

Title

**ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN, A CASE STUDY OF PHANGWA VILLAGE
T/A. MALENGACHANZI IN NKHOTAKOTA DISTRICT.**

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence against women remains a pervasive human rights and public health issue, particularly in rural communities of Malawi. This study assesses the impact of domestic violence against women in Phangwa Village, Traditional Authority Malengachanzi, in Nkhota Kota District. The research aimed to examine the forms of domestic violence experienced by women, identify contributing factors, and assess the social, economic, and psychological effects on victims. A qualitative case study design was employed, using interviews, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews with women survivors, community leaders, and relevant stakeholders. The findings reveal that domestic violence in Phangwa Village manifests in various forms, including physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse. Key contributing factors include poverty, alcohol abuse, cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality, and limited access to legal and social support services. The impacts of domestic violence on women were found to be profound, leading to physical injuries, psychological trauma, reduced economic productivity, and social isolation. The study further highlights gaps in awareness of legal protections and inadequate community-based interventions. The research concludes that domestic violence significantly undermines the wellbeing and empowerment of women in Phangwa Village. It recommends strengthening community sensitization programs, improving access to victim support services, and enforcing existing laws to reduce domestic violence and promote gender equality. Future research should incorporate longitudinal data, engage men and boys and evaluate policy implementation, while local authorities, civil society, and traditional leaders collaborate to strengthen prevention strategies, survivor-centered responses, and sustainable economic empowerment initiatives within Nkhota Kota District communities nationwide. Furthermore, integrating gender-responsive education, strengthening reporting mechanisms, increasing access to justice, and expanding psychosocial services are essential steps toward reducing domestic violence, enhancing women's.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Violence Against Women, Gender-Based Violence, Rural Communities, Socioeconomic Impact, Malawi (Nkhotakota District).

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence against women remains a pervasive human rights violation and a major public health and development concern worldwide. It cuts across social, economic, cultural, and geographic boundaries, affecting women of all ages and backgrounds. Domestic violence often manifested through physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse undermines women's dignity, safety, and well-being. Despite global and regional commitments to promote gender equality and protect women's rights, domestic violence continues to be deeply rooted in unequal power relations, harmful cultural norms, and socioeconomic vulnerabilities, particularly in rural communities of developing countries.

Background of the Study

Domestic violence against women is a widespread social problem that affects millions of women globally and represents a serious violation of human rights. It includes acts of physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse perpetrated by intimate partners or family members. Such violence not only threatens the safety and dignity of women but also undermines social stability, public health, and economic development. The persistence of domestic violence is often linked to unequal gender relations, patriarchal social structures, harmful cultural practices, and limited access to education and economic opportunities for women.

In developing countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, domestic violence remains prevalent despite efforts by governments and international organizations to address it.

Women in rural areas are especially vulnerable due to poverty, limited access to justice, low literacy levels, and strong adherence to traditional norms that promote male dominance. Domestic violence in these settings is frequently underreported, as it is often viewed as a private family issue rather than a crime or public concern.

In Malawi, domestic violence against women continues to be a significant challenge. Although the country has enacted laws such as the *Prevention of Domestic Violence Act (2006)* and committed to international conventions promoting gender equality, many women still experience abuse within their households. Factors such as economic dependence, fear of retaliation, social stigma, and lack of awareness of legal rights contribute to the persistence of domestic violence. The impact of such violence extends beyond individual victims, affecting children, families, and community development as a whole.

Context of the Study

This study is conducted in Phangwa Village under Traditional Authority Malengachanzi in Nkhonkhotakota District, a predominantly rural area in central Malawi. The district's economy largely depends on subsistence farming, fishing, and small-scale trading. Poverty levels are relatively high, and access to education, healthcare, and social support services is limited, particularly for women. These socioeconomic conditions increase women's vulnerability to domestic violence and reduce their capacity to seek help or escape abusive relationships.

Cultural norms in the area often reinforce traditional gender roles, where men are regarded as heads of households and primary decision-makers, while women are expected to be submissive and economically dependent. Such norms may legitimize or excuse abusive behavior, making it difficult for women to challenge violence or report it to authorities. Com-

munity mechanisms for addressing domestic violence are often weak, and cases are frequently resolved informally, sometimes at the expense of women's safety and rights.

Despite the existence of government and non-governmental interventions addressing gender-based violence, little research has been conducted at the village level to assess the specific impacts of domestic violence on women's lives. Phangwa Village provides an important case study for understanding how domestic violence manifests in rural communities and how it affects women's health, livelihoods, and social participation. Examining this local context is essential for developing effective, culturally appropriate strategies to prevent and respond to domestic violence.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this study is to assess the impact of domestic violence against women in Phangwa Village, T/A Malengachanzi, Nkhonkhotakota District.

Specific Objectives

- To identify the common forms of domestic violence experienced by women in Phangwa Village.
- To examine the social, cultural, and economic factors contributing to domestic violence against women in the study area.
- To assess the effects of domestic violence on women's physical health, psychological well-being, and economic activities.
- To explore the coping strategies and support systems available to women experiencing domestic violence in the community.
- To provide recommendations for improving prevention and response mechanisms to domestic violence at the community

level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Overview of Domestic Violence Against Women

Domestic violence against women refers to any act of physical, sexual, psychological, or economic abuse occurring within intimate or family relationships. According to the World Health Organization, domestic violence is one of the most common forms of gender-based violence and is rooted in unequal power relations between men and women. Scholars argue that domestic violence is not merely an individual or family issue but a structural problem sustained by patriarchy, social norms, and institutional weaknesses (Heise, 2011).

Domestic violence manifests in various forms. Physical violence includes acts such as beating, slapping, and kicking; sexual violence involves forced sexual acts; psychological violence includes intimidation, threats, and verbal abuse; while economic violence refers to the denial of financial resources and control over women's economic activities. Studies indicate that psychological and economic abuse are often underreported but can be equally damaging as physical violence (Jewkes, 2002).

Global Perspectives on Domestic Violence Against Women

Globally, domestic violence against women is recognized as a major public health and human rights concern. Research shows that approximately one in three women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lives (WHO, 2021). Domestic violence cuts across cultures and socioeconomic groups, although its prevalence and forms vary depending on social norms, legal frameworks, and economic conditions.

Literature from both developed and developing countries highlights that domestic violence is strongly associated with gender inequality, alcohol abuse, poverty, and exposure to violence during childhood. Feminist scholars emphasize that domestic violence is a mechanism through which men maintain power and control over women, particularly in societies where male authority is culturally legitimized. Despite global advocacy and policy interventions, domestic violence remains persistent due to weak enforcement of laws and deep-rooted social attitudes that normalize abuse.

Domestic Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa

Studies conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa reveal high prevalence rates of domestic violence against women, particularly in rural areas. Research indicates that cultural norms supporting male dominance, bride price practices, and social acceptance of wife-beating contribute significantly to domestic violence in the region (UN Women, 2018). In many African societies, domestic violence is viewed as a private family matter, discouraging women from reporting abuse or seeking formal support.

Economic dependency is also identified as a major factor increasing women's vulnerability to domestic violence. Women with limited access to education and income-generating opportunities often lack bargaining power within households, making it difficult to resist or escape abusive relationships. Furthermore, weak institutional support systems, limited access to legal services, and reliance on traditional dispute resolution mechanisms often result in inadequate protection for women.

Domestic Violence Against Women in Malawi

In Malawi, domestic violence against women is a significant social issue despite the existence of legal and policy frameworks aimed at addressing gender-based violence. The Prevention of Domestic Violence Act (2006) criminalizes domestic violence, while national gen-

der policies promote women's rights and gender equality. However, studies indicate that implementation and enforcement of these laws remain weak, particularly in rural areas.

Research by the Malawi Demographic and Health Survey shows that a considerable proportion of women have experienced physical or emotional violence from intimate partners. Scholars attribute this prevalence to factors such as poverty, alcohol abuse, low levels of education, and cultural norms that justify wife-beating under certain circumstances. Fear of social stigma, economic dependence, and pressure to maintain family unity often prevent women from reporting abuse to authorities. Impact of Domestic Violence on Women.

Numerous studies document the severe physical, psychological, and socioeconomic impacts of domestic violence on women. Physically, abused women may suffer injuries, chronic pain, disabilities, and reproductive health problems. Psychologically, domestic violence is associated with depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and low self-esteem. These effects often persist long after the violence has occurred.

Economically, domestic violence limits women's productivity and participation in income-generating activities. Abusive partners may restrict women's movement, control their earnings, or prevent them from engaging in employment. This economic disempowerment reinforces dependency and perpetuates cycles of abuse and poverty. Literature also shows that domestic violence negatively affects children's well-being, contributing to poor academic performance, emotional distress, and the normalization of violence.

Coping Mechanisms and Support Systems

Research indicates that women employ various coping strategies in response to domestic violence, ranging from silence and endurance to

seeking support from family members, religious leaders, or community elders. In rural settings, formal support services such as shelters, counseling centers, and legal aid are often limited or inaccessible. As a result, women frequently rely on informal networks, which may not always provide adequate protection.

Studies suggest that effective responses to domestic violence require a combination of legal enforcement, economic empowerment of women, community awareness programs, and engagement of men and traditional leaders. Education and awareness campaigns are particularly important in challenging harmful gender norms and encouraging reporting of abuse.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive case study research design to assess the impact of domestic violence against women in Phangwa Village under Traditional Authority Malengachanzi in Nkhosakota District. A case study design was considered appropriate because it allows for an in-depth examination of a social issue within its real-life context. The design enabled the researcher to explore the experiences, perceptions, and impacts of domestic violence on women in a specific rural community. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed to enhance the richness and reliability of the findings through methodological triangulation.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Phangwa Village, located under T/A Malengachanzi in Nkhosakota District, Malawi. The area is predominantly rural, with most residents engaged in subsistence farming, fishing, and small-scale trading. The village has limited access to social services such as healthcare facilities, legal aid, and counseling centers. Cultural practices and traditional norms strongly influence social re-

lationshiPs and household dynamics. These characteristics make Phangwa Village a suitable setting for examining domestic violence against women and its impacts in a rural context.

Study Population

The target population for this study consisted of women aged 18 years and above residing in Phangwa Village. The population also included key informants such as community leaders, health workers, social welfare officers, and members of community-based organizations involved in gender and social welfare issues. These groups were included to provide broader perspectives on the prevalence, causes, and impacts of domestic violence, as well as existing response mechanisms within the community. Sample Size and Sampling Techniques.

A sample size of 50 respondents was selected for the study. The sample comprised 40 women from households within Phangwa Village and 10 key informants drawn from relevant community structures.

Purposive sampling was used to select key informants due to their knowledge and experience in handling domestic violence cases. Simple random sampling was employed to select women respondents to ensure fairness and reduce selection bias. This combination of sampling techniques ensured that the study captured both personal experiences and institutional perspectives on domestic violence.

Data Collection Methods

Multiple data collection methods were used to gather comprehensive information for the study.

Questionnaires

Structured questionnaires with both open-ended and closed-ended questions were admin-

istered to women respondents. The questionnaires collected data on demographic characteristics, forms of domestic violence experienced, perceived causes of violence, and the impacts on women's health, economic activities, and social lives. Questionnaires were chosen because they allow for the collection of standardized data from a relatively large number of respondents.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including traditional leaders, health workers, and social welfare officers. The interviews focused on community perceptions of domestic violence, cultural factors influencing abuse, reporting mechanisms, and existing interventions. Interviews allowed for deeper exploration of sensitive issues and provided qualitative insights that complemented questionnaire data.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Focus group discussions were conducted with selected women in the community to explore shared experiences, coping strategies, and community responses to domestic violence. FGDs encouraged interaction among participants and helped uncover social norms and attitudes related to domestic violence.

Data Collection Procedures

Before data collection, permission was sought from relevant authorities, including local leaders and community representatives. The researcher explained the purpose of the study to participants and obtained informed consent. Data collection was conducted in a safe and confidential environment to encourage honest responses, particularly given the sensitive nature of domestic violence. Interviews and FGDs were conducted in the local language to ensure clarity and participant comfort.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data collected through questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages. The results were presented in tables and charts to facilitate understanding. Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed thematically. This involved organizing responses into categories and identifying recurring themes related to forms, causes, and impacts of domestic violence.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues were carefully considered throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by avoiding the use of names or identifying information. Given the sensitive nature of domestic violence, the researcher ensured that participants were not exposed to harm or distress during data collection. Where necessary, participants were referred to available support services within the community.

RESULTS

The findings of the study on the impact of domestic violence against women in Phangwa Village under Traditional Authority Malengachanzi in Nkhotakota District. The results are organized according to the study objectives and are based on data collected through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. Both quantitative and qualitative findings are presented to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The study involved a total of 50 respondents, comprising 40 women and 10 key informants. Most women respondents were aged between 25 and 45 years, indicating that domestic violence mainly affects women in their economi-

cally active and reproductive years. The majority of respondents were married, while a smaller proportion were widowed, divorced, or separated.

In terms of education, most women had primary-level education, with a few having no formal education at all. Only a small number had attained secondary education. The main economic activities reported included subsistence farming, small-scale trading, and piecework. These demographic characteristics suggest a high level of economic dependence among women, which may increase vulnerability to domestic violence.

Forms of Domestic Violence Experienced by Women

The findings revealed that women in Phangwa Village experience multiple forms of domestic violence. Physical violence was the most commonly reported form and included beating, slapping, kicking, and pushing by intimate partners. Many respondents reported that physical violence often occurred during disagreements related to household finances, alcohol consumption, or suspected infidelity.

Psychological or emotional violence was also widely reported. This included insults, threats, humiliation, and intimidation. Several women stated that verbal abuse was frequent and sometimes more painful than physical violence, as it lowered their self-esteem and caused emotional distress.

Economic violence emerged as another significant form of abuse. Women reported being denied access to household income, restricted from engaging in income-generating activities, or having their earnings controlled by their partners. Some respondents indicated that their partners deliberately withheld money for basic needs as a way of exerting control.

Sexual violence, though less openly discussed, was also reported by some respondents. This included forced sexual relations within marriage. Cultural norms that discourage women from refusing sexual advances made it difficult for many victims to recognize or report this form of abuse.

Causes and Contributing Factors to Domestic Violence

The study identified several factors contributing to domestic violence against women in Phangwa Village. Alcohol abuse by male partners was frequently cited as a major trigger of violent behavior. Respondents reported that violence was more likely to occur when partners were intoxicated.

Economic stress and poverty were also identified as key contributing factors. Financial difficulties often led to household conflicts, which sometimes escalated into violence. Women's economic dependence on their partners limited their ability to resist abuse or leave violent relationships.

Cultural and social norms played a significant role in sustaining domestic violence. Many respondents indicated that traditional beliefs support male authority and female submissiveness, making violence seem acceptable under certain circumstances. Some women believed that enduring abuse was part of marriage and feared social judgment if they reported violence.

Low levels of education and awareness of legal rights were also found to contribute to the persistence of domestic violence. Many women were unaware of existing laws and support services designed to protect them.

Impact of Domestic Violence on Women

The findings revealed that domestic violence has serious physical, psychological, social, and economic impacts on women.

Forms of Domestic Violence Experienced by Women in Phangwa Village (n = 40)

The findings show that psychological violence was the most commonly reported form of domestic violence, cited by 32 respondents (80%). This was followed by physical violence, reported by 28 respondents (70%), and economic violence, experienced by 24 respondents (60%). Sexual violence was the least reported form, with 10 respondents (25%) indicating experience of this type of abuse.

The table shows that psychological violence was the most commonly reported form of domestic violence, followed by physical and economic violence. Sexual violence was reported by fewer respondents, which may be due to cultural barriers and reluctance to disclose such experiences.

DISCUSSION

This chapter interprets and analyzes the findings presented in the previous chapter in relation to existing literature. It highlights the key patterns, explores their implications, and provides explanations for the observed phenomena in the context of Phangwa Village, T/A Malengachanzi in Nkhotakota District.

Forms of Domestic Violence

The study revealed that women in Phangwa Village experience multiple forms of domestic violence, including physical, psychological, economic, and sexual abuse. Psychological violence was reported by the highest number of respondents (80%), followed closely by physical violence (70%). This finding aligns with global and regional studies, which suggest that while physical abuse is often visible, psychological and emotional abuse are more pervasive and damaging, though less frequently recognized (WHO, 2021; Jewkes, 2002).

The lower reporting of sexual violence (25%) may reflect cultural and social barriers, as discussing sexual abuse is often taboo in rural communities. This observation is consistent with studies in Malawi and Sub-Saharan Africa, where women often underreport sexual violence due to fear, shame, or social stigma (*UN Women, 2018*). Overall, the findings demonstrate that domestic violence in Phangwa Village is multifaceted, affecting women both physically and emotionally.

Causes and Contributing Factors

The study identified alcohol abuse, poverty, cultural norms, and low education levels as major contributors to domestic violence. Alcohol abuse by male partners was frequently cited as a trigger for violent incidents, supporting literature that links substance use with increased aggression and domestic violence (*Heise, 2011*).

Economic dependence emerged as another significant factor. Many women rely on their partners for financial support, which limits their ability to resist or leave abusive relationships. This is consistent with previous studies in rural Malawi, which emphasize the role of poverty and economic dependency in perpetuating gender-based violence (*Malawi Demographic and Health Survey, 2015–16*).

Cultural norms also play a critical role. Traditional beliefs that emphasize male authority and female submissiveness often justify violence in households. Women's acceptance of abuse as part of marriage reflects deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes, a pattern observed in other rural communities in Sub-Saharan Africa (*UN Women, 2018*). Low levels of education and limited awareness of legal rights further reduce women's capacity to challenge abuse.

Impact of Domestic Violence

The impacts of domestic violence observed in

this study were physical, psychological, social, and economic. Women reported injuries, chronic pain, stress, depression, reduced productivity, and social isolation. These findings corroborate previous research indicating that domestic violence has far-reaching consequences for women's health and well-being (*Jewkes, 2002; WHO, 2021*).

The economic impact was particularly significant. Many women were unable to engage fully in farming or trading due to abuse or restrictions imposed by partners. This economic disempowerment reinforces the cycle of dependency and makes women more vulnerable to continued abuse. Socially, domestic violence affected women's interactions with family and community, while children who witnessed abuse experienced emotional distress, reflecting patterns noted in other studies (*Heise, 2011*).

Coping Mechanisms and Community Response

Women in Phangwa Village employed various coping strategies, including silence, endurance, seeking support from relatives, and reporting to traditional leaders. The reliance on informal support systems is consistent with rural contexts in Malawi, where formal services such as shelters, counseling, and legal aid are limited (*Malawi Demographic and Health Survey, 2015–16*).

However, the study found that resolution through traditional leaders often emphasized reconciliation rather than protection or justice. While this approach maintains social harmony, it may expose women to repeated abuse. This observation is consistent with literature highlighting the need to strengthen formal legal mechanisms while engaging community leaders in prevention efforts (*UN Women, 2018*).

Comparison with Existing Literature

The findings from Phangwa Village largely

mirror trends observed in Malawi and Sub-Saharan Africa. Poverty, alcohol abuse, patriarchal norms, and economic dependency are consistently cited as drivers of domestic violence. However, this study adds a localized perspective, showing how these factors specifically affect women in a small rural community. Unlike national surveys, which provide broad statistics, the case study approach reveals detailed experiences, coping strategies, and the nuanced social context that shape women's vulnerability and response to abuse.

CONCLUSION

This study assessed the impact of domestic violence against women in Phangwa Village, T/A Malengachanzi, Nkhosakota District. The findings indicate that domestic violence is widespread, multifaceted, and driven by social, economic, and cultural factors. Women in the village experience physical, psychological, economic, and sexual violence, with psychological and physical abuse being the most prevalent. Key contributing factors include alcohol abuse by partners, poverty, economic dependence, low education levels, and traditional norms that legitimize male dominance.

The study also revealed that domestic violence has severe consequences for women, affecting their physical and mental health, economic productivity, social relationships, and the well-being of children. Coping mechanisms largely involve silence, endurance, or seeking informal support from family or traditional leaders, while formal support services remain limited and often inaccessible.

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