief that women are second-class citizens and that being a good wife means obeying their husband.

In response to the question why battered women seek help a wide range of responses were given among which were trust in the person one sought help from, empathy that a victim got from the person she sought help from, prolonged battering, psychosocial and socio-economic support, awareness of available help among others.

For example one participant of a FGD in response to the question why she sought help from Philadelphia battered women crisis centre had this to say;

We have received great financial assistance from this Centre. It is true before I was introduced to Philadelphia I encountered many of problems with my husband because he saw me as a burden and beat me often. At Philadelphia I was trained on

entrepreneurship skills and financial management. I was also given some income to begin a small business and taught how to save. With this I began to earn some money for myself and now I am not totally dependent on my husband. I attended seminars and received counseling which has helped me regain my self-confidence. Before then I used to feel hopeless and useless. At Philadelphia I received intensive counseling on how to belief in myself. This encouraged me to pick the pieces of my shattered life together and started living again.

This quote explains that battered women seek help when the source of the help can help them socially or economically. These findings reinforce the findings of previous scholars which revealed that battered women are not passive actors in spousal relationships but actively seek help. The results are in agreement with the Farah et al. (2009) which argues that the informal social networks not only soften the impact of victimization and assist the victim in recovery but also assist in the resolution of the conflict and in ensuring that any decisions made are actually implemented.

CONCLUSION

Findings demonstrate that the highest reasons for not seeking help were concern for children, financial dependence, battering would cease, culture, fear, family, personal beliefs and love for the spouse in that order. Other reasons given as deterrents of help seeking included mistrust, self blame isolation and lack of information on available help. It is important to highlight that this was the question with the highest responses indicating the magnitude of barriers inhibiting help seeking.

Majority of the answer given as core in encouraging help seeking pointed at mitigating suffering, trust and problem taking long. Other factors that were mentioned as core in encouraging help seeking were employment and batterer's reference for family each with 10 (83.3%) responses. Frequency and severity of battering and empathy each received moderate responses each with 9 (75.0%). Other factors with fewer responses but nevertheless used by the respondents included social economic support, success of a previous experience and awareness of available help. These findings demonstrate that battered women are active help seekers despite the many challenges that hamper their endeavor to seek help.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the socialization agents more specifically the family, media and education educates the society in general on the adverse repercussions of wife battering on the victims and the future of their children. Towards this end the study recommends that the education system of Kenya includes aspects of human rights and gender equity and equality in the curriculum. This will enlighten girls and women on their human rights which will go a long way in encouraging them seek help if battered thereby eliminating the vice.

This study recommends counselling for men engaging in wife battering so as to curb the vice from a point of understanding and not on coercion or application of the law. Considering that the ultimate goal as curbing the vice as the most durable solution to many domestic problems, this study recommends that the Ministry of Gender, culture and Youth Affairs devises programmes that discourage on the retrogressive cultural beliefs and values especially them that uphold wife battering.

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