



## **IMPLICATIONS OF HOUSEHOLD VIOLENCE ON LEARNING FOR PUBLIC SAFETY: A CASE STUDY AMONG SELECTED HOUSEHOLDS IN LUSAKA DISTRICT, ZAMBIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The frequent occurrence of violent behaviour displayed by some people in some home environments has had a devastating effect in Zambian communities. The purpose of this study was to ascertain how household violence would implicate learning for public safety so as to establish possible strategies that should be integrated in public safety education or community sensitisation in order to curb the vice. The study was underpinned by a qualitative approach in the context of a case study. The population included members of the public, some government officials, some members of Non-Governmental Organisations and churches. Data was collected using semi-structured interview guides and focus group discussion guide. Data was analysed thematically. The findings from the study revealed that being emotionally/psychologically disturbed, violent habits and the upbringing of children in an environment where violence is inevitable were found to have been the reasons as to how household violence would impact on learning for public safety. The study recommended that the government should give resources and authority to the police, church leaders, traditional or community leaders and some NGOs that deal with violence cases, for campaigns of attitude change in the larger society so that household violence as a deterrent to public safety could be addressed objectively.*

**KEYWORDS:** Household, Violence, Household Violence, Public, Safety

## **INTRODUCTION**

Household violence has become very rampant world over. It is an internationally-recognised problem that has remained vicious and a threat to human life. Household violence has been one of the major challenges in the Zambian society given that women, men and children alike suffer either directly or indirectly from this social vice. In addition, the frequent occurrence of violent behaviour displayed by some people in some home environments has had a devastating effect in Zambian communities and has become a cause for great concern among the stakeholders involved. Anderson (2007) and Naran (2006) conducted a research on violence. Their findings revealed that violent acts perpetrated by aggressive individuals' impact negatively on the ethos of a community; compromise the safety of the public, which in turn affects relationships adversely between individuals.

Bandura's social cognitive theory (1962) posits that depressed people not only judge themselves ruthlessly, but also tend to respond to others in unfriendly manner and treat



themselves roughly for their inadequacies, resulting in feelings of worthlessness, chronic misery, pervasive depression and a lack of determination (Feist and Feist 2009). Retaliations to physical provocation are further contributory factors leading to violence (Bester and Du Plessis, 2010). Physical violence includes acts such as hitting, kicking, stabbing, shooting, pushing and shoving others, throwing objects, breaking windows, defacing property and setting objects alight (Moeller 2001). In addition, factors such as alcohol use and prejudiced behaviour play a significant role in promoting physical aggression among individuals. Harsh language and bullying are types of behaviour viewed as precursors to physical violence (Marsh et al. 2009). Physical violence and bullying in homes may affect harmony in homes, welfare of the community and have a direct impact on the safety of the general public (Marsh et al. 2009).

Some research findings indicate that for every violent act perpetrated by an aggressive individual, there is a consequence that not only affects the victim adversely, but also the entire community (Huston and Ripke, 2006). Accordingly, individuals who are concerned about their safety are less likely to focus much on their relationships and some tend to even shun such violent home environments, and opt to engage in extra-marital affairs so as to find peace. This, in turn, becomes a precursor to some forms of violence such as physical violence. Likewise, if violence happens in a home environment, spouses who worry about being safe are less able to live without fear, are less confident and suffer low self-esteem. Low Self-esteem Victims of violent behaviour suffer feelings of anxiety, insecurity and fear (Dellasega and Nixon 2003). Feelings of inferiority and guilt may cause loss of self-esteem and predispose victims to depression and suicidal tendencies (Moeller 2001). These individuals' inability to cope with the injustice, helplessness and hopelessness of their situations results in them repressing their feelings and expressing antisocial behaviour in the form of violence, reclusiveness and substance abuse.

The effect of household violence on victims is devastating. It not only harms the marriages but also destroys their families and limits the community's workforce. There is an all-round atmosphere of fear, impunity and insecurity in violence-prone areas. Household violence is connected to other human rights abuses of suppression of the rights to speech, association and liberty. It also has negative impact on the health of its survivors.

However, most literatures on household violence focused much on the consequences and its causes without seriously delving much into how such violence would implicate learning for public safety. Hence, the study that seeks to ascertain how such violence would implicate learning for public safety would help to establish some strategies and measures to curb the vice with the hope of integrating such strategies and measures in public safety education or community sensitisations for public safety to prevail. The purpose of this study was to ascertain how household violence would implicate learning for public safety.

### **Problem Statement**

Despite the measures that are put in place by the government, household violence is still occurring; resulting in issues such as killings and some physical and psychological disorders. As Wettersten *et al.* (2004) alluded to, household violence lowers quality of life and also leads to physical, emotional and psychological torture on the part of children, dependants as well as the individuals who are directly or indirectly affected by this vice. This makes it become a threat on the public.



According to The United National International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2000), many people know that household violence is a criminal act involving victims and offenders who are related to one another. Household violence knows no racial, gender, age, religious, socioeconomic, or sexual orientation boundaries. Statistics show that these crimes impact virtually every one of us in some way (Richards, 2011). What most people may not be aware of is that household violence has become a national dilemma, with a crime of this type occurring every time (Wettersten *et al.*, 2004). Family members try to ignore what is happening and neighbours do not want to get involved. The victim is usually left alone to determine the solution to it. Instead of the vice (household violence) being addressed through public safety education before it is further developed, law enforcement agencies are usually left to handle each case only after a criminal act has taken place and someone's right has been violated already. Much as we appreciate the widespread awareness about existing household violence, learning for public safety as the case of household violence is crucial. Perhaps, a study which ascertains implications of household violence on learning for public safety so as to establish strategies with the hope of integrating such in public safety education or community sensitisation could remedy the situation.

## THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Theoretical Framework is the structure that can hold or support a theory of a research study (Radhakrishna, Yoder and Ewing, 2007). Therefore, this section will provide an explanation of theories in relation to this study so as to understand phenomena, challenge and extend existing knowledge within the limits of critical boundary assumptions. A number of different psychological theories address the causes of Family Violence (FV). The most popular theories all acknowledge the abuse of power and control by the abusers, although the role of power and control varies by theoretical orientation (Orakles 2005; Farmer 1979). There are a number of theoretical categories such as: psychoanalytical, social, and cognitive behavioural, and family and systems theories of FV. However, the study was guided by the social theories of FV particularly, social learning theory and reactive aggression theory. These theories focus on how aggression, abuse, and violence are learned and transferred by individual members within the family. Social Theories of Family Violence focus on processes that are created through interactions with others in one-to-one relationships or in large groups (Bandura, 1979).

### Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory maintains that individuals learn social behaviours by observing and imitating other people (Bandura, 1989). In addition, Bandura (2009) alluded that imitation of role models is the most important element in how children learn. According to Papalia, Olds and Fieldman (2010), the process of imitation can be seen in the development of language aggression and moral decision-making. Social learning theory posits that individuals become aggressive towards family members because their aggressive behaviours are learned through operant conditioning and observing behaviour in role models (Malley-Morrison, 2004). He further explained operant conditioning as the strengthening of behaviour through positive and negative reinforcement as well as the suppression of behaviours through punishment. In fact, corporal punishment maybe chosen as a disciplinary action simply because it typically brings about children's compliance with parental demands (Gershoff, 2002). However, research points to both short and long-term negative effects associated with physical aggressiveness,



antisocial behaviour, and poor parent-child-relationships during childhood, aggression, criminal behaviour, mental health problems and partner or spouse abuse in adulthood (Straussberg, 1994).

However, social learning theory, in this study, attempts to explain the presence of intergenerational behaviours as a result of the way children are brought up within their home environments. For example, in a home where Christian values are upheld, children who are being brought up within that home environment are expected to behave in a Christianity way even as they go out leaving their parents. Bandura (1989) proposed that as children grow up, they receive feedback regarding their own behaviour. This serves as a basis for them to develop standards of judging their behaviours and seeking out models who match those standards. Children who grow up in violent/abusive families learn, imitate and repeat those abusive/violent behaviours in future relationships (Bandura, 1989). Individuals who were abused in childhood are at greater risks of abusing their own families in adulthood (Jackson, 1999). In addition, Jackson (1999) observed that an individual who observed violence in their families when they were children are at high risk of abusing their spouses. Corvo (2000) alluded that young adults who observed and experienced abuse when they were children are more likely to be in an abusive intimate relationship as either abuser or victim. Thus, social learning theory, as a family-based theory, examines the level of family conflict and the indirect lessons children learn.

### **Reactive Aggression Theory**

The theory of reactive aggression focuses on emotional and cognitive processes leading to behavioural responses (Berkowitz, 1993). It was chosen for this study because of the behavioural responses that come as a result of emotional and cognitive processes exhibited in a violent act. According to Straus (1983), when an individual experiences an unpleasant situation, an unpleasant stimulus occurs. This results in negative emotional responses that lead to an urge to hurt others or thoughts of hurting others. Straus (1983) further explained that the urge to hurt results in aggressive behaviour unless inhibiting factors are present. Douglas (2001) classified a group of individuals who abuse their spouses as “borderline/cyclical batterers”. These individuals have been observed to react with rage when they perceive or are faced with actual rejection or abandonment by their spouses. Once these individuals experience emotional pain, they are overwhelmed with the desire and thoughts to hurt their spouses (Douglas, 2001). The desire and thoughts may be immediately followed by rage and violent behaviours towards their spouses unless something happens to derail them (e.g., arrival of the police in response to a call from a neighbour or a knock on the door from an unexpected visitor). The reaction to aggression when faced with situation of pain and anger aids in our understanding of why household violence occurs and may increase our ability to combat the cognitive distortions that underlie some of the aggressive and abusive behaviours in which individuals engage as explained by this theory.

The two theories greatly influenced the direction of this study whereby causes of violence were explored, and brought out direct and indirect experiences of violence by the public. Understanding of the named theories was hoped to bring out improvements on existing interventions. Lastly, each theory presented its own limitations but the important thing was that the theories attempted to find a way in which the learning for public safety could be established.



## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a case study as a research design in a context of a qualitative approach. Non-probability-sampling design was used, specifically homogenous and expert purposive sampling technique. The initial sample size was 40 of which 35 were supposed to be members of the public and 5 key informants but the total sample size reached up to 80 of which 70 were members of the public and 10 were key informants. The researcher wanted to gather wide range of views according to the direct or indirect experiences of the participants. According to Bowen (2008), the concept *data saturation* (developed originally for grounded theory studies but applicable to all qualitative research that employs interviews as the primary data source) entails bringing new participants continually into the study until the data set is complete, as indicated by data replication or redundancy. Therefore, saturation in this study was reached when the researcher gathered data to the point of diminishing returns; when nothing new was being added. Thus, sample size was directly related to the concept of saturation. Morse (1995) states that saturation is a key excellent qualitative work but there is no published guidelines or tests of adequacy for estimating the sample size required to reach saturation. Semi-structured interview guide, focus group discussion and observation guide were used to collect primary data while secondary data were collected from secondary sources such as documents, journals, registers and so on. The researcher mainly used thematic analysis to analyse data. However, some descriptive statistic was used to enrich qualitative data. Validity and Reliability was ensured by methodological type of triangulation which was used as the research employed more than one tool of data collection about the same phenomena.

## RESULTS/FINDINGS

The study sought to ascertain how household violence would implicate learning for public safety. It was found that different aspects of violence make the public struggle in learning for public safety. The study revealed that through exposure to violence, violence becomes habitual behaviour in a victim or a member of the violent family. However, habits of violence, being emotionally/psychologically disturbed, and child upbringing in an environment where household violence is inevitable were found to have been the reasons why violence would implicate learning for public safety

### Habits

It was found that some people just develop a violent habitual kind of behaviour towards their spouses. The FGD and interviews of different categories of participants revealed that sometimes people enjoy to be violent for nothing. They feel good to be feared at whenever they are around people. Sometimes they can just create an argument that will lead to violence. Such people do not even fear to be jailed because of violence.

One of the participants interviewed narrated a story of a certain man who he tried to counsel but he could not take the advice given to him by a lot of people.

*"I was on a bus coming from town when a man had a quarrel with a friend. He told the friend publicly to say 'wılanjanganlila nkakubikila poison mubwalwa ukafwe.' [Don't play with my mind, I will poison your beer and you will die]. This man was rebuked by everyone around to say he should not utter such words*





*on public because even “when the person is poisoned by others, people will say it was you.” The man kept on praising himself to say ‘I don’t fear being jailed as long as I’ve done what I wanted to do. He even added that even when the wife becomes stupid, I can kill her. Such kinds of characters are just demon possessed.’ (Interview)*

### **Child Upbringing**

The research findings revealed that the upbringing of children affects learning for public safety. Participants were asked to explain why people fight or resort to violence even when there are penalties for that. It was found that the way a person was brought up could have an impact on his/her future. In an FGD, it was found that people who were brought up in a violent environment are at increased risks for a wide range of behavioural disorder trying to use violence as a way of resolving issues.

One participant described the behaviour of his young brother as follows:

*“My young brother is a disgrace to the family because of his unpleasant behaviour towards his wife and the entire family. He is very violent even to his wife and children. I think the way he was brought up by the uncle could be the effect because even the uncle used to be very violent and he used to maltreat the same brother of mine and used to beat his wife. So, that exposure to violent had caused my brother to behave the same.” (Interview)*

### **Psychological/Emotional Disturbance**

The study findings revealed that people struggle to learn for public safety when they become emotionally/psychologically disturbed as a result of household violence experienced. This was found to be the most critical thing having discovered that most of the acts of violence come unconsciously when people are in the state of psychological disturbance. It was revealed that out of any act of violence, violence prevails in return; not that the offender wants to revenge or plans to become violent towards the other but it comes in unconscious manner.

One of the participants from psychosocial department when interviewed explained that:

*“When a person is wronged by someone, they become psychologically disturbed making them to have that immediate impulse to hurt that person in return. After that when a crime has already been committed that’s when they come to realise that they were not supposed to do that but to handle that issue amicably.” (Interview)*

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study have been reached at after employing the appropriate data analysis mentioned above in methodology. Findings are discussed in line with the objective that was set in an introduction of this article. These discussions will help to come up with an understanding of the current situation regarding household violence.



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## **Implication of Household Violence on learning for Public Safety**

This study sought to ascertain how household violence would implicate learning for public safety. The study indicated that habits, psychological/emotional disorder and children upbringing in an environment where violence was inevitable were found to have an indirect impact on learning for public safety.

Anderson (2007) and Naran (2006) conducted a research on violence and their findings revealed that violent acts perpetrated by aggressive individuals' impact negatively on the ethos community, compromise the safety of the public, which in turn adversely affects relationships between individuals.

### **Habits**

The participants were asked why some people fail to avoid violence even when there are laws and punishments enshrined in the Zambian Constitution against violence and what implications violence has on learning for public safety. The study revealed that some perpetrators of violence develop the habitual kind of violent behaviour when they are exposed to violence throughout their life. That is what makes them to become violent towards their spouses. The results are in agreement with a study by Jolin and Welter (2011) who reported that aggressive habits learned early in life, are a foundation for later behaviour. The findings also agree with Social learning theory which indicates that individuals learn social behaviours by observing and imitating other people (Bandura, 1989). Furthermore, this theory posits that individuals become aggressive towards family members because their aggressive behaviours are learned through operant conditioning and observing behaviour in role models (Malley-Morrison, 2004).

However, this researcher found that some people just feel good to be feared whenever they are around their counterparts. These people may also have a tendency to start quarrels or argument that can lead them to violence. In addition, it was discovered that such people do not even fear to be jailed. Therefore, this could be that inadequate impulse or emotional control puts such an individual in a situation to act violently, especially if violent acts are that person's preferred response learned through past experience. Paul (2011) explained that people who intentionally use violence as a way to release anger tend to be more hostile. He further indicated that such people are likely to get into frequent arguments with people and be involved in physical fights as a way to release anger than people who are not violent. In this regard, such people struggle to avoid violence or to learn for public safety when such behaviour becomes a habit. This study concluded that such people may struggle to learn for public safety even when there are laws protecting the general public against violence.

### **Upbringing**

Findings of the study indicated that upbringing of a child in a violent environment has an adverse impact on public safety. This implies that there is violent behaviour transmission in children during their upbringing, as they observe and imitate what the elders do. Thus, these children are expected to behave violently towards others even when they grow up, as they see violence as a best way to resolve issues in relationships. This is in line with a recognition by World Health Organisation (WHO) (2007) that exposure to or observing violence between parents leads to intimate partner violence (IPV) because intimate partner violence tends to run in families. This also agrees to the social learning theory by Bandura (1989) which posits that



children learn to be violent through watching their parents and through being reinforced for their own aggressive behaviours. Therefore, this becomes a deterrent to public safety.

Public safety education should encompass everyone in the community such that good morals would yield a friendly and harmonious environment without violence. WHO (2007), indicates that exposure to community violence (outside the family unit) leads to an increased likelihood of family violence. When a child is exposed to violence during their entire life of growth, they are expected to behave violently towards others even in the relationship, and see violence as a best way of resolving issues. This is supported by Devries et al (2011) who clarified that exposure to violence has a powerful clinical, consolidating social adversity and psychopathology in future generations.

In this regard, such people can struggle to learn public safety in case of violence because violence becomes part of their way of life even when such people witness other perpetrators being imprisoned. This means that such sentence imposed to perpetrators as a deterrent to would-be offenders might serve no purpose. This entails that unless the upbringing of children is not in a violent environment, learning for public safety will be inevitable.

### **Psychological/Emotional Disturbance**

The study revealed that people struggle to learn for public safety when they become emotionally/psychologically disturbed (anxiety disorder and depression) as a result of household violence experienced. It was also found that when a person is wronged by someone, they become psychologically disturbed making them to have that immediate impulse to hurt that person in return. A study conducted by Lisa and Robert (2011) indicated that there are certain “voices” (negative thought processes) that flood the minds of these violent individuals influencing them to engage in acts of violence. These voices that contribute to violence include those that support social mistrust, those paranoid, suspicious thoughts, feeling victimized and persecuted, which promote and support thoughts of being discounted, blamed, or humiliated by other people. In this regard, these voices make a person often to react violently in an effort to regain the aggrandized self-image. This is in line with reactive aggression theory by Douglas (2001) which posits that once individuals experience emotional pain; they are overwhelmed with the desire and thoughts to hurt their spouses. In addition, the desire and thoughts may be immediately followed by rage and violent behaviours towards their spouses. However, the researcher viewed that the offender may not even want to revenge or plans to become violent towards the other but it is just that violence maybe impulsively or in an unconscious manner. It can be concluded that violence triggered by psychological disturbance such as frustrations and perceived humiliation can mainly be to retaliate, intimidate or exert control.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the study achieved its objective successfully by answering the research question set in order to ascertain the implications of household violence on learning for public safety among the selected households in Lusaka District. Having examined the views of the respondents, the following were the major findings of the study:

The study revealed that through exposure to violence, perpetuates violence in return. Some habits of violent behaviour start developing in a victim or a member of the violent family.





Therefore, habits, being emotionally/psychologically disturbed and the upbringing of a child where violence was inevitable, were found to have been the reasons as to how violence impacts on learning for public safety. Based on the findings, this researcher concluded that for public safety to prevail in the society, as in a case of household violence, children should not be exposed to any kind of violence. This is because children learn through imitations and observations as they grow up, such that, they start developing a habitual kind of violent behaviour even as they grow up to become adults, making them to act violently whenever they feel to be wronged. This implies that, learning for public safety as in a case of household violence cannot prevail. This makes household violence to have an adverse impact on learning for public safety in a case of household violence.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the findings elaborated in the previous chapter, the following are the recommendations

1. Arising from this, it is recommended that the government could give resources to the police, church leaders, traditional or community leaders and some NGOs that deal with violence cases. These resources could be used for campaigns on attitude change and raising awareness about the STOP HOUSEHOLD VIOLENCE PROGRAMS in the larger society so that household violence as a deterrent to public safety can be addressed objectively.
2. In order for learning for public safety to prevail, sensitisation about the effects of violence should be embraced in public safety education. The Ministry of Information, through public sensitisation, should create awareness among the general populace on the dangers and negative effects of violence, especially those issues that would deter the public from violence
3. The study revealed that household violence has some health risks such as physical and some psychological/emotional disorders. Arising from this, it is recommended that health promoters in the ministry must include the aspect of learning for public safety in the case of household violence in their health education programme such that the general public may be equipped with vast knowledge on preventive measures of household violence

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