

USING DATA TO ADVANCE STATUS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

EXAMPLE OF THE WORK OF GENDER
STUDIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS
DOCUMENTATION CENTRE, GHANA

Dorcas Coker-Appiah, Executive Director
The Gender Studies and Human Rights
Documentation Centre, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

- 1998 national level study on violence against women and children.
- Partnered with 8 organisations, both national level and community based.
- CEDEP, Amasachina, Maata N'Tudu, ASSID, Action Aid, Trades Union Congress, BEWDA, CENSUD

Introduction contd.

- The partnership aimed to place the issue of VAWG on the public agenda
- To challenge social tolerance and complicity as well as the state's silence
- In addition to partners, project worked with some academics in leading field work, data analysis and writing the report

Key findings

- The findings revealed that violence against women and children was not seen as a crime but was viewed as a private matter that should be taken care of within the family.
- Interventions were seen as an intrusion into a private affair.
- This societal view consequently inhibited women in talking about their experiences of violence.

- When women chose to talk about their experiences of violence, the study indicated that they preferred to report informally to family, friends or members of the community, leading to low reporting rates.
- When women reported, state agencies were the least likely venue for them to report.

- The attitude of state agency personnel, with the same biases as the society in which they operate, tended to reflect in how they responded to cases of violence.
- The research revealed a lack of support for victims of violence. Whilst this lack of support was evident throughout the country, it was more so in the rural communities.

Priority issues identified

- Poor state/institutional response to VAW, with frequent patterns of victim blaming, referring reported cases back to family and state agency personnel and society in general trivializing the issue;
- High degree of tolerance of VAW in Ghanaian society, perpetuated by strong perceptions that domestic violence, that is violence that occurs in the home in intimate relationships, is a private/family matter and not a serious crime;

Priority issues contd.

- General confusion about what constitutes violence and ignorance about the causes, consequences and mechanisms that perpetuate VAW, and
- Isolation of rural women and women's expressed dissatisfaction at the assistance and support they received when they reported

Activities to respond to priority issues

- Development of Rural Response System
- Training of state agency personnel
- Training of partners and other civil society organizations on VAWG
- Advocacy for passage of DV law

Objectives of Rural Response

- To increase the visibility of violence against women as a social issue in the target communities and surrounding areas;
- To establish community-based teams (COMBAT) for response, support and protection of women experiencing violence;

Objectives contd.

- To develop a referral system between the community based response teams and state agencies to encourage a consistent and coordinated response;
- To work with key state agency response personnel to ensure that re-victimization of women does not occur;
- To strengthen appropriate existing traditional systems of resolution of violence against women.

What is COMBAT

- Community based men and women trained
- to undertake number of activities.
- to provide support to and protect women experiencing violence;

Role of COMBAT

- Sensitization and awareness raising on VAWG: Creating awareness and sensitizing the community about harmful effects of violence and the benefits of a relationship based on equality as necessary to ensure the reduction or elimination of violence.
- Crisis intervention: Intervening on behalf of victims when a report is made to a member.

- Accompanying victim to report to state agencies, if required: Experience has shown that when a victim of violence seeks outside support, it is important to have other people to be with them, such as family and friends. The COMBAT member would play this role.

- Providing counselling to victims: The fact that a victim of violence has sought outside help does not mean the victim knows what she wants to do or how she can go about things. The role of the COMBAT in providing counselling is to put all available options to the victim and empower her to take her own decision.

Training of state agencies

- Objective of training of state agency personnel was to address poor state/institutional response to VAWG with frequent patterns of victim blaming, and referring reported cases back to family.
- To change attitudes of state agency personnel on VAWG and to victims of VAWG

- Over 500 personnel of Domestic Violence Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Police trained.
- 60 investigators of the Criminal investigation Department (CID) trained
- VAW training now part of police training curriculum

CSO training

- In addition to partners, about 30 organizations trained to improve understanding of VAWG
- Organizations intergrate VAWG prevention activities into their work

Advocacy

- Formation of the DV coalition for the passage of DV Act.
- Over 6 years of activism
- Coalition included not only organizations but individuals.
- Coalition still active

Conclusion

- The research, the publication and dissemination of the findings led to increased interest in VAWG prevention work in Ghana.
- The findings made it easier to push for passage of comprehensive DV law.
- Increased public awareness on VAWG as a social justice issue
- Increased reporting and prosecution

Conclusion contd.

- Partnership of multiple stakeholders and at various levels helped to make the issue a national one.