



STOP GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Kwame Nkrumah once said, "Revolutions are brought about by men, by men who think as men of action and act as men of thought."

As men of action, why haven't we established a revolution against GBV (gender-based violence)?

In this article, we will assess results from independent research on the perception and attitude of the community towards GBV among prominent married couples and those of the average person in Zambia, including the perceived GBV consequences and how men and boys can get involved in combating GBV.

Zambian prominent couples are often in the spotlight, and their relationships are no exception. Over the years, some high-profile couples have gone through divorce, which has also made headlines around the world.

Though prominent divorce cases are certainly dramatic, they also serve as a reminder that even the most high-profile couples are not immune to relationship problems. Regardless of whether you are a high-profile or ordinary person, divorce can be a challenging and emotional experience. However, when it comes to prominent couples, the statistics paint a different picture—one significantly more extreme.

The following are a range of reasons why prominent divorce rates are higher than those of the average person:

- **Infidelity:** One of the most common reasons for divorce is infidelity, as it can also involve minors and newborn children out of these marriages.
- **Violence:** Domestic physical and mental violence can happen in any relationship, but the public eye magnifies such incidents for prominent couples.
- **Lifestyle:** A prominent couple's extravagant lifestyle can contribute to higher divorce rates, as it creates division in the marriage due to constant travelling, media scrutiny, and partying.
- **Schedules:** The demanding schedules of prominent couples can strain relationships as they can be gone for days, weeks, or months.
- **Substance abuse:** Due to their lifestyle and stress, prominent couples may be more susceptible to drug and alcohol addictions, thus destroying their marriage.
- **Age difference:** prominent people sometimes marry partners with significant age differences. Though age difference is not inherently a problem, having different interests and lifestyles can lead to higher instances of divorce.

- **Narcissism:** Prominent people can be narcissistic partners who require constant admiration and validation. They tend to prioritise their needs, desires, and accomplishments over those of their partner. A lack of empathy can lead to one partner feeling unheard, unsupported, and emotionally disconnected.
- **Financial independence:** While financial independence can provide freedom, it can create a power dynamic within a marriage. Because a prominent person may feel that their wealth gives them certain leverage, it can lead to conflict and ultimately, divorce.

The following were among the reasons for abused Zambian wives not filing for divorce from their abusive-prominent partners:

- fear of feeling unworthy, loss of self-esteem, self-confidence, and worthiness in society, making them believe they are worthless without their abusive partner, who indoctrinates these fears in them;
- fear of humiliation by family, the police, friends, colleagues, and others;
- fear of being disregarded, criticised, harassed, or shamed;
- fear of retaliation by the abusive partner when he finds out he has been reported, especially when he wasn't arrested and punished;
- fear of not being believed, and the lack of faith in the ability of the justice system to properly punish the abusive partner, especially when the abusive partner is a prominent figure that can also bribe authorities;
- not wanting to report the abusive partner for fear of hurting him or damaging his reputation, and others involved;
- not wanting to report the abusive partner since the victim is dependent on him. The dependency syndrome, whereby women depend on the perpetrators of violence for survival, puts survivors in vulnerable situations.

Barely a day passes in Zambia without a report of a case of violence against women, whether in a rural or an urban setting. In some areas, the number of reported cases averages 50 a day. It is widely believed that many cases go unreported, and the numbers keep rising. An annual survey by the Victim Support Unit of the Zambia Police Service reveals that in 2016, the country recorded 18,540 cases of GBV, more than the 18,088 cases recorded in the previous year.

Similarly, the 2017 GBV third-quarter report indicates that the total number of GBV cases in just one-quarter countrywide was 16,090, compared to 13,092 cases in 2016 during the same period—an 18.6% increase. The report showed an increase in physical GBV cases, such as those involving assault and murder.

The gravity of GBV is evidenced by statistics from Zambian Police Service, which reveal a startling trend that needs to be curbed. In the third quarter of 2023, over 10,000 GBV cases were recorded nationally of which 2,550 were child victims. The statistics further reveals that women continue to suffer the brunt of GBV; 7,943 were females whilst 2,491 were males.

According to the AFRO Barometer survey from August 2023, more than one-third (36%) of Zambian women have experienced physical violence since age 15. Moreover, one in five women and girls (20%) suffer sexual abuse before the age of 18, and 39% are married before the age of 18 (Bessa & Malasha 2020).

Gender violence is a global pandemic, as 70 per cent of women experienced physical and sexual violence at some point in their lives—a statistic that should set off alarm bells. Regardless of its form, violence against women devastated families and undermined communities—a community that is not safe for women is not safe for anyone.

Activists point to poverty, gender inequalities, and social acceptance of GVB as key factors leaving many women vulnerable to abusive spouses, workmates, male relatives, and individuals. Moreover,

the associated violence and harmful and controlling aspects of masculinity resulting from patriarchal power imbalances is embedded in much of Africa's traditional and cultural beliefs. This deeply embedded imbalance and patriarchal values have led to women remaining discriminated against and disadvantaged in many sectors and to their being at a higher risk of violence.

Traditional leaders play a crucial role in modelling traditions and culture and reaching out to most people in their chiefdoms. The role their Royal Highnesses play in fostering women and girls empowerment, development, peace, unity, and stability is highly commendable. Additionally, as a Christian nation, the church is often reluctant to address this serious violation of human rights. Rather, the church has concentrated more on preaching, emphasising wealth, health, and deliverance, but forgetting the social justice of human rights.

Many refer to Zambia as the Switzerland of Africa, a peaceful, landlocked country. Zambia is the best and most peaceful investment destination in Africa, plus it's ranked the 4th most peaceful country in Africa. Still, where domestic GBV is concerned, communities, especially in rural areas, have continued to embrace these negative cultural beliefs whereby GBV is the norm. Some Zambians consider domestic violence a private matter to be handled within the family, and if a man does not beat his wife, it is taken to mean he does not love her.

Support for survivors of domestic violence is important, but to end domestic violence once and for all, society needs to understand how someone comes to perpetrate violence to stop violence from happening in the first place.

The root cause of domestic violence can begin with the perpetrator's own childhood abuse experience. Researchers have found that child abuse, neglect, and a negative parent-child relationship are significant risk factors that may lead someone to later perpetrate domestic violence. Certain childhood experiences can put people at risk of committing domestic violence in the future.

Experiencing trauma in early childhood can alter the brain, how the body responds to stress, and whether someone sees the world as a threatening, harmful, and untrustworthy place. Research has shown that people who have been exposed to trauma have increased activity in the amygdala of the brain, resulting in heightened fear and arousal that can lead to aggressive responses in the face of conflict and stress.

Trauma exposure is also linked to a decrease in activity in the prefrontal cortex, which is the part of the brain responsible for impulse control, concentration, and emotional reasoning. These are essential qualities for navigating interpersonal relationships.

Though Zambia has domesticated international and regional conventions on women's rights in its national laws and instruments, many of these efforts are often underfunded and poorly coordinated. Many declarations exist, but women's organisations on the ground are still waiting for concrete measures. There is a lack of consistency between various mechanisms, a lack of prevention measures and support for victims, and gaps in funding.

Often, a weak judicial system promotes corruption, and when the rule of being penalised is insufficient, the perception of corruption intensifies into deep concern about the abuser who breaks the law. For this reason, it is crucial to ensure that whoever or wherever there are bribery allegations with judges, there ought to be an investigation.

Are prominent people too influential, protected, and connected to be imprisoned? How effective are the Zambian law enforcement and justice systems to independently prosecute corrupt systems, and does society have the capacity to demand justice without fear or favour?

Weak integrity, transparency, and accountability hinder sustainability, prosperity, and human rights, which undermine socioeconomic development. Without integrity, no professional activity can be relied upon; without transparency, there is no accountability; without accountability, there is no detection; and when self-regulation is weak, trust diminishes.

As the fight against GBV continues, everyone needs to know how to support someone if they choose to confide in you about an experience of GBV. As in all societies, we should approach the GBV problem as one where prevention is better than cure through:

- Empowering girls by keeping them in school.
- Empowering women economically through cash support.
- Use feminist approaches to tackle gender inequality, including in the home.
- Provide women and girls with safe spaces.
- Engaging male allies.
- Including women in decision-making at the leadership level.
- Supporting local women-led and woman-rights organisations.

Women are the backbone of families, and they are essential to the growth and development of communities. Yet, for centuries, women have been relegated to the sidelines, subjected to discrimination and marginalisation.

Women's empowerment and promoting gender equality are essential for developing a nation. Empowering women leads to improved health outcomes, increased economic growth, and poverty reduction. However, women continue to face numerous challenges that hinder their ability to contribute fully to society. Addressing these challenges requires a concentrated effort from individuals, communities, and governments.

Issues that affect women and children must be central to the decision-making process. We must never accept, excuse, or tolerate any acts of violence against women and girls. We must move beyond plans, resolutions, and agreements to action. Only those countries that fully unlock the potential of their female population and stimulate its further development can advance fast.

The importance of women in society:

- Economy: Not only are women known as successful entrepreneurs, they also play a significant role in the labour force and contribute to the growth and development of businesses.
- Education: Women's education is crucial because it's linked to improved health outcomes, increased economic growth, and poverty reduction.
- Empowerment: Empowering women creates a more just and equitable society, thus positively impacting their lives and the lives of those around them.
- Political participation: Women's participation in politics develops democratic societies. Women bring diverse perspectives and experiences, resulting in more informed decision-making. Their participation also leads to policies that are more inclusive and address the needs of the entire population.
- Family and community: Women are the cornerstone of a generation. They provide care, support, and nurturing to their families, which are essential to the development of children. Women also play a significant role in community building and often take on leadership roles in community organisations.

Fathers hold a powerful position to create change in the ongoing journey towards ending GBV, and they are pivotal in shaping a future free from violence and discrimination. Their influence stretches beyond the confines of their immediate families, impacting communities and society at large.

Men and boys have a responsibility to take the lead and influence their peers, and governments must take strong measures to investigate, prosecute and punish those who establish the demand. Men and boys have a crucial role to play — as fathers, brothers, sons, husbands, and public advocates — in both speaking out against violence against women and girls, and in defying the destructive stereotypes that served to normalise gender inequality.

Here's why the role of fathers is indispensable in ending GBV.

- **Leading by Example:** Fathers are role models; their behaviours and attitudes at home profoundly shape their children's understanding of gender roles and relationships. When fathers demonstrate respect, equality, and non-violence, they teach their children these principles. Especially their sons will learn to treat women with respect, and daughters will understand what to expect in their relationships.
- **Next Generation Education:** Education is critical to fighting GBV, and fathers have the unique opportunity to educate their children about consent and boundaries through conversations about GBV being taboo while providing a safe space for their children to discuss issues related to gender and relationships, fostering an environment where equality and respect are paramount.
- **Public Advocate for the fight against GBV:** Fathers can serve as allies and advocates in their communities by supporting initiatives that encourage gender equality, participating in GBV campaigns, and using their voices to speak out against GBV. As a result, this can inspire peers, challenge traditional norms, and support policies that protect and empower GBV victims.
- **Establish Compassion:** Compassion drives commitment towards ending GBV as fathers become more attuned to the need for change in women's and girls' challenges of feeling valued and safe.
- **Inspirational:** Whatever action a father takes against GBV, it inspires other men to do the same. Such collective action can lead to a cultural shift in which violence will no longer be tolerated and where respect and equality become the norm.
- **Taking Action:** Ending GBV violence requires the effort of everyone, but fathers hold a powerful position to drive change by educating their children, becoming allies, challenging stereotypes, and building compassion.

The right to life, freedom of expression, and equality before the law are being compromised by acts of GBV. A woman has the right to feel safe in her relationship and home. But it's hard to know how to leave an abusive partner without being put in danger.

Despite the grim picture, statistics suggest that women are beginning to take steps to report GBV cases. In the past, most cases of GBV were considered family or private issues and went unreported.

Here are some appropriate responses to domestic violence victims:

- Resources are available such as talking to a counsellor on domestic violence helplines: 933 for GBV and 166 for children.
- You are not alone.
- You and your children deserve to be safe.
- I'm sorry this is happening to you.
- I'm glad you told me - I would like to help you.
- The abuse is not your fault – you are not to blame for someone else's violence.
- You have the right to make your choices, including the decision to leave an abusive situation.
- Domestic violence is a crime.
- You have the right to receive protection.
- People are concerned about you and they want to help.

Change begins with education. Building a culture without GBV in society starts with educating youth and children. Public integrity against GBV calls for governments to raise awareness of the effects by engaging the educational system to aspire norms of men's integrity against GBV. Another issue to

address is creating a culture of zero tolerance for corruption by authorities to protect the rights of GBV victims. Fighting GBV and corruption in all sectors is an expensive undertaking, but it needs to be done as it has a devastating impact on the Zambian economy.

Combating violence against women required effective legal frameworks wherein laws treated violence against women as a crime with appropriate penal provisions; institutional frameworks, including women-friendly administrative mechanisms and coordinated, multisectoral efforts; and the engagement and building of partnerships with men and boys, as well as community leaders, at the grassroots level.

Widespread violence against women is one of many realities that exacerbate women's subjugation in Zambian society. Moreover, GBV is a hindrance to the attainment of gender equality and the realisation of the social and economic goals of Zambia, as it erodes the confidence of the survivors that they can contribute to development efforts.

With the announcement of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target on the elimination of violence against women, there has been a substantial increase in population-based surveys and studies measuring intimate partner violence across the world, with several countries now having conducted multiple surveys. Ending violence against women and girls reflects the core principle of the transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

As we review complaints of ethical misconduct against judges and justices during GBV court cases, we trust Transparency International will continue its efforts in its fight against corruption, and Amnesty International will continue promoting human rights. Additionally, we thank the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for their monitoring of governments' progress towards the SDG target aimed at providing global, regional, and country baseline estimates of physical or sexual, or both, violence against women by male intimate partners.

A tardy Happy Father's Day to all dads out there! Let's embrace this responsibility and use it for good to act against GBV because ending violence against women is every man's business.