

PEACEFUL HOME ALLIANCE FOUNDATION

RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE: BREAKING THE SILENCE, CREATING
AWARENESS AND LISTENING TO THE STORIES.



INTRODUCTION

Objective of discussion

By the end of the discussion, students will be well informed on;

- ❖ Domestic violence and spousal abuse;
- ❖ Understand the legal protections;
- ❖ Remedies;
- ❖ And societal responses to combat domestic violence and spousal abuse

What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is a **systematic pattern of coercive, controlling, or abusive behavior** perpetrated by one intimate partner or family member against another within a domestic setting. It encompasses **multiple forms of harm**, including but not limited to:

- ❖ **Physical Abuse** – Acts of violence such as hitting, slapping, choking, or using weapons to inflict bodily harm.
- ❖ **Emotional/Psychological Abuse** – Manipulation, humiliation, gaslighting, threats, isolation, and constant criticism designed to degrade self-worth.
- ❖ **Sexual Abuse** – Forced or non-consensual sexual acts, marital rape, reproductive coercion, and sexual humiliation.

What is spousal abuse?

A Specific Subset of Domestic Violence

Spousal abuse refers to **violent or oppressive behavior inflicted by one spouse (or intimate partner) upon the other** within a marital or cohabiting relationship. It is characterized by:

- ❖ **Power Imbalance** – The abuser seeks dominance through intimidation, fear, and control.
- ❖ **Cycle of Violence** – Often follows a pattern: tension-building → acute violence → reconciliation/honeymoon phase → repeat.
- ❖ **Long-Term Consequences** – Leads to severe trauma, PTSD, economic instability, and even fatalities (e.g., dowry deaths, honor killings).

NB: Domestic violence and spousal abuse are **not merely private disputes** but **grave human rights violations** requiring legal intervention, societal awareness, and systemic support for survivors.

FORMS OF ABUSE

Abuse refers to **harmful behaviors** used to **control, dominate, or exploit** another person. It can occur in **domestic, familial, institutional, or societal settings**. Below are the primary forms of abuse:

❖ Physical Abuse

Definition: Intentional use of force causing injury, pain, or impairment. **Examples:** Hitting, slapping, burning, strangling, forced confinement.

❖ Emotional/Psychological Abuse

Definition: Manipulative behavior harming mental well-being. **Examples:** Gaslighting, threats, humiliation, isolation, verbal insults. **Impact:** Causes anxiety, depression, PTSD.

❖ Sexual Abuse

Definition: Non-consensual sexual acts or coercion. **Examples:** Rape (including marital rape), molestation

Who are the common victims

Domestic violence and spousal abuse predominantly affect **women**, with **global** data showing that **1 in 3 women** experiences abuse in her lifetime. However, **men can also be victims**, though their cases are often **underreported and overlooked** due to societal stigma and gender stereotypes.

❖ **Women as Primary Victims –**

- Most reported cases involve female survivors facing abuse from male partners.
- Factors like **gender inequality, economic dependence, and cultural norms** contribute to higher victimization.

❖ **Male Victims – The Hidden Reality –**

- Studies suggest **1 in 6 men** experience domestic abuse.
- Men often **hesitate to report** due to fear of ridicule, lack of support systems, or disbelief by authorities.

❖ **Why Male Abuse is Overlooked –**

- **Social stigma** ("Men should endure pain").
- **Legal & institutional bias** (Fewer shelters/resources for male survivors).

Legal recognition

Domestic violence (DV) and spousal abuse are recognized worldwide as **serious human rights violations** and public health concerns. Key global frameworks include:

❖ **United Nations (UN) Instruments:**

- **CEDAW (1979)** – Requires states to eliminate violence against women.
- **UN Declaration on VAW (1993)** – Defines DV as gender-based violence.
- **SDG 5.2** – Targets eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls.

Ghana has made **legal and policy strides** but faces implementation gaps.

❖ **Domestic Violence Act (Act 732, 2007) –**

- Defines DV broadly (physical, sexual, economic, emotional abuse).
- Establishes **Domestic Violence Support Fund**.
- Allows for **protection orders**.

❖ **Criminal Code (Amendment) Act, 2007 –**

- Criminalizes marital rape (though enforcement is weak).

❖ **1992 Constitution (Article 26) –** Prohibits harmful customary practices.

Institutional measures in Ghana

Ghana has established several institutional frameworks to address domestic violence (DV) and spousal abuse, though challenges in implementation persist.

Key Institutional Measures:

- ❖ **Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) –**
 - A specialized police unit under the Ghana Police Service that handles DV cases, provides victim support, and facilitates legal action.
 - Operates nationwide with offices in major regions.
- ❖ **Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection (MoGCSP) –**
 - Leads policy formulation and coordination of gender-based violence (GBV) interventions.
 - Implements awareness campaigns (e.g., *16 Days of Activism Against GBV*).
- ❖ **Domestic Violence Support Fund (DVSF) –**
 - Established under the **Domestic Violence Act (2007, Act 732)** to provide financial assistance for survivors (medical care, legal aid, shelters).
- ❖ **Social Welfare & Community Development Departments –**
 - Offer counseling, mediation, and temporary shelter referrals for abuse victims.
- ❖ **NGOs & Civil Society Efforts –**
 - Organizations like **WILDAF Ghana**, **Gender Centre**, PHAF, and **Ark Foundation** provide legal aid, advocacy, and rehabilitation services.

Challenges facing measures

Despite progressive laws and institutional frameworks, Ghana faces significant challenges in effectively addressing domestic violence (DV) and spousal abuse:

❖ **Weak Law Enforcement**

- Delayed justice due to bureaucratic inefficiencies in courts and police processes.
- Low prosecution rates, with many cases settled out of court or dropped due to family pressure.

❖ **Underfunding of Support Systems**

- The **Domestic Violence Support Fund (DVSF)** remains inadequately resourced, limiting access to shelters, medical care, and legal aid for survivors.
- **DOVVSU (Domestic Violence Unit)** lacks sufficient personnel, logistics, and training to handle cases effectively.

❖ **Cultural and Societal Barriers**

- Normalization of abuse due to patriarchal norms and victim-blaming attitudes.
- Preference for traditional mediation over legal action, especially in rural areas.

❖ **Limited Shelter and Support Services**

- Few safe shelters exist, forcing many survivors to return to abusive environments.
- Lack of specialized counseling and rehabilitation programs for victims and perpetrators.

❖ **Underreporting of Cases**

- Fear of stigma, retaliation, or economic dependence prevents many victims (especially men and LGBTQ+ individuals) from reporting abuse.
- Distrust in law enforcement discourages formal complaints.

❖ **Gaps in Legal Implementation**

- Marital rape remains poorly enforced despite being criminalized.
- Weak monitoring of protection orders, leaving survivors at risk.

The way forward to curbing domestic violence in Ghana

To strengthen Ghana's response to domestic violence (DV) and spousal abuse, the following measures are essential:

❖ **Strengthening Law Enforcement & Judicial Processes**

- Train police (especially DOVVSU) and judges on DV case handling.
- Fast-track courts for GBV cases to ensure swift justice.

❖ **Increased Funding & Resources**

- Allocate adequate budget to the **Domestic Violence Support Fund (DVSF)** for shelters, legal aid, and medical care.
- Expand DOVVSU's reach with more personnel and logistics.

❖ **Public Awareness & Education**

- Nationwide campaigns to challenge harmful gender norms and victim-blaming.
- Integrate DV prevention into school curricula and community dialogues.

❖ **Improved Support Systems**

- Build more shelters and safe spaces for survivors.
- Provide psychosocial support and economic empowerment programs.

❖ **Legal & Policy Reforms**

- Strict enforcement of marital rape laws and protection orders.
- Regular review of DV policies to address emerging gaps.

❖ **Community & Traditional Leader Engagement**

- Partner with chiefs and religious leaders to discourage out-of-court settlements.
- Promote male involvement in anti-violence advocacy.

*"Silence enables abuse—
action ends it. Let's make
Ghana safer for all
survivors."*



*Strengthening laws, support & awareness
to #EndDomesticViolence*

FROM LAWS TO LOVE—BUILDING A GHANA WHERE HOMES ARE SAFE, NOT SCARS