

The Reciprocal Experience of Victims And Law Enforcement Officials Dealing With Domestic Violence Cases; Yeka Suby City, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Women have little contact with the criminal justice system (CJS), and their unique circumstances and needs are overlooked by the CJS. Understanding the victim's point of view and interactions with law enforcement officers is thus critical for developing policy, and practice standards and informing professionals working in policing and the justice system. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the reciprocal experience of victims and law enforcement officials dealing with domestic violence cases; in Yeka suby city, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The study took a qualitative approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions (FGD). Accordingly, key informant interviews have conducted with five police officers and two social workers. Likewise, in-depth interviews have been held with four police officers and seven victims. As a result, the researcher conducted 18 interviews with police officers, victims of domestic violence, and social workers. Moreover, the researcher also conducted three focus group discussions with police officers, domestic violence victims, and social workers in separate subgroups. The study found that law enforcement officials in the study area provide little or no assistance to victims of domestic violence. As a result, victims are brought into contact with the CJS when the problem is severe and/or the offense is discovered by patrol officers at a hot spot. The study also discovered that victims are not interested to report their victimization of domestic violence. They visit criminal justice officials in an extreme situation and once the case is reported to law enforcement officials, many victims do not want their offenders prosecuted for a variety of reasons. The most important justification, as revealed by the study, is victims' economic dependency, absence of clear victims' protection mechanisms and policy and cultural factor where abuse of women, such as beating by intimates, is largely an accepted norm in a given community. Thus, the study recommends policy supported awareness creation for criminal justice officers, victims, offenders as well as for the community in general. Moreover, the government should have clear mechanism of supporting economic dependent victims to encourage good interaction with criminal justice officers. Finally, there should be a strategy that encourages the positive relationship between law enforcement officials and victims. Thus, there should be also victims' protection mechanisms to build trust on CJS.

Keywords: Domestic violence, victims, law enforcement officials, CJS, women, Addis Ababa



Introduction

In Ethiopia, a significant number of women experienced intimate partner violence (Ayele and Keadu 2021). But women make up a small proportion of those who come into contact with criminal justice agencies, and their unique circumstances and needs are frequently misunderstood by the criminal justice system (Earle, Nadin and Jacobson, 2014). In this regard, police officer responses to domestic violence incidents have been widely criticized (Radley, 2006). Thus, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the reciprocal experiences of victims and law enforcement officials dealing with domestic violence cases in Yeka sub city, Ethiopia.

Domestic violence research has been relatively extensive and has come from a variety of disciplines and approaches; however, our understanding of the response of the criminal justice system, particularly law enforcement officials, to domestic violence is insufficient and has yet to be explored. Existing research has primarily focused on victims of domestic violence with, against, or for their abuse perpetrator, with a particular emphasis on women's immediate reactions to domestic abuse.

Similarly, most studies (Ayele and Keadu, 2021; Eyerusalem, 2021) in Ethiopia have focused on the experiences of victims and consequences of domestic violence. Thus, unlike the vast majority of existing studies on the impact of domestic violence, this study investigated the relationship between domestic violence victims and law enforcement officials.

Furthermore, there is a marked lack of academic literature addressing this topic in Ethiopia, and as a result, the issue focusing on the relationship between domestic violence victims and law enforcement officials is on the periphery and has not received adequate attention. This study investigated the dual relationship between domestic violence victims and law enforcement officials.

The research not only adds to the criminological literature, but it is also relevant and timely in terms of improving the justice system on a national scale. More importantly, this study has a number of implications for criminal justice policy and practice at a time when domestic violence victims and their specific needs are receiving more attention.

Traditionally, institutional responses to domestic violence have focused on mediating and negotiating, if at all, women as victims of domestic violence, without taking into account the consequences of the dual relationship on the improvement of women's rights and the justice system. In particular, institutional responses have rarely recognized the ways in which the criminal justice system's response to domestic violence may cause, influence, or affect a woman's involvement in the due process of justice system. As a result, this study will investigate how the criminal justice system's response to domestic violence victims' women can have a wide-ranging impact on their lives and behavior, even bringing women into contact with the justice system and offender.

The general objective of the study is to explore the reciprocal experience of victims and law enforcement officials dealing with domestic violence cases; Yeka suby city, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Describe the experiences of domestic violence victims who have contact with the law enforcement officials
2. Identify factors that influence the law enforcement officials' decision to handle domestic violence
3. Describe the challenges of domestic violence in the criminal justice system

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Domestic violence and the response of criminal justice system can be expressed in the form of interaction that can be expressed through symbolic interaction. Symbolic interaction, as defined by George Herbert Mead (1934), is a social psychological perspective that focuses on perspective, interaction, and meaning, with an emphasis on how individuals interpret others, themselves, and their situations. As a result, one's definition of the situation gives meaning to the situation as well as the expectations of oneself and others.

Individuals are constantly interpreting situations as they move from one to the next; these situations have meaning only through people's interpretations and definitions of them. The meanings they create while interpreting situations then determine their subsequent actions (Stets and Carter, 2012).

As a result, the research article argues that an interactionist perspective can be useful in understanding how victims of domestic violence (primarily women) come to understand their abusive situations from offenders and the criminal justice system's response. This understanding may be especially important in conceptualizing how domestic violence by offenders (mostly close family members) and the response of the criminal justice system affects victims' sense of self. A better understanding of the relationship between victims of domestic violence and offenders, as well as the criminal justice system's reaction to victims' behavior, necessitates an understanding of how the interaction within an abusive relationship and the type of reaction (from the criminal justice system) modifies the self. This necessitates a discussion of role taking and reflected appraisal, as these are the two processes that symbolic interactionists use to conceptualize the self as a social product.

Role-taking is very important to symbolic interactionists because it is so important in the development of the self. Role taking, according to Turner (1969), is the foundation of interaction. It is the process of imaginatively adopting another person's perspectives during interaction.

Symbolic interactionist ideas could be used to better understand power dynamics, specifically why those in higher status positions are more successful in defining situations in which they can assert dominance. The symbolic interactionist emphasis on meanings, the application of these concepts in power relations to

understand the experiences and meanings arising from differences in economic power among family members as abuser and abused relations. In this case, the symbolic interactionist emphasis on social actions and their consequences may inform the experiences and meanings that actors associate with such types of relationships. In interactions with hegemonic masculinity, the dominant form of masculinity that is socially acceptable and required of men, this power relationship may demonstrate the concept of 'defining the situation.' In general, it refers to the ability to anticipate another's expected behavior and comprehend the world as they see it. Stets (1988) suggests that an inability to take on roles may contribute to conflict and violence, so this process may be essential for understanding domestic violence.

The process of reflected appraisal, on the other hand, can be seen as the result of adopting the viewpoint of the other while role-playing. A reflected appraisal is defined as the imagination of our appearance to the other person, his judgment of that appearance, and some kind of self-feeling, such as pride or mortification. In other words, reflected appraisals are what people believe others think of their abilities and attributes, whereas self-appraisals are how people rate their own abilities and attributes (Bouchey & Harter, 2005).

As a result, This paper that the social contexts in reflected appraisal conditions are met in the relationship between victims, offenders, and the criminal justice system in domestic violence. In other words, victims' experiences with their offender and the criminal justice system, as well as the process of reflected appraisal, may be influenced by some interpersonal conditions within the social context of domestic violence, such as dominance and status, diminished self-efficacy, and social or psychological isolation. It has been proposed that the reflected appraisal process is only one component of self-concept formation. A sense of efficacy is important in self-concept and, in particular, efficacy-based self-esteem, which is an essential component of self-concept. As a result, I contend that the social context of victims of domestic violence creates this constrained social structural condition. Domestic violence victims' self-concept may be particularly vulnerable to changes as a result of this reflected appraisal process, simply because their opportunities for efficacy are diminished. Abuse may reduce feelings of efficacy. For instance, being successful in seeking help or ending an abusive relationship may be the most effective action an abused woman can take. According to Ferraro (2006), when women attempt to leave, their efforts are frequently thwarted. Offenders employ a variety of tactics to control and manipulate their partners' physical freedom, which appears to occur most frequently when women attempt to assert their autonomy. Domestic violence victims may isolate themselves, withdraw from friends and family, or refuse to disclose abuse for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons include a fear of stigmatization, seeing the violence as a private matter within the relationship, feelings of shame and embarrassment, or depletion of the emotional resources of outside supporters if the abuse is chronic.

Research Method

For data collection, the researcher used an in-depth interview, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions. The interview technique was a semi-structured in-depth interview with victims of domestic violence, police officers and social workers who have been working with the case of domestic violence.

The researcher used specific procedures and approaches to achieve the study's objectives. First, key informant interviews were held with knowledgeable and experienced police officers as well as social workers about the issue under investigation. In this research, key-informant interviews were conducted with three police officers and two social workers. Police officers have been purposively selected based on their long year experiences in crime investigation and prevention of domestic violence cases. Likewise, social workers who have been working with domestic violence victims have been targeted during data collection. Moreover, in-depth interviews were held with four patrol police officers and five victims. The victims have been identified based on their registered contact with the police officers. The police department has contacted the victims who had contact with them about voluntariness to participate in the research. The researcher took the list of all victims who expressed their consent to participate in the study. During the victims' interview, an experienced woman has taken the role of interviewer to avoid cultural barriers. Thus, in this study, 18 interviews were conducted with police officers, domestic violence victims, and social workers.

Moreover, the researcher also conducted three focus group discussions with police officers, domestic violence victims, and social workers in a separate sub groups. Each group had seven to nine participants, and the researcher moderated the discussion. The research participants; police officers, victims, and social workers were carefully chosen and due attention was given for the following points. First, the criminal justice officer, police, would be able to provide a general picture of the issue under investigation. More importantly, criminal justice officers are the most visible and direct agents of the criminal justice system, having direct contact with victims of domestic violence and the criminal justice system as a whole. Second, the victims themselves have firsthand knowledge of the issue under investigation. They are the best source of data to understand their perception, challenges while dealing with the criminal justice system for their problem. Third, the interviewed social workers were people who had direct contact with victims. They are directly responsible for providing counseling and guidance to women and children who have been victims in the Yeka area, Addis Ababa city administration. Therefore, key informants interview was conducted with knowledgeable and experienced police officers, victims themselves and social workers.

Result and Discussion

Domestic violence has been defined by informants in various ways, including beatings of a wife and/or children by her husband and violence against

children by close family members. Domestic violence, according to the participants of the study, includes the intentional abandoning the dependent wife and children's basic monthly food supplies at a desired level. Participants also stated that rape and violence by close family members may be considered domestic violence. For them, it is a form of violence perpetrated by close family members that may result in physical harm, anxiety and social exclusion from close friends and family members. The interview with victims, one of the participants stated:

My husband abused me and caused me to lose two teeth. My entire body is covered in scratch marks. For years, I've been exhausted. I was hoping that his behavior would improve and he would stop being violent. Unfortunately, I had a lot of physical pain and was unable to see my friends. If one of my friends has a visit to me, the next step is to suffer from his attack [a long pause]...Simply put, it has been extremely torching (Victims Interview, May 2021).

During the interviews with victims, police officers and social workers, the researcher has understood the problem has been deeply rooted in the society and resulted for many sufferings on victims as well as damage for the society. Participants argued many women as well as children were suffered physically, economically, socially and psychologically. A social worker mentioned that women and children are highly suffering from domestic violence. But, she argued, less attention is given by all stakeholders including the police officers in dealing with the issue. She stated that

Domestic violence has not been addressed to the desired extent. Domestic violence social work activity has a very limited government budget, human resources, and other equipment. When we ask police officers to respond to domestic violence offenders, they are also hesitant. (Interview with a social worker, May 2021,)

Likewise, interviews with police officers revealed that domestic violence is a difficult social phenomenon in the criminal justice system, and it has received less attention, despite some improvement. One of the informants (female investigation police officer) pointed that:

It is one of the most difficult tasks in a police officer's job. To be honest, it's received less attention. In previous years, most of us thought of it as a family matter. Such understanding is still prevalent, particularly among patrol officers. It is an offense that is most often committed in private, and while we may have arrived at a place where the violence is being committed, it is still difficult to enforce (Interview held with police officer, May 2021).

According to interviewee of experienced police officers, victims of domestic violence come into contact with the criminal justice system either because the problem is severe or because the offense is detected by patrol officers. She

argued that even after the problem was reported to us or made known to us, victims still preferred not to prosecute their offenders for various reasons. She cited a story that supports her point. During the interview, she mentioned the following experiences:

*There was for instance, a man who abuses his wife. One day, the patrol officers apprehended the offender while beating his wife and the victim came to us the next day to report. She informed me that the problem was repeated and that her patience had run out. She wanted to go to court before the case. Then I opened a charge file to proceed with the case, but she came back the next day and said she wanted to stop it. I asked why she wants to stop it, and she said, "I can't live without him; I'd rather chose the stick than lose him" (Interview held with police officer, May 2021).
"I have dealt with such cases before," she added.*

Similar ideas were expressed during interviews with domestic violence victims, who stated that despite severe violence against them, most victims are hesitant to visit police officers. They claimed that the criminal justice system has no the capacity as well as interest to handle domestic violence cases. Furthermore, some interviewees argued that dealing with police officers may exacerbate their suffering rather than alleviate it. The victim's interviewee also claimed that it had exposed them to more complicated problems. One of the victims for instance stated that:

While my husband attacked me violently, I reported to the nearby police station with the help of my neighbors. The officers were hesitant and seemed unconcerned about my problem. His methods were vexing to say the least, let alone helpful. He was less inclined to take action. However, thanks to the efforts of my friends, police officers arrested my husband for one day. Unfortunately, the next day my husband has released and attacked me again, and I did nothing but accept the pain. Finally, with God's help, I divorced (Interview with domestic violence victim, May 2021.).

According to the interviews with police officers, dealing with domestic violence in the criminal justice system is a difficult task for different reasons. In the first place, some crimes, such as beatings, are crime based on complaint which requires the involvement and cooperation of victims. Second, nearly all acts of violence are committed in private. Third, the victims trust on the criminal justice system for this particular issue is not as such good. Finally, victims' financial reliance on their offenders also complicated handling of domestic violence cases in the criminal justice system. For example, the department head of an investigation office on domestic violence cases in Yeka Sub city raised the following points:

In my experience, dealing with domestic violence is difficult and time-consuming due to the country's civil and criminal laws. The legal systems have no, or very few, ways to control and safeguard the victim, exposing

victims directly to the offenders. Another issue that threatens victims' willingness to report the case is economic (Interview held with police officer, May 2021).

This idea was also reflected in the FGD with all groups of participants. The participants were critical of the criminal justice system in supporting and encouraging victims to have contact with the criminal justice system at all. During the discussion participants pointed that the justice system has no practical strategy to protect the victims suffered by their close family members. As to the participants of the study most victims are economically vulnerable women. Most victims are also women with little or educational attainment. Thus, participants argued, victims have no means of livelihood after reporting their victimization to the police. Most decisional power in the family for most victims is vested on the man's hand.

During the interview with key informants, one police has mentioned her experiences how the economic situation of victims can have a significant impact on victims and criminal justice relationships. She stated the following statement:

Many women seeking court protection expressed ambivalence about having a partner arrested and being concerned about her ability to financially provide for herself and her children while financially dependent on the offender. It only gets worse if she has children. The majority of victims are financially dependent on the offender. This situation aggravates the problem and most women prefer to be victimized frequently by their close partner than dealing their case in the criminal justice system either to the police or court. (Interview held with police officer, May 2021).

During the interviews with victims and police officers, cultural norms are also big challenge for victims to report their victimization to police and pursue further prosecution. According to informants, domestic violence is private family matters that should not be exposed to the public. Women victimization is something as normal social phenomena for significant members of the society. One of the victims for instance stated:

For many years, I remained silent while my husband physically abused me. I used to believe that the husband had the authority to do so. When the violence escalates, I contact the police.

According to the interviews many victims are embarrassed to disclose their suffering and they prefer to keep silent with their pains and suffering. Since most victims are wives, close relatives, or other close family members, they frequently prefer to remain silent because they regard it as a family matter. They are culturally ashamed if their case is made public, unless their tolerance reaches its limit due to repeated offense. For example, the victim who had contact with the police reported her case as follow:

I had no any idea to visit a police complaining against my husband. I have tolerated many days of suffering. Later on, I reported to the police when my patience and suffering have reached the limit. I was reached to a level of beyond my capacity. I've remained silent for long periods of time in fear of the embarrassment and gossip of friends and close neighbors (Interview held with police officer, May 2021).

Such kinds of practice are particularly common in cases of child rape that are committed by close family members. According to the informants, cases of child rape in their community have been committed by close family members. Likewise, Yeka sub-city investigation office representative also mentioned that homosexual rapes by friends and teachers, as well as neighbors are most frequently reported to police. But, most victims did not report for fear of isolation, stigma, and invasion of privacy.

The interviews with informants' child rape are also an alarming problem that requires the attentions of all concerned bodies. During my interview, with social workers as well as investigation police officers, they revealed that they come across many horrific stories of domestic violence victims. An investigation police officer stated her experience as follows:

I have investigated cases of children raped by their fathers, religious preachers, and others.during my investigation, I encountered vexing and horrifying cases. Sometimes I cry.... [pause] and worry about my children's future. Who can be trusted on? It's extremely difficult... [Long pause] Look, their [victims'] problems do not end immediately after the offense; they are still at risk (Interview held with police officer, May 2021).

Likewise similar feeling was expressed during the interviews with social workers. As to the interviewee, domestic violence including rape and physical violence against women is worrying that require the attentions of all stakeholders.

On the other hand, FGD participants pointed out that the criminal justice system has few, if any, mechanisms in place to protect victims from future offenses. When women approach the criminal justice system, they frequently face threats or actual retaliation from the offender. During the discussion one participant mentioned that

Such things [threat or actual retaliation] had actually occurred, and I have such a report from victims. Regrettably, I did nothing to ensure their safety. Some NGOs provide temporary shelter for child victims until the case has completed in order to prevent further violence (FGD, May 2021).

FGD participants also highlighted the criminal justice system's inability to protect victims from further offense. Participants stated that in most cases, victims did not report their victimization to police because they feared retaliation from the offender. Because a threat from an intimate partner offender is more easily

delivered by an offender who knows how to access the victim by virtue of being in the relationship. One of the FGD participants with police officer stated:

Our criminal justice system has yet to be developed. We have many internal issues, such as a lack of capacity, a shortage of human resources, and a financial deficit. We have no capacity to protect victims from any kind of physical threat posed by offenders (FGD, May 2021).

Furthermore, one of the key informants claims that in some cases, justice for victims of domestic violence includes confusion and frustration with the slow pace of the criminal justice process, as well as paralyzing fear and conflict in the victim's mind about whether the offender should go to jail. Thus, informants remarked that victims' relation with the police is highly affected by fear of retaliation from the offender, a victim's perception of the social stigma associated with victimization, and a belief that reporting to police will accomplish nothing.

In some cases, police officers regard domestic violence enforcement as 'rubbish' work that is more about a private matter and, if any, social service activities rather than law enforcement.

The police officer may be suspicious when dealing with family cases and it is better for police officers to avoid such matters if at all possible. This was expressed by one of the informants as follows:

I knew and understood that it was my duty and responsibility to enforce any kind of dispute, whether it was a burglary or a domestic dispute, but I didn't feel and thought such cases were not good to enforce for the family themselves. In our culture, it is obvious that a husband may beat his wife and it is not a big deal (Interview held with police officer, May 2021).

So most officers are aware that they have responsibilities to handle domestic violence, but they appear to compromise their professional duty to harmful traditional practices, such as the culture of beating a wife. Despite the fact that the officers had little or no experience with domestic violence prior to joining the police force, they gradually expressed skepticism about the extent to which they could impact this issue. Many times, the officers expressed doubt that their intervention would make a difference, particularly in the long run. Despite the fact that the criminal justice officers work primarily on the aftermath of domestic violence and not on prevention, it is possible that they simply see domestic violence as an intractable part of society.

Limitation Of The Study

Domestic violence against women and children is a sensitive topic that can evoke feelings of guilt and stigma. As a result, victims may have been reluctant to disclose their intimate partner violence experiences, which may have influenced the

reported prevalence in this study. As a result, the findings of this study should be interpreted in light of this limitation.

Conclusion And Recommendations

In Ethiopia's justice system, the interaction between law enforcement officials and victims appears to be negative. Informants were interested in law enforcement officials and claims that officers were hesitant to prosecute domestic violence-related crimes. The in-depth interview with informants provided insights into possible reasons for the variability found in experiences, particularly the proposed role of victim and system expectations, and informants' perception that getting help is contingent on "being lucky" with the law enforcement officials in contact.

Interviewed law enforcement officials also admitted to being hesitant to prosecute domestic violence cases. They believe that enforcing domestic violence is not their responsibility, and when confronted with a case, officers advise victims to negotiate with the offenders. Domestic violence is a private matter that should be kept within the confines of the home, according to all police officers.

As a result, the study suggests that policy-supported awareness-creation is critical for criminal justice officers, victims, and offenders. Furthermore, the government should have a clear mechanism for assisting economically dependent victims in order to encourage positive interactions with criminal justice officers. Finally, domestic violence should be clearly criminalized in Ethiopian law. Criminalization of it, combined with societal awareness creation, may serve the purpose of demonstrating its moral intolerance and, ideally, acting as a deterrent mechanism.***

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Compliance with ethical standards

The author declares that all ethical procedures have been followed during the whole process of the study. The author also declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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