

COLLECTIVELY ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

In this month's issue

Addressing Domestic violence

Join in the fight

In the name of love

The Church and Bride Price



Members of Kirewa women's forum

wrong with men being violent to women (especially their wives who need to be disciplined when they err).

Many of these communities have rigid definitions of the roles of women and being a man is defined as being tough, domineering and demanding respect and honour.

Across the country and around the world, women's rights organizations and community based organisations like MIFUMI are doing their best in helping victims of violence through sensitisations, trainings, and providing services like counselling, advice, legal representation, shelter and community advocacy through the Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) and other women rights groups.

In the past domestic violence and violence against women had proved difficult to fight. However, in recent years, it has been recognized as both a health and human rights issue. This therefore makes it everyone's responsibility to change existing societal and individual attitudes that accept violence against women as normal by mobilising all sections of the family, community and society to bring together diverse local, national, regional and international efforts to end violence against women. This bigger group will in turn build popular pressure to implement equitable policies that recognise women and children as equal beings in society.

Violence against women has been attributed to a number of socio-cultural factors that breed gender inequality often brought about by difference in the socialisation of boys and girls, misrepresentation of women's bodies, women's unequal access to the political, economic and legal sectors and the use of violence to solve interpersonal conflicts.

Even after many years of campaigns against violence against women and domestic violence, the world continues to register an increase in the prevalence of violence against women at different levels of society.

Governments at local and national level need to acknowledge that violence against women is a serious social issue that needs combined efforts to come up with lasting solutions. For instance, in 2008, the Tororo district local government realized that Bride Price was a leading cause of violence against women and young girls; and also a means

of unfair treatment of young men, widows, the deceased and the bereaved. Women stayed in violent relationships because their Parents could not refund Bride Price paid to them. Young girls were being married off for financial and materialistic gains, young men were imprisoned for failure to pay Bride Price and deceased women were being denied burial until their spouses paid. Embarking on mass campaigns and sensitizations, the district local government passed the Bridal gifts Ordinance that redefined Bride Price as a gift that is not demanded or refundable.

As individuals, if one has experienced violence or abuse as a child or witnesses marital violence in the home, then one is more likely to perpetrate or suffer the same in their homes. This is made worse by community and cultural isolation of women which denies them any form of social support.

The men in these communities have been raised to believe there is nothing

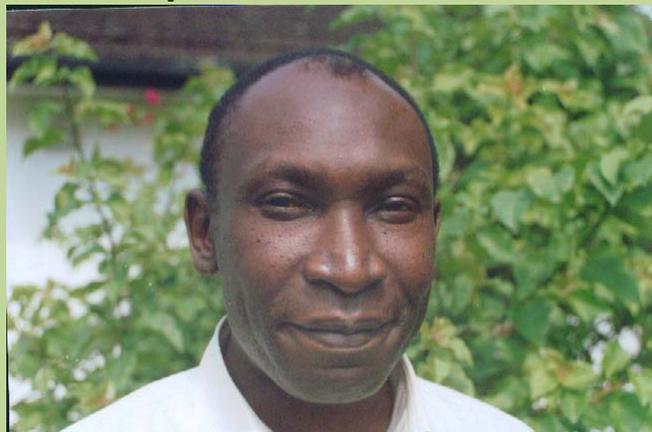
HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR COMMUNITY IN ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN.

Many have been affected by domestic violence; either as victims or witnesses. Others have simply read about it and wondered what they can do about it.

Here are a few things you could do:

- Visit your nearest women's rights NGO or community group and volunteer to support abused women and children either directly or at your community by helping them access available services. A lot of the organisations that help victims and survivors of abuse need assistance from the public.
- Participate in local and national women's rights events and activities including the 16 days of activism campaign against violence against women.
- You may not be able to do much physically but you can donate to this cause in both monetary and materialistic terms. You will have made a big difference.
- SPEAK OUT against domestic violence and child abuse at any given opportunity and encourage victims, family and members of the community to challenge and report any form of abuse.
- Publicise the gravity of this problem using any available communication channel at your disposal. Write, document and share
- You can do much more than what is listed here if you want to end violence in your community.

Fr. Paul Okoth on Bride Price and the position of the church.



Fr Paul Okoth

The church doesn't acknowledge Bride Price because Bride Price means paying for something.

According to the Bible, man is created in the image of God nothing less. How do you reduce that image of God to something that is monetary? How do you value or equate God's image to goats, chicken and cows? You cannot do that and think you are a Christian.

I believe any gifts exchanged at a marriage ceremony should be presented to the couple for their well being and not wasted for the pleasure of in-laws.

We have had cases where a young happy couple is denied a wedding because the boy and his relatives cannot afford the Bride Price they have been asked to pay. If any of us is going to act against a sacrament which is supposed to be holy because of money or Bride price, then we are not acting in a godly way.

Bride Price is opposed to Christian morals.

Father Paul Okoth,

St. Austin Church, Mbale

All in the name of love

Even when I saw him as irregularly as once a week, I considered myself happily married compared to some women in my village who had to share their husband with three or four other women; always fighting over who is the better wife to the man and whose children he loves more.

Each time I saw them at the well, I sneered at them. Ironically, one evening when my husband returned with a beautiful young woman and introduced her to me as Juliet, his second wife, she was the one sneering at me. We were going to live together and share everything. I looked at my husband in disbelief searching for reasons for his decision, but he did not blink and I knew then I should not dare question him.

Juliet was beautiful and friendly, in a few weeks, I stopped looking at her as the enemy but simply as a rival. She especially took a liking to my children. We did the chores in turns each of us trying secretly to prove to our husband who the better wife was.

Months later Juliet started complaining as to why she should cook and be burden with other chores when actually she can decide to feed herself and her husband. She kept my children really close to her but I did not see anything wrong with that until one of my children shocked me by telling me she hated me because I was a bad mummy who “wanted to kill daddy and mummy Juliet”, that was why daddy liked to beat me; because I was a bad evil woman.

I asked her where she had heard that and she responded *‘from mummy Juliet’*. I immediately confronted Juliet about feeding my children with lies and involving children in adult issues. She screamed at me calling me a stupid old hag who was jealous of her beauty and it was just a matter of days before I would be thrown out. Then she would become the only woman of the house and own my children. This time I did not care if my husband beat me for standing up to him. I waited until he had returned and had his meal before I raised my fears with him.

Before I could even finish my first sentence his right hand had struck my right cheek with such fury that I was blinded for a few seconds. He said Juliet had already told him of my evil plans and today he was going to show me who the man of the house was.

He asked Juliet to hold me down as he mercilessly rained slaps, kicks and punches on me. Together with Juliet, they threw me out of the house and asked me to leave.

I told them I would only leave with my children. My husband told me I had no children in that home. All the children belonged to him and Juliet now. I pleaded with them to forgive me but they would not listen. All I could hear were the cries of my children in the house. That night I left for my parent’s home in the next village and reported the matter to the LCI chairman who referred me to MIFUMI.

MIFUMI supported me through the period of recovery and it was then that I realised that I had only been happily married for two weeks out of all the ten years I had been with my husband. I could not count on my fingers and toes the number of times he had beaten me like this. I wondered how many women in my village still thought having a man at whatever cost was happiness.

The LCI, Tororo Police and MIFUMI supported me in getting my children back. MIFUMI continues to support me on my road to full recovery.

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