

Types of violence experienced by individuals in same-sex relationships in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya

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Abstract

The body of research into violence in relationships has grown substantially over the years. However, until relatively recently, much of research focused primarily on the violence perpetrated within heterosexual relationships, with men viewed largely as perpetrators and women as victims. Research into violence and abuse within same-sex relationships is therefore relatively new and, in terms of depth, relatively understudied. The study investigated experiences of intimate partner relationships with a focus on intimate partner violence (IPV) in Ainabkoi Sub-County of Uasin Gishu County in Kenya. Based on the study, this paper explores the types of violence experienced by individuals in same-sex relationships. The study was cross-sectional exploratory by design, and it utilized qualitative methods of data collection. The target population comprised all individuals in same-sex relationships in Uasin Gishu County. Snowballing technique was employed in selecting a sample size of 30 individuals in the same-sex relationships. The inclusion criterion was any person who had experienced IPV. In-depth interviews and case narratives were the main tools of data collection. Qualitative data was transcribed, coded and then thematically analysed in line with the objectives of the study. From the research findings, emotional, physical, psychological and sexual assault were the main violence types identified in the study that are experienced by individuals in intimate partner relationships. It is recommended that law enforcement personnel (police) should be given adequate training by the state to better understand the historical mistreatment of gay and lesbian individuals to encourage empathizing with the population.

Keywords: types, violence, individuals, same-sex relationships, uasin gishu county, Kenya

1. Introduction

Mental health professionals acknowledge the severity and widespread nature of intimate partner violence (IPV) (Burke & Owen, 2006) ^[5]. According to Burke *et al.* (2002) ^[6], IPV produces an array of negative consequences for the individuals who experience it, such as physical injury, mental health problems, impaired relationship functions and economic conditions and children who see any acts of parental IPV end up with emotional and behavioural problems etc. (McClennen *et al.*, 2002) ^[16]. The general perception and depiction of experiences of IPV, in the media and available literature, is of a male batterer and female victim/survivor, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2006). IPV occurs among LGBT and not only in heterosexual relationships. The survivors of violence among LGBT grapple with various challenges that are added disadvantages, as described by McClennen *et al.* (2002) ^[16] and McClennen (2005) ^[15]. Same-sex IPV has been denoted as the “double closet” because there is a lot of silence and shame that exists within the violent relationships (Kaschak, 2001; McClennen, 2005) ^[15].

A study conducted in the United States (US) by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programme in 2010 found that in their survey of 3856 participants who had experienced IPV, 4.3% were survivors and were transgendered. More importantly, the percentage was lower than the 50% women and 37% men who reported abuse by their partners. Of the men and women who reported intimate violence, 31% were gay, 26% lesbian, and around 10% were heterosexual. Out of the 3856 participants reported in the survey there were only around 10% who reported services that were utilized to assist them (NCAVP, 2010).

In a recent US report based on a national data set, the CDC found that sexual minority respondents reported rates of IPV equal to or higher than sexual majority respondents (Walters *et al.*, 2013, p. 2) ^[27]. Specifically, 44% of lesbian women, 61% of bisexual women and 35% of straight women reported having experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime. In a California health interview survey, Goldberg and Meyer (2013, p. 2) ^[10] found an IPV prevalence of 31.9% among lesbians, 52.0% among bisexual women and 32.1% among women who have sex with women (WSW) participants. Moreover, 26% of gay men, 37% of bisexual men, and 29% of straight men reported having experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime (Walters *et al.*, 2013, p. 2) ^[27].

In the studies that used purposive samples, between 19.2% and 39.0% of men who have sex with men (MSM), gay men, and bisexual men reported experiencing IPV in their lifetimes and between 11.8% and 25.5% reported experiencing IPV in the past year (Walters *et al.*, 2013, p. 2) ^[27]. The Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) has been working with the minority, marginalized and disadvantaged groups, and special attention is paid to sexual minorities such as transgender, gays, lesbians and intersex persons (KHRC, 2011) ^[13]. In the same way that IPV among LGBT is ignored and hidden in many societies especially in Africa, the issue is also hardly written about thus there is a dearth of literature on violence within LGBT relationships. Some communities even downplay the issue or do not talk about it at all, considering it irrelevant within the heterosexual population (West, 2002) ^[28].

Conceptualization of Same-Sex Relationships in Africa

According to Murray (2000) ^[17] and Murray and Rosco (1998) ^[18], sexual relations between members of the same gender is a reality that is and has always been present the world over. This is true of nations both in Africa and elsewhere in the world. Similarly, Seabrook (2004) ^[25] points out that in many traditional societies, people had many ways of accepting and accommodating sex between men and that homophobia was introduced by the colonizers and the churches that practice Christianity. This is especially true in countries that are characterized by poverty and underdevelopment, a large number of which are in Africa. In such countries, all the organs of society compound the problem of homophobia by turning a blind eye to WSWs and MSMs. Consequently, all the problems and issues they face as a social group, such as violence and health issues, e.g. sexually transmitted diseases, are ignored and this directly violates their human rights (Anyamele *et al.*, 2005) ^[12].

People across continents and cultures have their own unique ways of defining and expressing sexuality. This therefore means that one culture cannot impose its ways upon others (Robertson, 2003) ^[24]. Altman (2004) ^[1] and Jenkins (2004) ^[11] posit that Western countries have generally accepted same-sex relations and the people in same-sex relations have organized themselves into organizations and communities. This, however, is not the case in most African countries, where people do not in many cases 'come out' with their sexuality. Altman (2004) ^[1] explains that studies have been conducted that show the diversity in sexual minorities. He maintains that MSM does not necessarily mean a gay man.

According to Anyamele *et al.* (2005), not all MSM and WSW identify as GLBT. From this, two categories are derived to differentiate between those who identify and those who do not identify as lesbian and gay. The first category is MSM and WSW who do not consider themselves GLBT but have same-sex relationships with persons who identify themselves as GLBT and even socialize and interact with them. This category forms a large portion of the MSM/WSW population. In the second category, MSM and WSW do not consider themselves GLBT and, in addition, do not socialize nor have any interaction with persons who identify themselves as GLBT. They include miners, migrant workers, boarding school students, men in the military, soldiers, street boys in the stage of exploration of their sexualities, inmates in correctional facilities etc. Despite its heterogeneity, Anyamele *et al.* (2005) ^[12] refer to this second category as "special groups".

According to Onyango-ouma *et al.* (2009) ^[20]

Research on MSM and the subsequent development of sexual and reproductive health programmes including HIV/AIDS in Africa is severely constrained. Social hostility, legal persecution, epidemiological invisibility and funding gaps are some of the barriers that inhibit research on MSM (p. 1).

Types of IPV within Same-Sex Relationships

Violence in LGBTQ relationships may be referred to as 'partner violence', 'relationship violence', or 'same-sex/same-gender domestic violence'. The term "domestic violence," has, however, been used more when referring to heterosexual relationships and ascribes to some gendered roles (males as batterers and females as victims). It may, therefore, not apply in cases where violence in same-

sex/same-gender relationships is to be considered or acknowledged. Some members of the LGBT communities do not and cannot recognize because of the assumptions presented (Chung & Lee, 1999) ^[8]. Some researchers and LGBTQ groups, however, continue to use the term "domestic violence" in order to form comparisons with heterosexual violence.

Ristock (2005) ^[23] asserts that the violence that occurs within heterosexual relationships is similar in nature to the violence that happens within same sex relations. Such violence can be categorized into various forms such as physical, psychological, economic and sexual abuse as well as threats of such violence. Examples of physical abuse include slapping, kicking, punching, shoving, dragging on the floor among others. Psychological and emotional abuse occurs when one partner threatens, harasses and intimidates the other thereby causing fear. Abuse also involves verbal abuse whereby there is name-calling and insults.

Economic or financial abuse is defined by Ristock (2005) ^[23] as occurring when one partner denies the other financial sustenance and controls the other by using money. It can also take place when the dominant partner refuses the other to work or support themselves financially. Sexual abuse is violence of a sexual nature and occurs when one partner forces the other to have sexual intercourse or acts of a sexual nature without consent. It includes rape, sodomy, penetrating genitals using either a part of the body or an object and so on (Ristock, 2005) ^[23].

In considering the dynamics of LGBTQ violence, there is, sometimes, a pattern to the violence that presents itself. Ristock (2002) ^[22] explains two patterns: one being characterized by violence that escalates with time and thus gradually increases. The other is characterized by a pattern that is not incremental in nature, rather tends to occur almost unpredictably. Marrujo and Kreger (1996) ^[14] add that, unlike physical violence in heterosexual couples where in most cases the abuser tends to be physically larger and stronger, the same among same-sex partners shows a slight difference, whereby in many cases the perpetrator and survivor may be of nearly equal physical build or the aggressor may even be physically smaller. The authors also note that self-defence is a common explanation for the violence that occurs among same-sex relations whereby one partner responds to violence or threats of violence by using physical violence in return (Marrujo & Kreger, 1996) ^[14].

There is a mainstream perception that victims are 'passive' and these actions may go against these perceptions. This perception arises as a result of the nature of domestic violence among heterosexual partners; that the man is the abuser and aggressor and the female is the passive victim. People thus believe that among lesbians for instance, the feminine 'femme' partner is the passive recipient to the abuse meted out by the masculine 'butch'. Imposing this heterosexist perception upon same sex violence is, however an incorrect assumption. The real nature of intimate partner violence among same sex couple shows a unique dynamic, and differs considerably from the heterosexual violence. Study into the dynamics of same sex intimate partner violence reveals that an individual's physical appearance cannot definitively state that the individual is an abuser or a victim and different types of sexualities must be considered separately and their uniqueness appreciated (Ristock, 2005, p. 4) ^[23].

According to Ristock (2005) [23], types and forms of violence across sexualities are fairly similar in nature, progression as well as the effects of abuse. There are, however, key differences that are unique to same sex partnerships (Ristock, 2005) [23]. These differences arise out of the very aspect of society that LGBTI groups suffer from such as homophobia from heterosexual people. Within LGBTI themselves, there exists ‘biphobia’ and ‘transphobia’ and this discrimination mimics what the larger society does to the sexual minorities. Ristock (2005) [23] explains that since the society shames and discriminates the sexual non-conforming people, threats of ‘outing’ LGBTI members to the wider public is one of the abusive tactics unique to LGBTI groups (Ristock, 2005) [23].

Statement of the Problem

IPV is an existing problem and prevalent among same-sex relationships but is not reported as much as in heterosexual population. There is a gap in knowledge on the experiences of IPV in same-sex relationships, especially in Uasin Gishu County. The dearth of inquiry around the experiences of same-sex IPV victims is likely because the individuals have been marginalized and there is a historical reluctance to report violence (Blosnich & Bossarte, 2009) [3].

Very little research and attention has focused on the nature of IPV within same-sex relationships. Existing studies indicate that it occurs at the same frequency and at higher rates when compared to heterosexual couples (Strasser *et al.*, 2012) [26]. Research into same-sex IPV has revealed various similarities with heterosexual relationships. Among the similarities, scholars have singled out the influence of abusing substances, power dynamics, traditional gender beliefs and perceptions, and violence in the family that the individual comes from as correlative factors to the perpetration of IPV (Burke & Follingstad, 1999; West, 1998, 2002) [28, 29]. Among the differences are the structural realities of homophobia and heterosexism (Burke & Follingstad, 1999). Heterosexism and homophobia are used by perpetrators/abusers to further isolate victims/survivors; a unique part of IPV experienced by LGBT (Renzetti, 1992) [21].

Few countries have existing systems to monitor, record and report incidents and experiences of violence, making the quantification of homophobic and transphobic violence a complex process. Even where such systems may be present, there still exist barriers that hinder survivors of IPV such as the fear of retaliation by the abusers, fear of being ‘outed’ or the fear of being further stigmatized or discriminated by homophobic service providers. In this regard, there was need to shed light on the issue of intimate partner violence among LGBT by generating data and evidence on IPV within the same-sex relationships and also identify the barriers, if any, that still exist when responding to this form of violence in order to address gaps that still exist.

2. Materials and Methods

Situated in the mid-west of Kenya’s Rift Valley, some 330km North West of Nairobi, Uasin Gishu is a cosmopolitan county, covering an area of 3345.2 square kilometres. The County borders Kericho County to the South, Nandi County to the South-west, Kakamega County to the North-west, Bungoma County to the West, and Trans Nzoia County to the North. It has three main divisions, namely Eldoret North, Eldoret South and Eldoret East, which are further subdivided

into six constituencies (Sub-counties) (GOK, 2012) [9]. This was a cross-sectional exploratory study, utilizing qualitative methods of data collection. The study population comprised individuals in the same-sex relationships living in Uasin Gishu County. The unit of analysis was the individual person in a same-sex relationship. A sample size of 30 individuals in the same-sex relationships from Uasin Gishu was used. The inclusion criterion was any person who had experienced IPV. In Uasin Gishu County, there are 6 constituencies with each constituency having various wards. The study was based in Kapsoya ward, Ainabkoi constituency (Sub-County). Snow-balling technique was used to select the sample population from the IPV survivors in Kapsoya. The qualitative methods included in-depth interviews and case narratives. The data was collected in two parts. The first part entailed selection of informants to get their views on the various types of IPV they experience, how IPV affects them in all contexts and the barriers they face when seeking help and accessing services after the violence experienced. The second part entailed case narratives of the LGBT so as to get their lived experiences of violence, specifically IPV. The participants were selected through snow-balling and purposive sampling. Data were presented as narrative and verbatim quotations. Selected comments from informants were used to amplify their voices and explain phenomena.

3. Results and Discussion

Types of Violence experienced by Individuals in Same-Sex Relationships

The study entailed sought to identify the types of violence experienced by individuals in same-sex relationships within the study locale. Five main types of violence reminiscent of same-sex relationships were identified. However, these types of violence were being experienced at varying frequencies. The types of violence identified were: emotional; physical; psychological; sexual, and stalking. Table 1 below summarizes these violence types with varying frequencies of occurrence. The frequency of was classified on a three-point Likert scale of: very often, often and rarely.

Table 1: Types of Violence experienced in Same-Sex Relationships

| Type of violence | Very often (1) | Often (2) | Rarely (3) | Mean |
|------------------|----------------|-----------|------------|-------|
| Emotional | 9 | 18 | 3 | 1.800 |
| Physical | 11 | 18 | 1 | 1.667 |
| Psychological | 3 | 13 | 14 | 2.700 |
| Sexual assault | 7 | 11 | 12 | 2.167 |
| Stalking | 2 | 6 | 22 | 2.700 |
| Aggregate mean | | | | 2.207 |

As indicated in Table 1 above, majority of the respondents experienced physical violence (mean, 1.667) and emotional violence (mean, 1.800). Sexual violence occurred often (mean, 2.167) while psychological and stalking types of violence rarely occurred (mean, 2.700). Responses buttressing these findings were presented by victims of these violence types during the interviews and case narratives.

Jack (pseudonym), one of the respondents interviewed, submitted his rage and anger over the physical violence that has been continuously meted to him by Chris (pseudonym), his lover:

...you know I am a party boy...I happened to have kissed a

gay friend on his cheek while at the dance floor...this made Chris really annoyed...when we got home that night, he beat me, accusing me of cheating on him! My explanations did not yield...he hit me with a cooking stick and left this mark on my hand (showing)...and went on and forcefully had sex with me!

Stacy (pseudonym) a lesbian narrated during the case narratives how enduring she has been in an abusive relationship from her lover, Maggy (pseudonym).

...my relationship has been abusive but I can't just let go. Maggy is the wife to a prominent politician in Uasin Gishu County and is therefore wealthy. She gives anything I want...I have even built a house for my parents and educated my two siblings from the money she gives me. She is a very rough woman who demands sex anytime from me...I once resisted when we were out in a resort club because I didn't feel like it...she beat me up and hurled unprintable insults at me...I apologized for the mess and we had sex...she later gave me more money...I have learnt to live with the emotional and physical troubles....

Similarly, Ben (pseudonym) presented his submission on physical and psychological torture resulting from stalking from his lover who was a doctor at the time based at the Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital:

...I had been dating this doctor for over two years until hell broke loose...it only happened when we got into an argument over who Peter (pseudonym) was to me. Peter was actually my cousin and we wouldn't be intimate...he wasn't even aware that I ascribed to gay sexual orientation. My lover got upset with this explanation claiming I was cheating on him...he became incensed, strode into the kitchen and grabbed a butcher knife. He pulled me by my hair, had me on my knees and had the butcher knife on my neck...he later locked me out of the house that night.... I went back and apologized; he could meet all my financial needs and so I was such a slave...I moved out though....

Angela (pseudonym) indicated during the interviews how her lover, who was so insecure and jealous, would physically and psychologically torture her whenever they got into altercations:

...she would literally punch, slap and kick me whenever she suspected I was having an affair with another girl...she insulted me and always threatened to leave and go back to her boyfriend; since she was a bisexual....

It is evident from the study findings that individuals engaging in intimate same-sex relations experience an array of IPV types. The study established that the major types of IPV faced by individuals in intimate partner relationships range from emotional, physical, psychological, sexual assault and stalking. Whereas Ristock (2005) ^[23] asserts that the violence that occurs within heterosexual relationships is similar in nature to the violence that happens within same sex relations, such violence can be categorized into various forms such as physical, psychological, economic and sexual abuse as well as threats of such violence. Examples of physical abuse include slapping, kicking, punching, shoving, dragging on the floor among others. Psychological and emotional abuse occurs when one partner threatens, harasses and intimidates the other thereby causing fear. Abuse also involves verbal abuse whereby there is name-calling and insults.

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of a sexual nature without consent. It includes rape, sodomy, penetrating genitals using either a part of the body or an object and so on. Marrujo and Kreger (1996) ^[14] add that unlike physical violence in heterosexual couples where in most cases the abuser tends to be physically larger and stronger, the same among same sex partners shows a slight difference, whereby in many cases the perpetrator and survivor may be of nearly equal physical build or the aggressor may even be physically smaller. Self-defence is a common explanation for the violence that occurs among same-sex relations whereby one partner responds to violence or threats of violence by using physical violence in return.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Emotional, physical, psychological and sexual assaults are the main types of violence experienced by individuals in intimate same-sex relationships. Majority of the respondents experienced physical violence and emotional violence. Sexual violence occurs often while psychological and stalking types of violence are rare. Victims of these types of violence feel deeply about their situation and desire to find ways to address them.

It is recommended that law enforcement personnel (police) should be given adequate training by the state to better understand the historical mistreatment of gay and lesbian individuals to encourage empathizing with the population. In efforts to reduce real and potential police-community problems between officers and sexual minority complainants, the police unit should develop programmes that include gay and lesbian liaisons, specialized units that respond to hate crimes aimed at these individuals and special outreach teams that work to strengthen the relationship between sexual minorities and police officers. These programs represent first steps in addressing service accessibility problems as they work to create an atmosphere that acknowledges intersections and the variety of factors that shape IPV experiences.

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