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FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS:

TACKLING THE JUSTICE DEFICIT FOR WOMEN

SURVIVORS IN GHANA



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One in every three women globally is subjected to violence, with 35% having experienced either physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of an intimate partner or someone else.¹ Rooted in patriarchy, violence against women and girls (VAWG) is used “for the social control of girls and women, defining their behaviour, restricting their freedoms, preventing their participation in public life or decision-making and ensures that men retain their positions of power and control over the lives of women and girls”.² It is the impunity with which violent acts are carried out that compounds violence as a system of social control of women. Impunity is a major contributing factor to the violence being perpetuated or repeated around the world.³ This is in some part due to the fact that easily accessible justice systems are either non-existent, inadequate and/or poorly implemented in most countries.

This research report is part of a multi-country ActionAid campaign on access to justice for women, looking both at the global barriers to justice⁴ as well as the specific deficits in each of the four countries the campaign focuses on. Here, we present the case of Ghana, where 71.5% of women have experienced violence in their lifetime⁵ and where, despite a comprehensive Domestic Violence Act being passed in 2007, too many survivors are yet to access justice for crimes against them.

Women’s rights organisations in Ghana have been the driving force for change on VAWG and have played a crucial role in not only getting the Domestic Violence Act developed and passed, but also monitoring the implementation of the law. Over the past 12 years, these organisations have built a body of knowledge on access to justice and have also been using this research to advocate to the Ghanaian government for better implementation of the law. This case study developed by ActionAid Ghana and ActionAid UK is designed to supplement and contribute to this body of knowledge by gathering qualitative research in the form of lived experiences of women working as domestic workers and in restaurants – who continue to fall through the cracks of the Ghanaian legal system.

For this research, focus group discussions were held with groups of women domestic workers and women who work in bars and restaurants, to assess their experiences of violence in their work and social spaces as well as their experiences with accessing justice. These women experience violence 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and because of their informal status they are seldom heard and often invisible.

They exemplify the shortcomings and grey areas of the legal framework as well as the rootedness of patriarchy and social norms. At a time when the international community – including the women’s rights movement in Ghana – is calling for the ratification of the International Labour Organisation’s (ILO) Conventions 189 and 190, these grounded experiences can contribute to the evidence base towards advocating for the ratification of both conventions and their adoption into national law. In order to ensure that no survivor of violence falls through any cracks, gender-based violence in the workplace needs to be part and parcel of the decent work agenda and, in turn, the latter ought to be part of the access to justice struggle.

Implementation gaps in the Domestic Violence Act

In assessing the progress made towards securing justice for women in Ghana through the Domestic Violence Act, this report echoes women’s rights organisations’ observations that it is being poorly implemented. It is almost impossible for survivors of violence to report crimes. Where survivors do report - to frontline services, the police or within the community – achieving an effective remedy for the violence remains remote.

The Domestic Violence Act is quite a comprehensive legislation with a strong definition of domestic relations and a wide remit for what is considered as violence. While the Act was passed in 2007, the Legislative Instrument, which provides guidelines for how the Act should be implemented, was only passed in 2016. This gap in time has created problems with the uptake and use of the law by the police, Domestic Violence and Victim Support Units (DOWVSU, which is a unit of the police that deals with cases of domestic violence) officials and prosecutors, which in turn has had a knock on effect on survivors’ use of the law and providing meaning to the Domestic Violence Act through court judgements.

Implementing the law involves a complex institutional framework whereby provision of services to survivors is done through agencies that are not directly within the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection’s remit. DOWVSUs are the first point of call for survivors of violence wanting to report their abuse, yet they have no communication or accountability lines to the Ministry of Gender, and since the latter was recently removed from Cabinet, their budget allocations are even lower. Each DOWVSU is attached to a police station in each district. They are headed up by a coordinator who is drawn from the police. The reporting and subsequent case management

processes are complex and present at least seven barriers to survivors:

1. Financial costs, including transport etc
2. Location of DOWVSU offices being far away and lack of knowledge among survivors that they exist and where they are
3. The traumatic and often discriminatory experience inside DOWVSU offices
4. Lack of privacy and adequate resources to guarantee confidentiality
5. Costly medical examinations
6. Insufficient knowledge of the Domestic Violence Act by police prosecutors
7. Going to court can be physically or financially impossible

For decades, global macroeconomic policies dictated by influential actors, including the International Monetary Fund, have pressured governments into cutting spending on public services – and national governments have caved in. Ghana has not escaped this trend, with detrimental impacts on the government’s ability to offer gender-responsive public services that are available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable – including those that survivors of violence rely on to report a case and see it through to the perpetrator being sentenced.

Summary recommendations

Governments and civil society have a role to play to:

- 1. Ensure that all workers enjoy a violence-free working environment through the realisation of rights in the workplace**
- 2. Ensure a reduction in violence against women and survivors’ access to justice through a well-resourced and sustainable Domestic Violence Fund for survivors**
- 3. Ensure a significant reduction in violence against women and survivors’ access to justice through unlearning and challenging values of informal, community based legal systems, national normalisation on perceptions of women as properties of men; and the overall placement of domestic violence as a private issue**

INTRODUCTION

On March 26, 2019, a group of women's rights organisations, advocacy groups and activists under the umbrella of the Coalition on Domestic Violence Legislation in Ghana, sent a letter to the President of Ghana, His Excellency Nana Addo Danquah Akufo-Addo, raising concerns over the lack of implementation of the Domestic Violence Act.⁶ In the letter, the Coalition highlighted the fact that the legislative framework "has been ineffective on the ground because nothing has been done beyond creating the law" thus placing access to justice beyond the reach of 71.5% of women in Ghana who have experienced violence in their lifetime.⁷

The Domestic Violence Act 732, which was passed in 2007, has been hailed as one of the most progressive VAWG legislations in the world. As such, much hope was placed on the legislation. Not only was it supposed to provide legal guidelines for response, protection and prevention of violence against women and girls, it was also supposed to address the patriarchal nature of Ghanaian society where domestic violence, in particular, is seen as an acceptable social norm and a way of resolving domestic disputes. Despite the progressive nature of the law, survivors of violence are still finding justice beyond their reach.

This research conducted by ActionAid Ghana and ActionAid UK attempts to highlight the barriers facing survivors as they try to access justice. It forms part of a worldwide campaign to highlight the structural and systemic nature of VAWG and the global justice deficit. It is estimated that one in every three women globally is subjected to this violence, with 35% having experienced either physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of an intimate partner or someone else.⁸ Rooted in patriarchy, violence against women and girls (VAWG) is used "for the social control of girls and women, defining their behaviour, restricting their freedoms, preventing their participation in public life or decision-making and ensures that men retain their positions of power and control over the lives of women and girls".⁹

The justice deficit is as a result of global structural problems that continue to marginalise and oppress women and girls. It is these global structural issues that impact on legal, economic, and social issues to create the justice deficit that works against women and girls and presents obstacles to their accessing justice. The case study of Ghana was selected to show the impact that the lack of implementation of good laws has on survivors' access to justice.

The case study was developed through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders including those who form part of the frontline services, those who are part of the judicial system, members of the Domestic Violence Secretariat and Management Board, and representatives from women's rights organisations.

Women's rights organisations in Ghana have been the driving force for changes on VAWG and have played a crucial role in not only getting the Domestic Violence Act developed and passed, but also monitoring the implementation of the law. Over the past 12 years, these organisations have built a body of knowledge on access to justice and have also been using this research to advocate to the Ghanaian government for better implementation of the law. This case study developed by AA Ghana and AA UK is designed to supplement and contribute to this body of knowledge and to serve as a repository, bringing this research into one story of access to justice in Ghana.

Much of the research already done was largely quantitative therefore this research has deliberately focused on collecting stories of the experiences of women experiencing violence in Ghana. These lived experiences are key to building a grounded evidence base that clearly illustrates the complexity of VAWG and what needs to be done to meaningfully tackle it on all fronts.

The significant contribution that this research makes is to highlight experiences of two groups of women who are considered to be among the most vulnerable: domestic workers who are covered by the Domestic Violence Act and informal workers¹⁰ in bars and restaurants who, unlike domestic workers, have not been singled out under a targeted law. Focus group discussions were also held with domestic workers and informal women workers who form some of the most marginalised and vulnerable women, and who are exposed to violence 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

The research will also form the basis for a three-year campaign in the UK as well as in Ghana that's focused on getting governments to prioritise access to justice for survivors of violence. It will also be used to advocate to donors, as they shift their focus to economic growth and development, to prioritise and integrate women and girls' access to justice.

ActionAid is an international charity that works with women and girls living in poverty. With a human rights-based approach, we are ending violence and fighting poverty so that all women, everywhere, can create the future they want.

Methodology and structure

This qualitative study was developed through a series of in-depth interviews with key stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act. In total, 11 in-depth interviews were conducted with members of the Domestic Violence Secretariat and its management board, a lawyer working specifically on women's rights and the Domestic Violence Act, a Circuit court judge sitting at the Gender Court, women's rights organisations (Federacion Internacional de Abogadas (FIDA) and Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF)), coordinators of two Domestic Violence and Victim Support Units (DOWVSU) and a FIDA paralegal. Three separate focus groups were held with 36 participants representing domestic workers, informal women workers and the Community Based Anti-violence Team (COMBAT). Some of the interviews and focus groups were translated from Twi, Fante or Ga into English. The qualitative information was built around a literature review of existing research into VAWG and the Domestic Violence Act in Ghana. The findings of the research were presented at a workshop of 25 participants representing women's rights organisations, trade unions and labour organisations, community organisers and campaigners. There, recommendations were collectively developed.

Following this introductory section, the second section of this report outlines the legislative context in Ghana and highlights the situation of violence against women there. Section three looks at the barriers experienced by women accessing justice for crimes against them. This includes an analysis of the legislative framework and the barriers to the uptake of the law; a critique of the economics of VAWG and the lack of substantive (gender) budgeting to allow for gender-responsive public services relating to access to justice and the cost of this to survivors of violence; and, finally, an exploration of precarious workers' experiences in accessing justice. The fourth section of the report examines the social norms preventing women from accessing justice and the informal ways in which VAWG is "resolved" or dealt with. The fifth section of the report provides recommendations aimed at the Ghanaian and UK government, donors including DFID and international NGOs.

Part 2

ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR WOMEN SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE IN GHANA

Violence against women and girls is first and foremost a gross violation of fundamental human rights. Protecting the rights of women and girls from violence is enshrined in the international human rights regime, the most important of which is the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW defines gender-based violence as “violence which is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately”¹ and recognises it as a form of discrimination against women.¹ The Convention also specifically situates gender-based violence in patriarchal systems and structures such as:

“ideology of men’s entitlement and privilege over women, social norms regarding masculinity, the need to assert male control or power, enforce gender roles, or prevent, discourage or punish what is considered to be unacceptable female behaviour. These factors also contribute to the explicit or implicit social acceptance of gender-based violence against women, often still considered as a private matter, and to the widespread impunity for it.”¹

The government of Ghana signed CEDAW in 1980 and ratified it in 1986. As such, Ghana was legally bound to enact the provisions of CEDAW into law and to account for the measures taken to comply with the treaty’s obligations.¹ As a member of the United Nations, Ghana is also bound by the Sustainable Development Goals’ targets and indicators. Tackling VAWG is closely interlinked with achieving the SDGs – particularly SDG 5 on Gender Equality.

2.1 The Ghanaian Domestic Violence Act.

In 2007, the Ghanaian government passed the Domestic Violence Act 732. Women’s rights organisations and women activists who fought hard to get the Act developed and passed describe it as “one of the best you can find in the world”.¹ However, it took a further 10 years for the Legislative Instrument (implementation guidelines) to come to life.

Ten years before the Act could be passed, quantitative data collected by the government body (the National Council on Women and Development) revealed that 72% of respondents reported that wife beating, rape, defilement, widow rites, forced marriages and female genital mutilation (FGM) were commonplace in their communities. Nearly a

quarter (23%) of the women reported that they had been beaten by their husbands or boyfriends and 25% of the men interviewed revealed that they beat their partners. In cases of rape, 59% of survivors said that they had not reported it to anyone.¹ This research was substantiated by a second nationwide quantitative study conducted by an NGO, the Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre, in 1999/2000. Patricia Essel of women’s rights organization WiLDAF remembers that:

“the research gave quite scary statistics as to what was happening nationwide when it came to violence... one out of every three women suffered some kind of violence; one out of five have suffered some kind of psychological abuse.”¹

At around the same time, about 34 women were killed across Accra over a two-year period. They were all killed in the same violent way indicating that there was a serial killer at work.¹

This, together with the statistics provided by the two nationwide surveys, underscored that violence was a gendered issue and it prompted women’s rights organisations and activists to come together to force the state to address the issue of violence against women. Impunity ought to end.

Women’s rights organisations and the struggle for legislative reform

It took several years for the Domestic Violence Bill to be passed into the Act. The final push to get the Bill passed was due in large part to the campaigning and movement building undertaken by women’s rights organisations in Ghana.

It was a long struggle to criminalise domestic violence because it was seen as private issue. The few women who did go to the police to report were “asked to go back home because it was a private matter”¹ and told that “it should be dealt with domestically”.²⁰ Ghanaians also held the belief that “when it came to VAWG it was always felt let’s go to the family level to handle it”.²¹ When patriarchal beliefs are adopted by professional frontline service workers such as the police, the effect on reporting can be devastating.²² Low numbers of survivors reporting was due in some part to the attitudes of police who “would trip women up [by asking women survivors] ‘what were you wearing?’, ‘why did you say this?’, ‘were you submissive?’”,²³ thus turning the situation around and either blaming the survivor, using the survivor’s

previous behaviour to excuse the crime or denying that any crime had taken place.

Because criminalising of domestic violence was coming up against strongly patriarchal issues embedded and perpetuated through social and cultural norms, it was belittled as “a Western law, an imposition” and within the predominately male parliament at the time, “they actually were not convinced that we should pass such a law”.²⁴ It was also seen as an attack on men and as such the Bill was colloquially labelled by traditional and religious leaders, as well as community leaders – a strong and influential group in communities – as the “Women’s Bill” developed “so that women can fight men”²⁵ and “take them to prison”.²⁶

The struggle to pass the legislation was also hindered by the fact that the Bill contained a clause (Article 42(g)) that criminalised marital rape. Women’s rights organisations pushed for marital rape to be included in the legislation because they felt that the space in which rape occurred should not decriminalise the act – that rape within marriage is as much rape as when committed by a stranger. However, “men who are in a patriarchal society didn’t see any sense in that if [he] is married to you then why should you accuse [him] of raping you?”.²⁷ Within a deeply patriarchal society, raising the issue of marital rape was a make-or-break moment with the patriarchy trying very hard to suppress the issue. This particular issue has been attributed by women’s rights organisations as to why it took parliament 10 years to pass the Bill into law.

It was a difficult moment for women’s rights organisations who had to face the fact that if they stuck to their position to keep the marital rape clause in the law, then the Bill may never see the light of day. It was the sticking point with parliament and the reason why the passing of the law was being so severely delayed.²⁸ It put the women’s movement in a dilemma where “we wanted the law to be passed – are we going to take a rigid stand and hang on to the passage of the law that must be inclusive of marital rape which might not see the light of the day or compromise and get the law passed?”. The women’s movement came to the conclusion that it would be better to compromise on this and agreed to the removal of the rape clause from the Bill. There was a realisation among the women that this was going to be a much bigger task for them because not only was it requiring a change in patriarchal thinking but it also meant that the movement had to try to find ways to advocate for marital rape to be criminalised by using strong data and evidence because if parliament “can’t see it [they] think we are importing western policies and ideas into our legal spaces.”²⁹

In the end, public pressure from traditional leaders, church and community leaders and local political constituencies forced the already-sceptical government to remove the clause, upholding the marital rape exemption with its roots in colonial British Common Law.³⁰

“but the husband cannot be guilty of a rape committed by himself upon his lawful wife, for by their mutual matrimonial consent and contract the wife hath given up herself in this kind unto her husband which she cannot retract.”³¹

To get the law passed in 2007 and the Legislative Instrument (the guidelines for implementation) 10 years later required strategic campaigning and movement building by women’s rights organisations. They came together in various forms: as the Domestic Violence Coalition (which still exists today) and through a special coalition called the Sisters’ Keepers movement³² to demand justice for the murdered women and for the passing of the Domestic Violence Act. They used every tool available to them including:

- **Mobilisation** where women’s rights organisations and individuals were mobilised across all the regions and marched on Independence Square to call for justice for the murdered women.
- **Sensitisation** programmes were held across the country with traditional leaders, church leaders, the police and communities to raise awareness for the need for a law on domestic violence.
- **Advocacy** at targeted policy makers and ensuring that women’s rights organisations were at the table when legislation was being drafted.
- **Campaigning** through petitions, marches, handing of communiques to government and using specific moments like the 16 Days of Activism to raise awareness and build public interest
- **Public engagement** such as the “Faces of Violence” project that showed the public the effects of violence against women by getting survivors to tell their stories next to their photos. This prompted many other survivors to come forward to tell their stories.
- **TV adverts** were also connected to the “Faces of Violence” project where women told their own stories of abuse including how they were treated by the justice system. This opened domestic violence as a topic for public discussion – a big shift in a society that treated it as a private, ‘never to be spoken of’ issue.³³

Longitudinal, multi-country research shows that the single most effective measure in the reduction of violence against women is the mobilisation of women's movements in feminist action.³⁴ This research is borne out in Ghana where the sustained effort of the women's movement, which lasted 20 years (the first 10 years was spent trying to get the Bill passed into an Act and the second 10 years to get the Legal Instrument passed, together with the compromise on the marital rape clause), is what got Ghana one of the most progressive domestic violence laws in the world (albeit with its inherent limitations both on paper and in its implementation). The momentum generated and the consistency in which the women's movement made progress sent a clear signal to the Ghanaian government that they were a formidable force:

“We went to parliament, we sat there and held placards saying “Pass the DVA”... At a point in time there were women who were ready to go naked in the streets³⁵... I think it was the pressure that was mounted and the fact that we never gave up.”³⁶

The special nature of the Domestic Violence Act

The progressive nature of the Domestic Violence Act lies in what constitutes domestic violence both in the nature of the violence as well as in what constitutes a domestic relationship.

With regards the latter, Section 2 of the law defines a domestic relationship as a family relationship, as well as a relationship that resembles or is similar to a family relationship “or a relationship in a domestic situation that exists or has existed between a complainant and a respondent”. This has been interpreted to mean that domestic relationships include couples that are married, engaged or dating, as well as relationships that are intimate or cordial and relationship where the two parties have a child together. It also includes relationships held between people who live together in a house or compound but are not related by familial ties. And, importantly, it includes domestic workers/ house-help in the house of the respondent.

The Act also includes a wide range of acts and behaviours which constitute violence. These include:

- Physical abuse, including physical assault, as well as forced detention and deprivation of a person's access to food, water, shelter and rest, and torture.

- Sexual abuse, while not including rape, is defined as forcing sexual contact (including sexual conduct that is humiliating, degrading and abusive) and knowingly infecting a person with HIV or any sexually transmitted disease. It does not include rape because the definition of rape is covered under the criminal code 1960 (Act 29).
- Economic abuse, which has been defined as denying or threatening to deny someone of economic or financial resources, including someone's right to moveable or immovable property or destroying that property that they have an interest in. It has also been interpreted as including depriving or denying a person's right to work.³⁷
- Emotional, verbal or psychological abuse.

Section 6 of the Domestic Violence Act adds to the progressive nature and widened remit of the law by stating that a charge or complaint of violence need not only be brought by the survivor of violence but can also be brought by a person with information of such abuse. An example of this was a case of two children being beaten publicly by the pastor of their church. A lawyer, using a video recording of the beating, laid a charge against the pastor on behalf of the children.³⁸ This provision is regarded as important as some survivors may not be able to raise a complaint because they are either under the control of the perpetrator and dependent on the perpetrator for food, clothing and shelter. A survivor can also be prevented from reporting a case because of the social norms forced upon them by their family's cultural beliefs and the overall stigma that comes with exposing domestic violence.

The Act also provides for survivors of violence to apply for a protection or occupation order from the court and allows the court hearing the criminal case to impose a protection order. In the absence of shelters, these two provisions are key as the protection order prevents the accused person from coming within a certain distance of the survivor and the occupation order legally ensures that the accused person vacates the property if it is shared with the survivor, even if the accused person is the owner of that property. The Act allows for 'reconciliation' in limited circumstances, through court-mandated alternate dispute resolution mechanisms. Importantly, the Act provides for free medical treatment to be provided to survivors of violence.

Other critical features of the Act are the various institutions that have been legally provided to ensure access to justice for survivors of violence. The first is the provision for the establishment of a Domestic Violence Fund to be supported by externally-raised funds from individuals, organisations and the private sector, as well as from funds allocated from the national budget on the approval of Parliament. The purpose of the Fund is to provide material support to survivors of violence, including accessing medical treatment, to provide training for families of survivors of violence and to fund any other issues that will assist in the rescue, rehabilitation and reintegration of survivors of violence. Of critical importance is the use of the Fund to construct shelters for survivors and train and develop the capacity of those providing services through the shelters.

As a result of the Domestic Violence Act, Gender Courts have been set up to hear cases of domestic violence. The courts are assigned a judge that has “good knowledge of the law and a strong ability to interact with the victims while having a human approach to the cases.”³⁹ Most of the judges are women.⁴⁰ Although Domestic Violence and Victim Support Units (DOWVSU) don't fall under the Act, they act as first points of contact for the implementation of the law. The DOWVSUs are the first line of reporting, not just for domestic violence cases but also for child-related issues, including defilement, maintenance and juvenile criminal activities, and are attached to police

stations in the various districts in Ghana. The Gender Courts form part of the circuit courts in (currently) four regions to hear cases being brought to court through the Domestic Violence Act.

Other pieces of legislation that provide some protection against gender-based violence include:

- Children's Act, 1998 (Act 554).
- Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, January 7, 1993.
- Courts Act, 1993 (Act 459).
- Criminal Offences Act, 1960 (Act 29).
- Human Trafficking Act, 2005 (Act 694).

Ghana's Domestic Violence Act – pushed to its current state thanks to the relentless mobilisation of the women's movement – is one the most progressive legislations on paper. But poor implementation, combined with persisting discriminatory practices rooted in patriarchal structures and values have prevented women and girls from accessing justice. Women's bodily integrity is still largely unprotected and only deep, structural changes that debunk patriarchal structures and attitudes will meaningfully address the problem.



Irene Aborchie-Nyahe (right), a lawyer and founder of the Ghana Legal Assistance Network. “Ghana has one of the best domestic violence acts in the world – but when it comes to implementation it's very frustrating,” she says. “If someone suffers abuse, the first place they need to go is a police station, but the police see it as normal. They think if ‘nobody's dead, nothing terrible has happened’.”

Part 3

THE JUSTICE DEFICIT IN GHANA

While it is known that, globally, one in three women is subjected to violence, it is the impunity with which violence is perpetrated that compounds violence as a system of social control of women. Impunity is a major contributing factor to the violence being perpetuated or repeated.⁴¹ This is in some part due to the fact that easily accessible justice systems are either non-existent, inadequate and/or poorly implemented in most countries.

In Ghana, the justice system is difficult to access because the legislation on domestic violence is being poorly implemented. It is almost impossible for survivors of violence to report these crimes. Where survivors do report – to frontline services, the police or within the community – achieving an effective remedy for the violence remains remote because access to justice is out of reach for many women and girls. As will be discussed in the following subsections, reporting violence and following the legal process through is financially unattainable as well as physically challenging when police stations and courts are too far away from many survivors to physically get to.

This scale of violence against women and the lack of reporting can be linked to an intersection of legal, economic and social issues, all built on the foundation of a strongly patriarchal society.⁴² It is a widely held belief in Ghanaian society that a man is justified in beating his wife or partner and that violence, in particular domestic violence, is a private issue.⁴³ More often than not, impunity prevails.

3.1 Barriers to accessing justice

The Domestic Violence Act is quite a comprehensive legislation⁴⁴ with a strong definition of domestic relations and a wide remit for what is considered to be violence. While the Act was passed in 2007, the Legislative Instrument, which provides guidelines for how the Act should be implemented, was only passed in 2017. This delay has created problems with the uptake and use of the law by the police, DOWVSU officials and prosecutors, which in turn has had a knock-on effect on survivors' use of the law and providing meaning to the Domestic Violence Act through court judgements.

Uptake and use of the Domestic Violence Act

“The law is a model law because [women’s rights organisations] did some work on it but the implementation has been fraught with problems and challenges”⁴⁵

Women’s organisations FIDA and WILDAF have been consistently monitoring the implementation and use of the law. While FIDA, through its SAVE project, has been monitoring the implementation of the Protection and Occupation Orders,⁴⁶ WILDAF has been monitoring the application of the Domestic Violence Act at the Gender Courts through their Court-Watch projects.⁴⁷

WILDAF first monitored the use of the law just after the Act was passed, but before the Legislative Instrument was passed. Between 2007 and 2009, of approximately 150 cases observed in the courts, only 2% used or mentioned the Domestic Violence Act. The reason given for the low uptake of the law was that the Domestic Violence Act had just been passed in 2007 and it was still new. Among key actors, such as the police and prosecutors, most were unaware of the existence of the Domestic Violence Act. According to Patricia Essel of WILDAF, the people and state actors alike “did not know the content of the law, they were not too comfortable with using it”.⁴⁸

WILDAF repeated the monitoring exercise in 2017/2018 at Gender Courts in five districts in the Western, Eastern, Volta, and Greater Accra Regions of Ghana. This time, of 280 cases monitored, only 22.5% were completed with final sentences given and 77.5% were adjourned. Of the 22.5% completed cases, only 6% made use of or mentioned the Domestic Violence Act. The reason provided this time for the low uptake was that prosecutors felt that using the Criminal Offences Act was better because it provided stiffer sentences.

A judge from the Gender Court interviewed⁴⁹ for this research agrees with this finding. She felt that the punishment laid out in the Domestic Violence Act was far too lenient in comparison with what was provided in the Criminal Offences Act. For example, if someone has physically abused another person, the Domestic Violence Act suggests a fine or imprisonment of up to two months while the Criminal Offences Act suggests an imprisonment of three years for assault, which is the same offence of physical abuse or assault.

However, Irene Aborchie-Nyahe, a lawyer specialising in gender-based violence and the Domestic Violence

Act, says that the Act needs to be read alongside the Criminal Offences Act. Any offence contained in the Criminal Offences Act, which, if it takes place in a domestic setting, can be prosecuted under the Domestic Violence Act. However, the judge stated that when a charge is being laid by prosecutors it has to be done using one of the two Acts – both cannot be used. The judge has to hear the case and pass judgement based on what prosecutors bring to court.

The implications for not using the Domestic Violence Act to bring charges to court include that it denies survivors a series of protections including access to protection and occupation orders. Access to protection and occupation orders is also hindered by the fact that court staff did not have knowledge of protective and occupation orders.⁵⁰ Further implications for the lack of uptake of the law is that survivors are denied access to alternative dispute resolution processes and the options of settlements. It also denies survivors access to counselling services provided by clinical psychologists. Finally, when bringing a case of domestic violence to court under the Criminal Offences Act, data is collected under ‘criminal offences’ and not recorded specifically under the Domestic Violence Act. This skews data on the prevalence and nature of domestic violence. Research carried out by FIDA shows that courts did not have any data on protection and occupation orders.⁵¹

A further and perhaps more fundamental problem with the low uptake of the Domestic Violence Act is that it means the law is not being given the opportunity to develop and be interpreted through court cases. There is no space, therefore, to allow for precedence to be set as a guideline for how cases should be interpreted and dealt with. With the law being prevented from evolving, no legal progress can be made and the struggle that women’s rights organisations have engaged in to secure women and girls’ rights to justice remains incomplete.

It should be noted that the WILDAF research found that of those cases which had been completed, including those that used the Domestic Violence Act, 72% of the suspects were found guilty. This indicates that when the law is used, it has the ability to provide justice for survivors of violence.

The realities of the law

Between 2004 and 2005, Ghana’s government transformed the Women and Juvenile Units into the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Units (DOWVSU). The change of name followed the public’s response to the then proposed Domestic Violence Bill, which (as mentioned earlier) was seen as the

“Women’s Bill”. It also signalled a change in the nature of the units to make it more accessible to male survivors of violence. Showing that DOWVSU and the Domestic Violence Act were there to work for men as well women is what also led to a shift in the public’s acceptance of the new law.⁵²

DOWVSU is an important part of the justice system for survivors of violence. Despite being key enforcers of the Domestic Violence Act and the first port of call for survivors of violence wanting to report their abuse, they have no communication or accountability lines to the Ministry of Gender. Each DOWVSU is attached to a police station in each district and fall under the Ghana Police Service. Some are separate buildings or offices attached to the police while others share offices with police stations. They are headed up by a DOWVSU coordinator who is drawn from the police. The DOWVSUs handle cases that fall under the Domestic Violence Act, as well as the issues relating to children, including maintenance, defilement and assault cases like rape and physical assault. Figure 1 shows the process for reporting a case through DOWVSU.

ActionAid Ghana commissioned a study in 2017 to assess the ability of DOWVSU to provide safe spaces for survivors.⁵³ The study included a survey, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and observations with 148 respondents. Ten regional offices of DOWVSU were sampled for this study. This research, together with our supporting interviews, supports the assertion that, in practice, the process outlined above is not as accessible and straight forward as it looks on paper.

Barrier 1: The true cost of accessing formal justice

To access the formal justice system, a survivor has to first battle the social norms and find the courage to report the case. This will be covered in the next section. Thereafter, she faces the challenge of having the financial resources to gain access to the justice system – this includes the costs of transport and medical examinations, which are limiting factors to accessing justice. Although the Domestic Violence Fund should in theory help survivors cover the costs of medical examinations, in practice the funds rarely or never reach women and girls in need. In a recent study into the economic and social costs of violence against women, it was found that a survivor of violence who accessed the formal reporting process spent on average GHC283 (\$53) in a 12 month period – the equivalent of 10% of the annual per capita expenditure on non-food consumption, which in 2014 was GHC1964 (\$360).⁵⁴ This cost

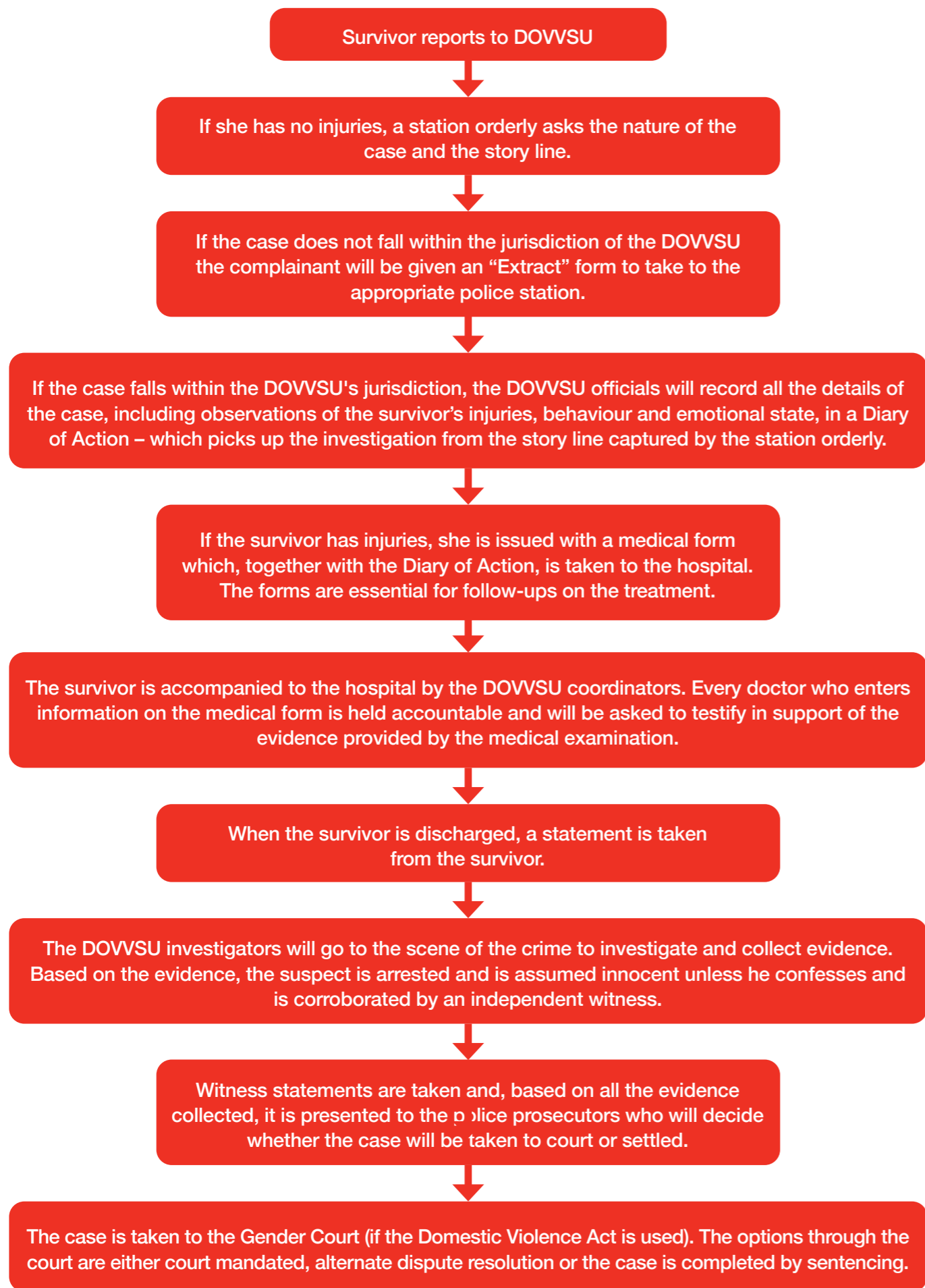


Figure 1. Reporting violence through DOWVSUs: how it works

included the medical examination fee, transport costs to report the complaint at a DOWVSU office or to appear in court, accommodation, food and replacing damaged property. FIDA also undertook an in-depth study of survivors' access to justice at two DOWVSU offices.⁵⁵ Seventy percent of survivors who were interviewed were engaged in informal street trading and other menial jobs, where between 70-80% of them earned less than GHC100 (\$18) and up to GHC400 (\$73) per month. For many of them, paying just the medical bill of GHC200 (\$36) would put them out of pocket. Taking time out of work to go through the reporting and follow up process of their case at police stations, hospitals and courts will also likely leave women workers out of pocket. This was also reflected among the women we interviewed who were working as domestic workers and informal workers in bars and restaurants – as one of the more vulnerable groups of women, their financial situation placed them outside of the justice system.

The above highlights the close link between women's material poverty and the justice deficit. Women with very low to no income are almost automatically denied justice. It also illustrates how women are not a homogeneous group. Violence, injustice and gender inequalities play out within other complex and transitory notions of age, class, race, sexual orientation, disability, caste and these "change over time, and differ by location and cultural context."⁵⁶

Barrier 2: The location of DOWVSU offices

The second barrier is accessing DOWVSU. DOWVSU offices are located in district centres and at regional level. The geographical area that DOWVSU has to cover is extensive thus putting its reach out of the hands of many survivors who may not be able to afford the transport costs:

"The boundaries between divisions means that our area of operation is very big. If someone has to report a case they have to come from far out places. It is too costly for them to come to DOWVSU offices. It also makes our work cumbersome because all the areas bring their cases here."⁵⁷

Accessing the DOWVSU offices also depends on survivors knowing that the offices exist and also

where they are located. The fact that there are so few offices can also mean that survivors or members of the public may not know where they are. In the focus group discussions⁵⁸ we held with women who were working as domestic workers and in bars and restaurants and from diverse areas, only 13 of the 36 women knew of the DOWVSU offices and of these, none reported that there was a DOWVSU office in their area. Those who knew where the DOWVSU offices were said that a trip would take anything from 20 minutes to an hour by taxi. In Kwaku Banfu, a rural area on the outskirts of Accra, Community Based Anti-violence Team (COMBAT)⁵⁹ reported that in their area the nearest DOWVSU was about 30 minutes away and would cost them GHC20 – a sum that was difficult to pay as the area is impoverished with high unemployment rates. Sometimes COMBAT team members would carry survivors on their bicycles or motorcycles to report a case. The distance between DOWVSU offices and the fact that the units have a wide jurisdiction of cases means that DOWVSU offices are often swamped with cases. The capacity in the offices range from four to 17 members of staff, most of whom are investigators, making it almost impossible to keep on top of every case coming through the units:

"The workload is too much for the staff because we don't only perform DOWVSU duties. The DOWVSU office operates 24 hours and the personnel are also involved in general police work, including night patrols, snap checks and also patrol when dignitaries are visiting the region."⁶⁰

Barrier 3: The experience inside DOWVSU offices

A third variable in accessing the justice system is what happens when a survivor enters a DOWVSU office. In one of the offices visited for this research, the front desk that a survivor would have to report to first was situated in front of holding cells that were filled with male suspects, some of whom were semi-clothed. For a survivor of violence, this could be triggering and re-traumatising, causing the survivor to rethink reporting the case. Another dependency is the police orderly who first screens the survivor's case to advise her on whether or not DOWVSU has jurisdiction. With deeply-held patriarchal beliefs still prevalent across Ghanaian society, the chances of a survivor encountering a male police orderly who is not gender-sensitive and who either has limited knowledge of

the law or doesn't believe that domestic violence is a criminal act is very high. Irene Aborchie-Nyahe recalls a visit to a police station:

“I sat there and then a victim came to report a case to the police officer. The man was like ‘Look at your mouth!... Look at how you are talking! It is because of the way your mouth is that he has beaten you’, justifying the abuse in the police station. [He was] supposed to be pro-solution not a problem. This is one of the major problems we have... the patriarchy.”

One positive is the fact that there are predominantly female DOWVSU officers. In the research done by ActionAid Ghana, 73% of DOWVSU officers were female. This can go a long way in encouraging women survivors to report.

Even though the Domestic Violence Act forms part of police training, it is not an examinable. This means that it is very likely that a survivor will first encounter a patriarchal male (or potentially a female too) who does not know the law well and may therefore either send her back home or persuade her to not report her case.

Barrier 4: Lack of privacy and adequate resources

If the survivor makes it through those initial obstacles, she is required to wait in a public area before being called by an investigator to record the Diary of Action. These waiting times can last for hours. There is no privacy in these public areas and it is likely that she could encounter someone from her community who she knows. In the DOWVSU offices visited for this research, the room where investigators were taking statements was an open-plan room with eight-10 desks all located close to each other. In one of the offices, the room was windowless and perpetrators and survivors alike were crowded inside it, with no privacy at all. ActionAid Ghana's research found that 87% of 52 respondents who used the DOWVSU offices did not have any privacy and 29% did not feel safe in the DOWVSU offices.

ActionAid Ghana found in their research that evidence gathering and the storage of evidence was seriously compromised. In some cases, evidence was kept in boxes under desks or out in the open. This was due to the fact that DOWVSU offices did not have access

to proper storage facilities, including lock-up cabinets or drawers. The judge interviewed for this research said that proper evidence gathering was one of the serious impediments to ensuring a fair trial.

Barrier 5: The medical examination

The next barrier to accessing justice is the mandatory medical examination. This barrier has two parts to it. While DOWVSU coordinators are required to accompany a survivor to the hospital, not all of them are able to do so because of limited capacity; accompaniment tends to only take place where the injuries to the survivor are serious.⁶¹ The first of the two barriers is getting to the hospital – DOWVSU offices do not have access to vehicles for travel or to transport survivors to the hospital. ActionAid Ghana's research showed that seven of the nine DOWVSU offices in their study did not have access to a vehicle. In our interviews, DOWVSU coordinators also said that they did not have funds to put fuel in a vehicle to get to the hospital. In these cases, the DOWVSU coordinator has to either use her own car, call a taxi and pay for it from her own pocket, or get the survivor to pay for the transport.

A second barrier to the medical examination is that the survivor is charged up to GHC200 (\$37) for the examination. Even though the Domestic Violence Act states that survivors are entitled to free medical treatments, this has never been implemented and doctors have been charging survivors for the medical examination. Doctors have been reported as saying that they need the fee to pay for their transport costs to court when they have been asked to testify in support of their medical report. Certain cases like assault and rape cannot be fully evidenced without the medical examination.⁶² It should also be noted that even though survivors are entitled to the assistance of a clinical psychologist, it is not guaranteed that she will gain access to it. None of the DOWVSU offices had a counsellor on site. If the survivor has the funds for the transport and the medical examination, the case will move forward to the next step of evidence gathering.

Barrier 6: Awareness of the Domestic Violence Act and the services provided to survivors

The sixth barrier to accessing justice is the police prosecutor who is assigned to take the case forward. This stage is reliant on the police prosecutor's knowledge of the Domestic Violence Act, their desire to seek justice for the survivor and their level of integrity. In the research done by both FIDA and

WiLDAF, lack of knowledge of the content of the Domestic Violence Act was a serious impediment to cases being brought to court. In FIDA's research, police prosecutors lacked knowledge of Protection and Occupation Orders and as such could not offer this to survivors of violence. This means that, because there are no shelters, survivors who report violence are generally sent back to the scene of the violence or have to seek refuge with family members or members of the community. The lack of knowledge of the Domestic Violence Act also means that more prosecutors use the Criminal Offences Act because they are more familiar with it. According to the judge interviewed, prosecutors are either using the Criminal Offences Act or opting for settlement (whether the victim wants to or not). However, settlement does not often mean a settlement for the survivor, and it has been reported that often the settlement involves a payment by the suspect to the police prosecutor in the form of a bribe.⁶³ Ghana's report on progress against the SDGs show that 50% of the Ghanaian population has paid a bribe to a police officer.⁶⁴ One of the women in the focus group for domestic workers said that when she experienced sexual harassment in her place of work, she reported it to the police only for the police to take money from the perpetrator who was then allowed to go free:

“The money went into their personal pocket – it was a bribe”.⁶⁵

One of the respondents describes this situation as “those who are financially endowed – they get away with violence because of poverty” because in most cases DOWVSU officers abuse their position of power and drop cases when offered a bribe.⁶⁶

Barrier 7: The experience in court

If the case does make it to court, there are a number of remaining barriers facing a survivor. Some of these include the fact that the court setting may not be physically accessible to everyone. For example, courts may not have wheelchair access or interpreters for those whose hearing or speech may be impaired. The court setting was observed by WiLDAF as being hostile to survivors – the fact that the courts are a public space means that it becomes public knowledge when a survivor's sexual history or her marriage is brought into question. The numerous adjournments in the case are also problematic. Most women cannot afford the single trip to the court let alone several if the case is repeatedly adjourned.

At every step of the formal process for accessing justice, survivors are faced with sometimes insurmountable barriers, most notably financial challenges. The fact that there are so many unknown variables within the process means that most survivors are unwilling to put themselves through it. They know how potentially harmful and re-traumatizing the process could be, and the extent to which it leaves them vulnerable to chance.



Margaret Osei, a member of the Young Urban Women's Movement in Accra, Ghana. “When I think of justice, I believe there's supposed to be fairness, there's a balance of power, there's equity. Treatment for every person is equal and there is no discrimination.” The Young Urban Women's Movement in Ghana aims to bring together young urban women aged 15-35 to create awareness and advocate for young women's economic security, bodily integrity and unpaid care responsibilities.

3.2 Economic barriers to accessing justice

States are responsible for upholding women's rights, including through the provision of gender-responsive public services – in other words, services that are publicly funded, publicly delivered and universal; gender equitable and inclusive (i.e. free from discrimination and sexism, safe and inclusive processes that deliver inclusive services) and based on human rights standards (i.e. available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable).⁶⁷ At a time when global macroeconomic policies designed by influential actors like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are driving countries towards austerity (and national governments are succumbing to this pressure), governments are increasingly less able to provide much-needed health and other services that support survivors of violence to access justice. Ghana is not immune to this trend and has, just like many other countries, been unable to find the necessary resources to fund gender-responsive public services.

Most of the relevant services that a survivor requires to report and see her case through to the sentencing of the perpetrator and, ultimately, get the justice she deserves are chronically underfunded. The reasons for this are very complex but largely respond to budget cuts to the Ministry of Gender and consequently to the bodies and agencies that either sit directly under it or depend on the Ministry to obtain necessary budget allocations. In 2019, the Ministry of Gender was moved out of cabinet. As such, the minister is not able to participate in the decision-making processes of cabinet, nor advocate for women and girls' rights.

The loss of status of the Ministry of Gender and its reduction of an already consistently low budget has meant that significant elements of the Domestic Violence Act have not been implemented, making justice difficult to access for survivors.

One critical element of the Domestic Violence Act, which is essential for the full realisation of access to justice, is the Domestic Violence Fund. As mentioned earlier, the Fund was to be used to provide support for survivors of violence, including providing free access to medical treatment, as well as to be used to conduct training on the Act to all implementers of the law and to build shelters for survivors. However, since 2007, the Domestic Violence Fund has remained “dormant”.⁶⁸ And as we have seen above, these three issues have been the greatest obstacles to survivors accessing justice.

One of the interviewees noted that the amount that was in the Domestic Violence Fund was “so small that it is difficult to operationalise”.⁶⁹ In 2016, FIDA made a formal request⁷⁰ to the Ministry of Gender for the full disclosure of the amount of funds that were in the Domestic Violence Fund. The response from the Domestic Violence Secretariat was that in 2012, GHC36,400 (\$6,688) was in the Fund. However, by the end of 2013, no funds were spent and the balance remained at GHC36,400. In 2014, GHC1,900 (\$349) was spent and nothing further. The balance has remained unspent. The Domestic Violence Secretariat recognises the far-reaching implications of the Fund not being fully operationalised:

“The fund was supposed to support the survivors of violence by paying for their medical bills. But they have not been able to access that because of a lack of funds. People who experience VAWG are most vulnerable and they come to us for support. Ideally if the Domestic Violence Fund was operational then we could sponsor their medical bills. If they can't pay their medical bills, then the survivor withdraws her case. We were also supposed to use the Fund for training of stakeholders and to run the affairs of the shelter as it was operationalised. The lack of shelters is a big issue.”⁷¹

DOWVSU offices are constantly under-resourced. This is because they are currently left out of the budget planning offices. DOWVSU offices fall under the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) which is part of the police service. The CID submits an overall budget as part of the Ministry of the Interior's budget. It is not made transparent to the DOWVSU offices how much of the budget has been allocated to the offices. The representative of the Domestic Violence Secretariat pointed out that the fact that the DOWVSU offices didn't have vehicles was more a consequence of “internal malfunctioning” because vehicles were made available through the police services. This internal malfunctioning is due to the fact that lines of communication and coordination between the Domestic Violence Secretariat (which falls under the Ministry of Gender) and DOWVSU (which falls under the Ministry of the Interior) are not working. This is made more difficult with the removal of the Ministry of Gender from the cabinet.

Part 4 WOMEN IN INFORMAL WORK AND THEIR ACCESS TO JUSTICE

For this research, focus groups were held with groups of women domestic workers and bar and restaurant workers to assess their experiences of violence in their work and social spaces, as well as their experiences with accessing justice. These women experience violence 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and because of their informal status are the least heard and least visible. They exemplify the shortcomings and grey areas of the legal framework, as well as the rootedness of patriarchy and social norms.

The Domestic Violence Act includes domestic workers/house-help in its scope of domestic relations. This provided some hope that the Domestic Violence Act could be extended to include gender-based violence in the workplace, in particular to precarious workers in the informal sector. In some of the interviews conducted for this research, it was felt that the remit of the Act was wide enough to include gender-based violence in the workplace. This was expressed by one of DOWVSU coordinators:

“People who work together in an office or workplace for eight hours per day will also be covered by the Domestic Violence Act. The Act covers violence in the workplace. A woman working in a restaurant can use the Domestic Violence Act to lodge a case of gender-based violence in the workplace”.⁷²

However, the judge from the Gender Court disagreed. In her professional opinion, she felt it would be very difficult for her to hear a case of workplace violence through the Domestic Violence Act. This was because there is a difference between workplace and domestic relations. The Domestic Violence Act covers domestic workers not as a workplace issue but as a domestic relationship. Part of this confusion with the interpretation of the Act is as a result of it not being taken through the courts for sufficient interpretation and definition.

The current Labour Act does include sexual harassment. However, the Labour Policy only applies to those in formal work and excludes those in precarious work such as domestic workers and

informal sector workers, including women who work in bars and restaurants.

Ghana is yet to ratify ILO Conventions 189 (2011) on domestic workers and, like other countries, 190 (2019) on harassment in the workplace (particularly gender-based harassment). The latter recognises informal work as work and the places where informal work takes place as workplaces. This presents an opportunity to expand access to justice to women who experience violence in their workplaces. Momentum is now building globally for countries like Ghana to ratify and implement these two instruments.

4.1 Domestic workers, domestic violence

The domestic workers in this study had a clear understanding of what constituted violence against women. Their responses included sexual harassment, rape, wife beating, financial neglect by a husband, desertion of the family by the husband and physical assault. However, when it came to defining violence against women in the workplace their understanding shifted to exploitative work and discriminatory practices which they saw as acts of violence. These included:

- Disagreements on the salary
- Being forced to cook and eat food that was inferior, different and sometimes old compared to that of freshly-cooked food eaten by others in the household
- Hard labour
- Long working hours

With regard the long working hours, 14 of the 16 women started work at 6am and worked until 9 or 9:30pm. Those who started at 6am were also providing child care (including bathing and getting the children ready for school) in addition to doing household work. However, despite the early start and late finish, all the women did not opt to be live-in house helps but rather stayed out and travelled using public transport to and from work.

The women were asked whether they felt safe travelling so early and late in the day and their response showed that their risk of violence was ever-present with some of them having to make special arrangements with transport drivers, such as forming alliances with drivers to ensure their safety.

This raised some questions of why they didn't stay at the house where they were working. Almost every woman in the focus group had experienced sexual violence, including rape, in their workplace. Their stories had many similarities and are along the lines of Box 1.



Photo: Kathleen Prior/ActonAid

REGINA⁷³ WORKS AS A DOMESTIC WORKER/HOUSE HELP. THIS IS HER EXPERIENCE:

Almost every week, the husband of the employer pretends to leave the house for work. Sometimes he and his wife will leave in one car. He will make some excuse to come back to the house without his wife. Sometimes he will say "Oh I left something at home, I need to go and pick it up. You take the car and I will take a taxi back to work". He will sneak into the house and start touching my bum and squeezing my breasts. Sometimes he can get very angry and aggressive and tear my clothes. He will offer me money to have sex with him. If I say no he will force himself onto me. He has keys to other entrances

of the house and sometimes he will come into my room or when I am in the bathroom. I thought about telling the madam, but I knew that she wouldn't believe me. Then one afternoon as he was raping me the madam came home and the moment he saw her he said "You've always been exposing parts of your body to me. What am I supposed to do? Look at your body and look at that of my wife's". The madam heard this and she immediately attacked me saying that I was the bad person and dismissed me on the spot. I had to pack my things and leave the house immediately without my pay."

None of the women who had experienced violence at work reported it to the police or to DOWSU. According to one of the women, she didn't report to DOWSU because domestic work is not recognised as work and as a result of that, together with the lack of recognition given to domestic workers, domestic workers do not receive the kind of support that is required of the DOWSU official.

Some of them have reported their experience to the domestic workers' union. Because the Domestic Violence Act sees the violence experienced by domestic workers as a domestic relationship and not an employer-employee/workplace issue, there is no protection offered to domestic workers against unfair or constructive dismissal (if she rejects sexual advances). The union is therefore only able to work to ensure that the dismissed worker gets her full pay and can be placed into another job as soon as possible. There is no punishment for either the employer or the perpetrator of the violence. Many of the women in the focus group, most of whom were over the age of 50, said that the sexual violence only stopped when they got older.

4.2 Survivors of violence working in bars and restaurants

The women working in bars and restaurants were either cooks, waitresses or cleaners. They worked without employment contracts and were vulnerable to any changes in their work condition such as working hours, salaries and the withholding of their social insurance.

When asked what they understood by violence against women, all the women related it directly to their workplaces. Their understandings included:

- Hard labour including lifting heavy things
- Verbal abuse.
- Working overtime.
- Threatening you with dismissal if you don't do something that they ask you to do because it is beyond your ability.
- Favouritism, where special preference is given to others from different tribes and ethnic groups or religions.
- Sexual harassment and rape, and making this conditional on your employment.

The women in the focus group were between the ages of 20 and 30 years, and most were single mothers. Almost all of them had experienced sexual harassment or rape in their workplaces. Below are a few of their stories:

"At my former workplace, my boss –every time he comes he is like – you know we sell food and drinks – he will go to the bar and drink and drink – so when he is drinking, the workers – everyone is frightened – everyone is scared that he will call you to the office. So, when something like that happens, when he is drinking, then the ladies are called to the bar. They say they can't because they got their [period] and then he makes them call him prostitutes and he takes them to his office instead of the workers. He has done this to the workers. At the end of it he will have sex with you. After two to three months he will sack you."

"In my current workplace, our boss he is a Ghanaian but he has stayed outside [the country] for long. He knows the big men like the rich people. So, when he is having a programme over there and some of his friends come and they are like 'I like this girl. She is very nice'. He will call you and tell you 'My friend likes you. So you just go and listen and do whatever he tells you to do'. You just accept it. And you are working under him. He is your boss. So you go and you just listen to what his friend says. You give him your number – maybe you don't want to give him your number but because your boss told you to you just give him your number. And then if he calls you and you don't take the call he will tell your boss 'I called your girl and she didn't take the call'. And then the next day when you come he will say 'Why didn't you take the call?' and then there will be some violence too."

None of the women reported the cases of violence to the police or DOWSU. Some didn't report to DOWSU offices because they didn't trust them and because they knew money was required to transport and to fuel the DOWSU cars. Because there is no trade union representing these women and no NGO or women's rights organisations working with them, they have no way to realise their rights and no access to justice. They tend to rely on each other for security:

"I have a friend at my former workplace whose boss wanted to have sex with her. She told me and I told her that I know this man and I told her not to tell anybody but anytime he is trying to do something don't allow him. So sometimes when we are working, when we are closing, the boss will tell her not to go home. And then she will ask me to wait for her. So she told our boss that we stay at the same place but it was a lie. People were thinking we were siblings so she would tell the boss 'My sister is waiting'. It was going on for a while – she wasn't allowing the boss to have anything. So one day we were working and the boss called me and he was like 'Tell your sister that she is telling the staff that I want to sleep with her'. And I said no she hasn't been saying that. I am her

only friend and the only relative that she has here. She can't tell anybody without – she hasn't said anything. She hasn't uttered any word like that to me. That day our boss called the girl and he sacked her. He humiliated her in front of the staff. And they sacked her. She was crying and then she went home. She is still jobless today."

Many of the women started work between 6 and 7:30am and finished at around 2am. Similar to the domestic workers, these women were at risk of violence travelling to and from work. Because most of them lived in compounds or in informal settlements, their neighbourhoods were unsafe at those hours and some of them had to walk quite a distance, alone and at risk of violence, either walking to or from the place where they were picked up or dropped off by taxi drivers. They also talked about experiencing violence in the compounds or in the communities where they lived, thus placing them at constant risk, 24/7. When asked whether there was any place where they felt safe, the women said "when our heads were on our pillows" or "in the arms of our mothers".

4.3 Social norms as barriers to accessing justice

The women in both focus groups were asked whether they also experienced violence in their homes from family members and if they did, whether they reported it to anyone. The response was the same from both groups. Their options were either to tell no one or to confide in a family member or friend.

When they confided in a family member or friend, they were told to keep quiet about it or the case was used to blackmail or threaten the perpetrator for money. Sometimes the head of the family was called in to resolve the issue. In all instances, it was made clear that domestic violence was a private issue not to be reported to the police but to be dealt with by the family:

*"Per our social set ups and settings, we treat some of these things as family issues and that is why we don't report. The way our system is organised, the extended family – they are big and we have family leaders. They would rather come and they will blame you –and even when you go and report they will put pressure on you to go and withdraw the case because it is a family affair. Because it is between you and your brother, you and your sibling or family members, or even you and your spouse, they think it is a family affair and the family must handle it."*⁷⁴

A second woman said:

"Some will say this is a family issue. Let's go talk about it in the house. If we talk about it outside or if we are taking it to DOVVSU then you are trying to expose the family and disgracing the family. People are going to notice that your kids are not being taken care of by their father and they will think that they are being rejected. So let's forget about it and not talk about it. Whatever money he gives you just take it and keep quiet."⁷⁵

Those who were told to keep quiet about it were told that they should be grateful for their job because so many women are desperate for a job. The same excuse was used by employment agents who would tell survivors that there were many women available to fill their jobs, so they either had to keep quiet and put up with the violence or give up their job to another woman.

In most cases, when the head of the family is called in to handle the issue, it is dealt with as a pseudo-mediation. The family head will call the two parties together and, after listening to each party, they will tell the survivor of the violence to forgive and forget because the person is either their sibling, spouse or a relative. The perpetrator of the violence is never punished or even admonished and this in large part is due to the fact that age and financial resources are given preference – so if the perpetrator is older than the survivor (as in most of the cases between husband and wives) or has more money than the survivor, then the survivor is made to apologise to the perpetrator.⁷⁶

In cases of both domestic workers who are covered by the law and women who work as informal workers in bars and restaurants and are not covered by the Domestic Violence Act, it is clear that as survivors of violence they are left outside the formal justice system. Even with domestic workers, who are included in the Domestic Violence Act, the violence they experience in the households where they work is not considered to be a workplace issue. It is similar for women working in bars and restaurants – their informal work status precludes them from any legal protection because their

informal work is not recognised as work. Twenty years ago, women's rights organisations came together to demand legislation to protect women from domestic violence because of its increasing prevalence. However, now it is clear that with women being exposed to violence in the workplace and with Ghana moving towards getting more women into work through its Beyond Aid agenda, access to justice for survivors has to be expanded to include violence in the workplace. ILO Conventions 189 and 190 hold promise for this.

Part 5 CONCLUSION

Even though Ghana has one of the most progressive domestic violence legislations, it has not fully realised access to justice for survivors. There are a number of reasons for this which include that the Act has not been adequately implemented. Critical provisions such as free medical treatment, the Domestic Violence Fund and the provision of shelters has not been fully implemented. In addition, the lack of proper knowledge on the content of the Act is preventing survivors from receiving effective support including legal advice on procedures, for example, applying for protection orders. It is also preventing domestic violence cases from being charged and prosecuted as such, which is further preventing the law from being fully developed.

The cost of accessing formal justice processes is also preventing survivors from reporting cases of domestic violence. The cost of the medical fee alone is placing access to justice out of the reach of women who are unemployed or working in the informal economy as domestic workers, traders or in bars and restaurants.

National budgeting issues and coordination of budget planning is also having a negative impact on how frontline services are being delivered. For example, the lack of adequate resources for the DOVVSU offices is resulting in low staff capacity, high caseloads, poor infrastructural facilities and no budget for everyday essential expenses such as fuel.

Furthermore, even though there is a formal process for accessing justice, some groups of women are being left out. While the legislation protects those in domestic situations, there is no recourse for those who work in the informal economy as domestic workers or in bars and restaurants. The testimonies from these women show that there are gaps in the current justice system. Even though there is the Domestic Violence Act, which includes domestic

workers, the Act is not providing access to justice for them because violence in the workplace is not treated as a labour issue. Survivors of violence run the risk of dismissal or their wages being withheld if they report cases of violence against their employers. There is no targeted legislation protecting other informal workers including those women working in bars and restaurants. Left with nowhere to go, many of these women are relying on the conservative, patriarchal social norms of their families and communities which see violence against women as normal. It is therefore critical that, in order to ensure that no survivor of violence falls through any cracks, access to justice needs to include the decent work agenda where gender-based violence in the workplace is seen as an access to justice issue.

The Domestic Workers' Regulation is currently being worked on; there is mention of sexual harassment as a workplace issue. The Regulation places the responsibility for ensuring a safe and healthy workplace on the employer and gives power to domestic workers to report cases of sexual harassment. This presents a positive shift for domestic workers, particularly since the Trade Union Congress is involved in the negotiations.

Another opportunity lies with the ILO's conventions 189 on Domestic Workers and 190 on Violence and Harassment in the workplace. Not only do the conventions recognise gender-based violence in the workplace, but it recognises informal work as work and spaces where informal work takes place as workplaces. If the Ghanaian government ratifies the conventions, legislation protecting women in the informal economy will have to be developed.

One of the greatest opportunities for Ghanaian civil society to bring about change in the effectiveness of the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act is the existence of a strong women's movement. The women's movement was able, through strategic campaigning and movement building, to bring about the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act, as well as legislation to regulate and protect domestic workers. This can be done again, harnessing broad support beyond the women's movement and among other sectors of civil society to call for the ratification and implementation of the ILO Conventions. The women's movement can play a key role in bringing the government and the private sector on a journey towards ensuring no woman falls through the cracks of the justice system and the justice deficit comes to an end.

Part 6

RECOMMENDATIONS⁷⁷

1. Ensure that all workers enjoy a violence-free working environment through the realisation of rights in the workplace

Government

- i. Ratify and adopt into national law ILO Conventions 189 and 190 to ensure that all workers are protected from violence in the workplace.
- ii. Develop national action plans to support the implementation of ILO Conventions 189 and 190, where there are none, and ensure political follow-through including adequate national budgets for implementation and rigorous monitoring mechanisms.
- iii. Review existing labour laws and regulations and bring them in line with ILO Conventions 189 and 190.
- iv. Support women's human rights organisations, trade unions and labour organisations to monitor progress of implementation, conduct strategic litigation and provide expert advice.
- v. Put in place rigorous internal measures to facilitate easily accessible justice for survivors of workplace violence.

Civil society

- i. Engage in strategic targeted campaigning to ensure that the ILO Conventions 189 and 190 are ratified. This can include:
 - a. Mapping and reviewing what needs to be changed in labour laws and regulations.
 - b. Establishing a platform for key stakeholders to drive the ratification process.
 - c. Engaging in strategic advocacy including establishing dialogue between government, labour and workers' representatives through tripartite and stakeholder consultations, and regular strategic meetings with a parliamentary committee responsible for ratification.
- ii. Engaging in the awareness-raising and movement-building of workers' organisations, trade unions, NGOs and women's rights organisations through:
 - a. Strategic engagement with organised labour and CSOs on the content of the Conventions 189 and 190.
 - b. Consultations with organised labour to propose the ratification and adoption process.
 - c. Establish a cross-sectoral and inclusive working group that includes women's rights organisations, NGOs and INGOS, and organised labour to drive the process of ratification and adoption.
 - d. Develop a multi-pronged campaign strategy, drawing on the successes of the women's rights campaign for the passing of the Domestic Violence Act, to include community-based awareness-raising and movement-building, and social media and media campaigning.

2. Ensure a reduction in violence against women and survivors' access to justice through a well-resourced and sustainable Domestic Violence Fund for survivors

Government

- i. Include the Domestic Violence Fund in the budget line of the Ministry of Women, Gender, Children and Social Protection.
- ii. Parliament to accept the annual allocation of the Domestic Violence Fund at \$4 million by 2020.
- iii. Operationalise the Domestic Violence Fund within the next 10 years in all regions through a process of decentralisation.
- iv. Operationalise the Domestic Violence Fund so that the provision of shelters in the Domestic Violence Act can be realised.
- v. Establish mechanisms to ensure easy and equitable access to the Fund.
- vi. Depoliticise the Domestic Violence Management Board to ensure that its appointees serve their full term.

Civil society

- i. Engage in strategic and targeted advocacy aimed at the Ministry of Gender and the Gender Committee in parliament to achieve buy-in and support for the allocation of the national budget for the Domestic Violence Fund.
- ii. Establish a working partnership between the media and civil society organisations to raise awareness across traditional and new media platforms.
- iii. Develop a platform for inclusive discussion between civil society organisations, the media and state actors.
- iv. Provide strategic support to the Domestic Violence Management board to fundraise.
- v. Engage in strategic advocacy with political parties to ensure that domestic violence is included in their manifestos, thus giving civil society organisations a mechanism to hold them accountable.

3. Ensure a reduction in violence against women and survivors' access to justice through unlearning and challenging values of informal, community-based legal systems, national normalisation on perceptions of women as properties of men and the overall placement of domestic violence as a private issue.

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This report was authored by Saranel Benjamin of ActionAid UK, in partnership with Margaret Brew-Ward of ActionAid Ghana. With thanks for input to Lila Caballero, Lee Webster, Jean McLean, Sarah Maguire (DAI Europe), Susan Ayeetey (FIDA), Patricia Essel (formerly of WiLDAF), Korto Williams, Jillian Popkins, Sumaila Abdul-Rahman and Girish Menon. We are grateful for the participation of Ghanaian women's rights organisations, trade unions and labour organisations and community organisers in this research project and for helping us develop the recommendations put forward in this report. We are especially thankful to the women who participated in the focus groups. Their stories were harrowing, yet they were so brave to share it for this report.

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