



**GENDER STUDIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS
DOCUMENTATION CENTRE**

**A GUIDE TO DEVELOPING
A COMMUNITY RESPONSE
TO VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN IN GHANA**

Dorcas Coker-Appiah

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Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre (GSHRDC)

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P. O. Box AN6192
Accra North
Ghana

For all enquiries in connection with this guide, write to:

Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre
P. O. Box AN6192
Accra North
Ghana

Tel.: 233-21-760688
Fax: 233-21-760687
Email: info@gendercentreghana.org
gendcent@yahoo.com

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PREFACE

The 1990s were important years for the promotion of women's human rights globally with the affirmation of women's rights as human rights at the 1993 UN World Conference on Human Rights, the Vienna Declaration on violence against women as a human rights violation and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action adopted at the IV UN Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. The Beijing Conference saw the highest number ever of women's rights organisations participating at any international event and indeed the Plan of Action and the 12 critical areas of concern served as the focus of activities by women's groups across the world.

In 1998 when the Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre (Gender Centre) undertook a nationwide research on violence against women, (one of the 12 critical areas in the Platform of Action), one of the expected outcomes of the research was to identify ways and means of combating the problem. The findings of the research led to the development of a number of activities to address the problems identified, including the absence of support to victims of violence in rural communities.

Since 2000, the Gender Centre has, in collaboration with 6 implementing partners in Ghana developed a rural, community-based response to violence against women. The Rural Response System, (RRS) trained community men and women to provide services, including counselling, to victims of violence in their communities. This has proved effective in changing attitudes to women's role and status as well as reducing the incidence of violence within the community, not just domestic violence as was first envisaged, but even intra-familial violence generally (for example, between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law or parents and children). What has been key in this strategy is the use of both women and men in the intervention as well as ensuring the support of traditional and religious leaders. State agencies such as the Police and Health

service, the Department of Social Welfare and the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice have also been trained in order to ensure a holistic range of services for women experiencing violence.

This Guide has been written by the Gender Centre based in Accra. This document is the culmination of a great deal of work, adaptation and learning along the way by the target communities, implementing partners and the Gender Centre itself over seven years which we feel is important to share and disseminate both to practitioners in Ghana and beyond.

The purpose, then, of this Guide is to encourage civil society organisations to establish similar interventions within their own communities in efforts to mainstream women's rights and gender equality throughout their work. The Guide takes readers through the whole process of community entry, baseline survey, setting up and developing the RRS as well as training the Community based action Teams, (COMBAT).

The publication of this Guide serves as one more example of the Gender Centre's efforts in promoting women's rights in Ghana.

Dorcas Coker-Appiah,
Accra, October 2007

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In writing this Guide, I was really surprised by the great number of individuals and organisations who have contributed in no small measure to make the Rural Response System what it is today. My first appreciation is to our six implementing partners, BEWDA, Amasachina, CENSUDI, ASSID, CEDEP and GAWU who dealt directly with the communities and consequently noted and recorded our learning during the project. Secondly, our gratitude goes to all the COMBAT from the 18 communities for their commitment and dedication to the project and to the victims they supported without any reward and sometimes at the expense of their own economic activities. We cannot forget the traditional and religious leadership of the various communities as well the state agencies, the Police, Health, Social Welfare, for their support to the COMBAT and its work.

I cannot forget Kathy Cusack, the first coordinator of the Nkyinkyim Project for her meticulous notes taking which made it possible and much easier to put this Guide together. My gratitude also goes to Kanwal Ahluwalia, West Africa Programme Manager of Womankind Worldwide, our international project partner, for her comments in making this Guide reader friendly.

Finally, our most grateful thanks go to Comic Relief for their financial support to the Nkyinkyim Project without which this Guide would not have been possible.

Dorcas Coker-Appiah

BACKGROUND

Gender Centre's Research on Violence against Women in Ghana

In 1998, the Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre, in collaboration with eight implementing partners, Action Aid Ghana, Centre for Development of People (CEDEP), General Agricultural Workers' Union (GAWU), Maata "N" Tudu, Amasachina, Associates in Development (ASSID) and Centre for Sustainable Development Initiatives (CENSUDI) and Bawku East Women's Development Association, (BEWDA) undertook a nationwide research on violence against women and children (VAWAC). The aim of the research was to gather as complete and comprehensive information about violence against women (VAW) as possible.

The research tools were developed to obtain the following categories of information:

- a) the prevalence of violence
- b) information about violence types
- c) the context in which violence is enacted
- d) women's and society's responses
- e) barriers to responding
- f) recommendations for combating violence

It was intended that the first 3 categories of information (a, b and c) would identify the nature and diversity of the problem, the next 2 (d and e) would help to identify how violence is experienced and understood and the broader social responses whilst the final category (f) would assist in identifying ways and means to combat the problem.

In order to collect the information, a range of different research techniques and tools were utilised. Data was collected from all 10 regions

in Ghana using 3 different methods. A review of official police, court, health and social welfare records spanning five years (1993-1997) was one method. The others were 205 focus group discussions and the administration of a 349 question survey to 2069 women and adolescent girls. These girls and women belonged to a range of ethnic groupings, came from different regions as well as socio-economic backgrounds in a mix of rural and urban areas. The 3 different points of data collection were chosen to ensure greater accuracy and a balanced representation of multiple perspectives.

The Study Findings

The study findings revealed a broad understanding of the term violence beyond just physical violence to include sexual, psychological, economic and traditional practices.

- As elsewhere, in the world, violence is a reality for a substantial number of women.
- Violence against women is not an uncommon occurrence in Ghana.
- Women are most at risk of sexual violence in all its forms between the ages of 10-18.
- Women experience various forms of abuse.

Reasons Why Women are Abused:

Anything and everything can and is used as an excuse to justify the use of violence against women.

Factors Perpetuating Violence Against Women

During the focus group discussions, a number of points surfaced as factors that contribute to violence against women. Some of these are:

- Women and men have very defined roles in society. Any breach of those roles on the part of women can lead to violence.
- Unlike women who are accountable in both private and public spheres, men are only accountable in the public sphere to other men.
- In considering acts of violence against women, girls and children, the behaviour of the victim becomes the centre of attention.
- Rarely are perpetrators held accountable or considered to be responsible for their behaviour.

Violence Viewed as a Private Issue

- Violence against women and children is viewed as a private matter that should be taken care of within the family.
- Violence against women and children is not seen as a crime.
- Given violence is seen as a private matter, interventions are seen as an intrusion in a private affair.

Attitudes of Practitioners and Society

- In general, practitioners, like the society in which they operate, see violence as a private matter, women as both inferior to and the property of their male partners. Such biases are reflected in how they respond to reported cases of violence.

Reporting

- Reporting of violence by women is generally low for fear of blame.
- Women are inhibited in talking about their experiences of violence. When they choose to talk about their experiences of violence, the study indicates that they prefer to report informally to family, friends or members of the community.

- When women report, state agencies are the least likely venue for them to report to.
- Family and friends are important means of support when women experience violence in all its forms

Perpetrators of Violence

- Looking at all incidents of violence against women recorded in official records, the most frequent offenders were lovers, spouses, family members, acquaintances and ex-spouses.
- Contrary to popular belief that strangers are the most common perpetrators of sexual violence against women, the most common perpetrators of sexual violence are men known to the victims, including both male acquaintances and male relatives.
- Women are most at risk from men they know.

Impact of Violence

- The study confirmed that violence against women has a number of important health and social consequences.
- Violence is not neutral; it causes harm to women and children.
- Women only report violence when the situation or injury is serious.
- Violence against women has economic effects on the family as the woman may be forced to take time away from economic activities or to spend limited family resources on health care.
- Violence against women undermines their overall status in society and deprives society of women's full participation.

Conclusions and Recommendations from the research

Three main recommendations came out of the research findings:

1. The need for a comprehensive programme of response that targets both the immediate and long term needs of women and children experiencing violence.
2. In order to break the cycle of violence and social acceptance of its use, a key factor is the need to shift the responsibility for men's violence against women and children away from women and children to society as a whole.
3. While the immediate needs of women must be a priority, campaigns must not target women in isolation but should include men.

Following from these recommendations, the Nkyinkyim Project was conceptualised by the Gender Centre in collaboration with partners and communities to address the recommendations and some of the key findings. A number of other activities were also designed and carried out in the period following the launch of the research report. These are:

1. **Community awareness raising campaigns:** targeting women and children and all members of society about the issue of violence against women and children.
2. **Services for women and children:** women and children experiencing violence have many needs for different kinds of support including counselling and support services, alternative temporary and long-term housing, legal assistance and financial and/or maintenance support.

3. **Training programmes:** directed at increasing the capacity of implementing partners on the Project, state agencies (the police, health services staff and social workers), civil society organisations and individuals to be able to respond to reported and suspected cases of violence against women and children.