

Key Findings and Recommendations of

The Sociological Profiling of Perpetrators of Domestic Violence in Mauritius

Study Commissioned by
The Parliamentary Gender Caucus

Mauritius National Assembly

April 2018

Study undertaken by the University of Mauritius

**With the support of the United Nations
Development Programme**

Background

At its meeting held on 24 November 2017, the Parliamentary Gender Caucus, agreed that a Study be commissioned on the “Sociological Profiling of Perpetrators of Domestic Violence” in Mauritius.

The aim of the study is to provide a sociological analysis of the characteristics of perpetrators who use violence in their intimate partner relationships in Mauritius. Retracing the evolution of perpetrators, the study further identifies the risk factors and triggers of domestic violence from their childhood to adulthood; and provides recommendations for the support and rehabilitation of perpetrators and support to victims; and addressing the broader socio-economic and cultural context that supports this behaviour.

The study was led by a team of researchers from the University of Mauritius. The study was undertaken by Mr. I. Koodoruth, Senior Lecturer in Sociology and Mr. R. Sultan, Senior Lecturer in Economics. The Study was carried out in collaboration with the Commissioner of Police, the Woman Police Inspector at the Police Family Protection Unit and Officers of the Family Welfare and Protection Unit at the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare.

Aim

This study analyses the socio-demographic as well as psycho-social risk markers for domestic violence by perpetrators from their childhood to their adulthood. It further identifies factors that increase women's risk of becoming or remaining victims of domestic violence. Finally, it provides recommendations to address the root causes of domestic violence and the broader socio-economic and cultural context that underpins violence in the couple. Given that statistics reveal that domestic violence is largely perpetrated by males in Mauritius, the study accordingly focuses on this particular segment of the population.

Methodology

In order to identify the characteristics of male perpetrators of domestic violence, a comparison between three groups of respondents was carried out. The respondents in all three groups were selected using a random sampling method. Altogether, a total of 250 respondents were interviewed. The three groups are as follows:

- (i) the first group comprises those who have been identified as perpetrators. This group has been referred to as the **reported male perpetrators group** which includes 50 perpetrators who have been involved in police cases and/or have been reported to the Police Family Protection Unit (PFPU) and the Family Support Bureau (FSB). Respondents were asked to report at the FSB and the PFPU on a random basis and those who agreed to participate in the study were interviewed;
- (ii) the second group concerns those who perpetrate domestic violence but have not been identified as such by any institution. They are identified as the **non-reported male perpetrators group** which includes 145 respondents; and
- (iii) the third group is constituted of those men who do not perpetrate domestic violence.

They are called the **control group**. Fifty-five respondents in a couple relationship with no problem of domestic violence have been interviewed.

Additionally, data was also retrieved from the Domestic Violence Information System¹ (DOVIS) and thirty-five cases were analysed to provide qualitative data for the purpose of the study.

¹ The DOVIS is a web-based computer system for registration of reported cases of domestic violence under the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare. The system allows for data harmonisation, easier record keeping and faster retrieval of information on domestic violence issues.

General Findings

- ❖ Whilst looking at the evolution of a perpetrator from childhood to adulthood, it was found that there was no direct correlation between growing up in a violent household and the perpetration of domestic violence in later life.
- ❖ The findings of the Study reveal that there is not one single profile of a perpetrator of domestic violence; rather there are numerous risk factors and situational triggers to domestic violence.
- ❖ The profile of a perpetrator of domestic violence includes, *inter alia*, being manipulative, jealous, emotional and having strong patriarchal values.
- ❖ The various forms of violence reported by victims include:
 - physical violence, namely, kicking, slapping, hitting, burning, stabbing, threatening with an object likely to cause physical harm to the person;
 - sexual violence, namely, forced sexual relations accompanied by either physical violence or the threat of physical violence;
 - emotional and psychological violence, namely, systematically degrading the victim's self-worth through name-calling or demeaning comments, threats to harm or kill the victim or the victim's family;
 - controlling the sleeping habits and social relations of the victim; and
 - perpetrating economic violence, by controlling the victim's access to financial means.

General Recommendations

- ❖ The Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) sector and Social Workers should be encouraged to step-up their complementary role to Government in order to address the problem of domestic violence in Mauritius, in light of their ability to conduct targeted actions at grass-roots level. Similarly, NGOs and Social Workers interact with a wide variety of formal and informal groups which enable them to network and leverage their activities and resources.
 - With an increasing importance being paid at the grass-root level in terms of mapping of those individuals and households that are potentially at risk of violence, it is recommended that NGOs and Social Workers form a network and work in a holistic and collaborative manner to provide assistance both to victims and perpetrators of domestic violence.
 - Together with the collaboration of NGOs, aggressive sensitisation programmes should be organised throughout the island to address gendered social relations by targeting different groups of individuals (from youth groups in youth centres to members of socio-religious organisations to members in social welfare/community centres) who may be at risk of violence perpetration. Subsequently, there should be a mobilisation of Officers working at the community level, such as Youth Officers, Family Welfare and Protection Officers and Social Welfare Officers, amongst others.
- ❖ The existing legal framework of the Protection from Domestic Violence Act should be strengthened to prevent re-victimisation and redress any gaps pertaining to perpetuation of domestic violence.
- ❖ In order to have a coordinated mechanism to collect data and guide policy making, it is recommended that a Research and Strategy Office be established to conduct research, gather relevant data and identify emerging issues related to domestic violence and gender based violence.
- ❖ In light of the fact that, amongst other risk markers and triggers, there is also an underlying gendered power dynamics at play linked to perpetration of domestic violence, the gendered socialisation process needs to be addressed at the level of the family and at school level.
 - Good parenting practices and role-modelling should be strengthened through the National Parental Empowerment Programme and *Ecole des Parents* at the level of the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare;

- The school curriculum should include programmes on strengthening the emotional intelligence of children to teach the latter how to redirect their frustrations without resorting to violence; and
 - The school curriculum should be further inclusive of courses on moral and human values and principles of gender equality and human rights as from an early level.
-
- ❖ The media remains a powerful partner in sensitisation of the public on the subject of domestic violence. Different media houses are called upon to play a critical role in terms of shaping public discourse around domestic violence and educating the public at large on the gendered socialisation process, gendered roles and norms.
 - ❖ The Code of Advertising Practice and Code of Ethics of the Independent Broadcasting Authority should be made gender sensitive. Moreover, when designing advertisement/ publicity campaigns, care should be taken to avoid gender stereotyping.

Key Findings

FINDING 1- Marital Status

Marital status remains a risk marker for domestic violence perpetration. The study reveals that those victims living in an *Union Libre* remain at a higher risk of violence perpetration.

RECOMMENDATION 1

In order to have a more targeted approach towards addressing this specific category of individuals, it is recommended that NGOs and community based organisations act as complementary partners to the Government entities.

Professional Social Workers working at the community level should become familiar with the demographics of the area they are working in. They should be aware of the different types of community resources available in those areas.

They may be called upon to identify victims living in an *Union Libre* and endeavour to give them priority when imparting counselling on “Couple Communication Skills”. These counselling sessions may include door-to-door campaigns, as well as more in-depth sessions as advised by professionals.

FINDING 2- Level of Education

Given that a person’s level of education is often associated with earning ability and status in society, a man with a lower level of education may perceive his partner’s higher educational achievement as a threat. The man feels threatened by the perceived superiority of his female partner, and resorts to domestic violence to regain control over her.

Low level of education among both male perpetrators and victims of domestic violence is a risk marker of domestic violence. Similarly, a higher level of education among women as compared to their partner represents another risk marker of domestic violence.

The research has shown that key familial transitions such as the changing roles for the woman from that of being only a wife to career/ professional woman in paid employment, along with gaining a higher level of education creates a *rapport de force* in the marital relationship.

The greater participation of married women with dependent children in the paid labour force impacts negatively on the expectations of married life by the partner, and further impacts on the gendered roles of women and men in relation to their family responsibilities.

Furthermore, work practices that are not “family friendly” may reduce the space for couples to resolve differences and have a strong impact upon the well-being of marital relationships.

RECOMMENDATION 2

To address stress-factors threatening harmonious couple relationships, it is being recommended that Couple Communication (CC) skills-based training programmes for married couples be organised by the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare (MGECDWF), and complemented by relevant sectoral NGOs.

Concurrently, in a bid to yield the expected results, it is recommended that the existing Pre-Marital Counselling and Marriage Enrichment Programmes offered by the MGECDWF be evaluated periodically and reorganised at community level in an appropriate venue.

There is also the need to address the patriarchal values and unequal gendered power dynamics in the household through aggressive and sustained awareness campaigns targeting women and men at the community levels, in the workforce and all levels of society in a bid to address the gendered socialisation process, gendered norms and roles.

Policies which call for a work-life balance should be encouraged in the workplace with a view to encourage family friendly time.

FINDING 3- Employment Status

Domestic violence cuts across all socio-economic levels, ethnic groups and communities.

The findings of this study indicate that men who experience unemployment are at greater risk of Domestic Violence perpetration. The paid employment of a female intimate partner may be threatening for some men, especially those who are unemployed. Abusive partners may perceive a loss of status and power and use violence or coercion to regain control.

More than 50% of reported perpetrators of domestic violence and non-reported perpetrators of domestic violence do not have a permanent job. The level of unemployment for the perpetrator is highest among the reported perpetrators of domestic violence group.

Unemployment is a risk marker of domestic violence as a very high percentage of perpetrators does not have a permanent job.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Economic justice and gender equality should be pursued as a strategy to reduce violence against women. The Social Integration and Empowerment Act (2016)² should be gender mainstreamed. While setting up empowerment programmes for the implementation of the Act, family counselling sessions should be conducted to educate both husband and wife on what the concept of gender equality entails so as to ensure that women empowerment does not result in frustration among men.

The Marshall Plan aiming to eradicate poverty and social exclusion in Mauritius should be implemented in a phase-wise manner, with costed short, medium and long term outputs and outcomes. The Social Register Mechanism would be the most appropriate means of identifying families concerned.

The Citizen Support Unit which operates a Citizen's Support Portal, set up at the Prime Minister's Office, can be used to do a mapping of social problems to identify areas which require special support. Together with the Citizen Advice Bureaux, think tanks can be set up with professional social workers and other relevant stakeholders in these areas to establish an action plan for immediate implementation with a view to strengthening vulnerable families.

Increasing the number of women and children shelters in a decentralised manner across the island would provide a solution for women who are ready to leave the abusive relationship. NGOs may explore the possibility of tapping into the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Foundation to fund the setting up of these shelters.

FINDING 4- Number of Hours Worked

Work-family conflict results when there are incompatible demands between the work and family roles. Work-family conflict is more prevalent among male perpetrators.

In the case of reported perpetrators who were employed, it was revealed that 55% of perpetrators worked more than 8 hours a day.

The long number of hours worked is thus a strong marker for domestic violence perpetration.

² Proclamation No. 59 of 2016, with effect from 15 December 2016

RECOMMENDATION 4

A balanced life-style should be promoted. A number of recreational and leisure activities should be organised at the community level. These activities should be accessible to all Mauritian families. Both the public sector and the private sector should consider the welfare of families and promote activities to implement family-friendly workplace policies to assist employees to have a better work/family balance.

The activities by Social Welfare Centres, Youth Centres and Women Empowerment Centres should be revamped to maximize on the use of existing infrastructure.

FINDING 5- Sharing of Household Chores

It is revealed that if male partners play an active and equal role in the household, in terms of sharing of household duties, this relieves the burden of care on the female partners. In such households, violence is less likely to take place.

A high percentage of non-reported and reported perpetrators of domestic violence (33%) do not participate at all in household chores both during week days and weekends.

On the other hand, in the control group, 90% of men spend time on household chores and the pattern of time spent on household chores is similar both on week days and during weekends.

Stereotyped gender roles, unequal power relations and patriarchal bias within the relationship are risk markers of domestic violence as they correlate highly with the perpetration of violence.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Breaking through gendered stereotypes and gendered socialisation processes should start at an early age, within the family setting, and thereafter at school. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research (MEHRTESR) will be called upon to mainstream gender in the school curriculum.

Men's active support for gender equality through a variety of forms should be promoted in our society namely by advocacy, sensitisation campaigns and educational programmes for young men.

The Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare (MGECDWF) together with NGOs working on gender equality in the Mauritian society, must actively promote the 'Men as Partners' project and strengthen the advocacy towards the "He for She campaign" launched by UN Women.

FINDING 6- Personality Traits and Mental Health Issues

Perpetrators of domestic violence tend to report a higher level of emotional problems, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, aggressiveness and sleeping problems.

A perpetrator typically holds strong patriarchal values, is jealous, manipulative, inconsistent, and inflicts pain. Moreover, intimidating others is a normal behaviour for the perpetrator. Most perpetrators do not attend counselling sessions.

There is a strong correlation between poor mental health status and being a perpetrator of domestic violence.

Mental health issues remain a risk marker of domestic violence.

RECOMMENDATION 6

NGOs and Social Workers are called upon to identify individuals with mental health issues within the area that they operate in for a more targeted approach. In order to enable them to do so, they should be provided continuous training and capacity building. The field of social work should be professionalised, with NGOs and Government social workers pooling their efforts and resources to operate as a network, and to create synergy, increase efficiency and effectiveness.

In line with the recommendation of the World Health Organisation (WHO) for effective mental health policy, psychiatrists and psychologists must be posted in each regional hospital. Community physicians must be trained on mental health diagnosis and case management.

FINDING 7- Types of Domestic Violence

Distinguishing among the triggers and types of domestic violence, for example, between situational couple violence, or coercive control violence, ultimately helps in designing appropriate rehabilitation programmes for the perpetrators.

Situational couple violence (SCV) is usually due to poor communication skills, impulsivity and high levels of anger. SCV is most often used by non-reported perpetrators of domestic violence. The violence is episodic but not ongoing. It is found that SCV is more prevalent in families from a lower socio-economic status.

Substance and alcohol misuse are also factors that lead to escalation of SCV.

Coercive control is almost inexistent among the control group.

Coercive control is the type of domestic violence most often used by reported perpetrators of domestic violence. Male perpetrators are manipulative, aim to get what they want by any means so as to take complete control over their partner.

RECOMMENDATION 7

In Family Support Bureaux (FSBs), Health Care Professionals should be able to differentiate between the several types of domestic violence with a view to designing targeted rehabilitation programmes for each type of perpetrators of domestic violence.

In order to address situational couple violence, relationship enhancement therapy may be used; whilst Moral Reconciliation Therapy may be used in the case of coercive control violence.

The role of Social Workers and NGOs remains crucial to map out a profile of high risk areas. Psychologists and Psychiatrists may hold Counselling sessions using these above-mentioned techniques in Community Health Centres/ Area Health Centres/ FSBs for rehabilitation of perpetrators.

FINDING 8- Main Causes of Domestic Violence

The perpetration of domestic violence is multi-causal and cannot be accounted by only one factor.

The study shows that 53.5% of non-reported perpetrators and 44.9% of the reported perpetrators see financial problems as one of their main causes of domestic violence.

Other causes which are considered as the major triggers of situational violence by both non-reported and reported perpetrators as compared to the control group include:

- mobile phone calls/ social media;
- alcohol and substance misuse;
- extramarital affairs; and
- past abusive experience.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Given that the dynamics of domestic violence operate differently in each case, no cause and effect relationship can be established. Therefore, Officers dealing with cases of domestic violence should be further trained on the type of questioning of victims and perpetrators depending on individual circumstances, as well as on the identification of gender-based violence issues. A monitoring and evaluation mechanism should be set up to monitor progress of perpetrators towards rehabilitation.

The Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare and relevant stakeholders should provide Intervention Programmes to perpetrators as a comprehensive approach to rehabilitate them and bring behavioural change and attitude.

Presently in Mauritius, the Protection from Domestic Violence Act (PDVA) provides under *Section 3* that “the Court may, subject to the consent of both parties, order the parties to attend counselling sessions organised by the Ministry” of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare. It is recommended that the PDVA be amended to make provision for mandatory counselling for perpetrators.

In addition to mandatory counselling, it is further recommended that the PDVA be also reviewed to strengthen the protection given to victims of domestic violence to prevent the risk of re-victimisation.

When setting up programmes to assist victims of domestic violence, the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare should also consider the cultural barriers that prevent victims of domestic violence from leaving abusive relationships.

FINDING 9- Type of violence perpetrated

Male abusers are more dependent on their partners in comparison to men who are not violent. A higher level of dependence may generate attachment anxieties which is manifested through higher levels of intimate jealousy leading to increased perpetration of domestic violence and more severe cases of perpetration of intimate aggression.

For three types of violence (Verbal Abuse; Violent Jealousy and Violent Control), the level of occurrence of violence is higher for the non-reported perpetrators of DV and highest for the reported perpetrators of DV as compared to the control group.

An analysis of cases of the three types of violence shows that the reported perpetrators group tend to be almost three times more violent than the control group.

A trigger of domestic violence in everyday life interaction is attributable to excessive emotional dependency which is likely to result in feelings of possessiveness.

RECOMMENDATION 9

Violent coercive control which is perpetrated through excessive emotional control of the partner should be addressed through Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT). Capacity building programmes in MRT should be provided to Family Welfare Officers and Prison Welfare Officers to improve the quality of services offered to perpetrators of domestic violence, including those who are in custody in prisons.

FINDING 10- Level of Morality

Moral and immoral behaviour refer to a wide range of behaviour that are judged according to generally accepted moral norms that are established by human groups. Violence in any form violates the norms and is therefore labeled immoral. Moral identity works as a self-regulatory mechanism that motivates moral action and is driven by the need for consistency.

All three groups tend to show relatively the same level of agreement concerning what is moral and legal. This indicates that the values of what is moral and what is legal is shared by all members of Mauritian society irrespective of whether one is a perpetrator or not of domestic violence.

RECOMMENDATION 10

In the implementation of Perpetrator Intervention Programmes, the level of morality displayed among perpetrators should be considered as an entry point to rehabilitate the latter to show respect to their partners in their everyday life.

Sustaining classes on moral and human values, as well as civic education and human rights education should be considered at the school level, as well as youth groups, social workers in social welfare centres and women centres amongst others.

FINDING 11- Feelings of victims of Domestic Violence

A significant number of women prefer to stay in an abusive relationship as they fear severe retaliation due to poor enforcement of the legislation. Although they suffer from depression, terror, and moral and physical exhaustion, they prefer to remain with the perpetrator.

Poverty is a significant barrier which prevents women who are in an abusive relationship from leaving this relationship, as they may be economically dependent on the perpetrator.

RECOMMENDATION 11

The number of shelters should be increased to provide additional transitional housing facilities, pending the psychological rehabilitation of victims. Economic empowerment programmes should also be established at the level of these shelters to enable victims to become financially independent.

Conclusion

This study constitutes a first in Mauritius as it seeks to fill in the gaps on the sociological profile of a perpetrator of domestic violence. It has sought to analyse the factors in an individual's life, from childhood to adulthood, that lead to the perpetration of domestic violence. The study therefore argues that the perpetration of violence is multi-causal and multifarious, ranging from psychological abuse to physical acts of violence. It furthermore states that, whilst some perpetrators have experienced violence in the household during childhood, there is, nevertheless, no proven direct relationship between having grown up in a violent environment and continuing the cycle of violence in adulthood. The study propounds that there are situational triggers, risk markers and triggers of domestic violence and concludes that there is not a direct cause and effect relationship that can be established between growing up in a violent environment and continuation of the cycle of violence later in life.

Concurrently, the study reveals that there are different dynamics at play that result in the perpetration of violence, including *inter alia*, unemployment, long hours of work, the heavy use of alcohol, mental illnesses, and the unequal gendered power dynamics in the household. Likewise, although domestic violence cuts across socio-economic classes, the study identifies the factors that result in non-reporting of the abusive relationship, which include low-income and poverty.

The fact that Mauritius is signatory to various women's rights instruments and reports periodically on the status of gender equality implies a level of accountability towards looking at women's rights as equal human rights. These findings have deep implications for policy making to strengthen existing efforts at the national level to eliminate domestic violence in a holistic manner.

A number of tangible recommendations have been made in this report, which may be circulated to relevant stakeholders to formulate an implementation plan through costed medium-term outputs and longer term outcomes. Concurrently, the actions of Government need to be complemented by those of NGOs and social workers or community-based organisations working on the ground for interventions to yield the expected results.