



## Lived Experiences of Domestic Violence and Coping Strategies among Female Secondary School Teachers in Uganda

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**Abstract:** This study investigated about lived experiences of domestic violence and coping strategies among female secondary school teachers in Uganda. The study employed qualitative approach within 23 secondary schools in Kitgum District. While through snowball sampling the study targeted all female teachers in these schools, who are victims of domestic violence, only 20 teachers who agreed to participate became the sample of the study. Furthermore, all the 23 head teachers of these schools participated in the study through purposive sampling. Data collection took place through in-depth interviews and data analysis took place through the thematic approach. While some of the domestic violence cases that took place include being beaten, tortured and injured, the victims used multiple ways to cope with the situations. The study recommends faith-based interventions as potential remedy for women who face domestic violence through deploying religious workers like school chaplains or other appropriate religious person to give support to such victims. The study further recommends supportive policy frameworks mainstreamed on tools for empowering female teachers and head teachers on support system for female teachers affected by domestic violence to allow them supportive work environment as well as provision of guidance and counselling experts in schools to provide similar services.

**Keywords:** Domestic violence; coping strategies; teaching roles.

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### Introduction

Domestic violence against women is a concealed, chronic and comprehensive epidemic in societies with adverse consequences (Rakovec-Felser, 2014). It causes hurt and it is accompanied by a possibility of physical, sexual, emotional and psychological

harm (Ghazanfarpour, 2021; Rivera et al., 2015; World Health Organization, 2013; Pence, 1983). Violence against women can result in physical injuries, psychological pains, such as depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorders (PTSD) and

suicidal behaviors, and it can reduce resilience and anxiety tolerance in women (WHO, 2013).

Domestic violence occurs globally. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, domestic statistics for the United States of America showed that from 2016 to 2018, the number of Intimate spousal violence victimization increased by 42% (National coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2020). In Ethiopia, more than one in three ever-married women reported that they had experienced physical, emotional or sexual violence from their husbands at some point in time (Meskele, 2021). The Uganda Demographic and Household Survey report of 2006 pointed out that 60% of women in Uganda had experienced physical violence at the age of 15 (Ocheme et al., 2020). However, statistics are lacking on secondary school female teachers experiencing domestic violence.

Domestic violence is a workplace issue, and those suffering from it need to be helped, yet this cannot be done unless what the victims go through is brought to light. Until such a reckoning, teaching and learning in secondary schools may continue to be affected. Teachers are vital resources who have received less attention than they deserve for their Psychological well-being and yet teachers' stress has been shown to have an impact on their performance all over the world (Rajesh et al., 2022).

The primary role of secondary school teachers is to educate learners and prepare them for further studies and job market (Delener, 2013). Teachers impart knowledge, skills and values and inspire learners by giving instruction, guiding and facilitating learning. For teachers to perform well, they must be physically and emotionally sound, yet this may not be possible for female teachers if they experience violence.

Domestic violence has been found to have negative consequences on employees in many sectors of banking (Oni-Ojo et al., 2014), in health institutions (Fitzgerald et al., 2008), in industries (Ajala, 2008) and in transportation industries (Reeves & O'Leary-Kelly, 2009). Workers who suffer violence may experience physical and emotional problems that can affect their overall well-being and keep them from performing their work effectively. The effect on their performance will be immense without suitable coping measures. If this is to occur among female teachers, then learners' progress will be disrupted since teachers determine students' future academic success (Chetty et al., 2014).

A culture of silence surrounds domestic violence in workplaces, which makes it difficult to get an accurate picture of the extent of the vice (Oni-Ojo et al., 2014; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005). This gap in literature needs to be addressed if learners are to have meaningful education outcomes. In response, this study addressed the research gap on domestic violence among female school teachers at secondary schools in Uganda. It focused on female teachers because women are more prone to be victims compared to men (Walby & Allen, 2004).

## **Literature Review**

### **Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence is a pattern of coercive and assaultive behaviors, including physical, sexual, verbal and psychological attacks and economic coercion that people use against intimate partners. This behavior pattern involves intimidation, threats, psychological confusion, emotional pain, verbal abuse, physical and sexual aggression and homicide (Mendez et al., 2022). The power and control can be in the form of coercion, physical abuse, intimidation, emotional abuse, economic abuse and deprivation (Ajala, 2008).

### **The Lived Experience of Domestic Violence**

Despite a large number of studies having been conducted around the globe focusing on abusive relationships, knowledge about abused women's experiences is lacking (Ghani, 2014). Notably, the impact of such experience may have adverse consequences for the victims (Ghani, 2014).

In a qualitative study conducted among abused women in Norway, the examples of abuse reported by the participants included power and control strategies that keep women in subordinate positions to fit the conservative perception of manhood and womanhood (Alasaker et al., 2016). The experience of women in domestic violence can also take the form of physical violence. This includes being slapped, pushed, hit, kicked, dragged or beaten up as well as being threatened with guns or knives (WHO, 2005).

Domestic violence does not only cause physical injury. It also undermines the social, economic and emotional well-being of victims (Kaur & Garg, 2008). Emotional/psychological abuse occurs when someone does something that has a negative emotional effect on another individual with the intent to control the impacted individual (Zhou et al., 2017). It also includes threatening a person, his/

her possessions or harming a person's sense of self-worth by putting them at risk of severe behavioral, cognitive, emotional, or mental disorder, which can arise from name-calling, criticism, social isolation, intimidating or exploitation to dominate, routinely making unrealistic demands and terrorizing a person verbally (Obi & Ozumba, 2007).

Qualitative research consistently found that women frequently considered emotionally abusive acts to be more devastating than physical violence (WHO, 2005). A victim may be influenced into thinking that she was not assaulted, and the people around may not know what is going on in the life of the survivor with no external injury to show, yet emotional abuse can be devastating to the survivor who suffers silently, feeling manipulated and controlled. Economic violence can occur when the abuser prevents the victim from getting to work, controls all the household income or denies her money for day-to-day needs (Ajala, 2008). It involves discrimination or denial of opportunities, services, exclusion, denial of access to remunerated employment and denial of property rights (Ocheme et al., 2020). A study conducted among armed forces in Canada found a moderate correlation between physical and emotional violence (Skomorovsky, 2015), suggesting that individuals who experience one type of violence may often be victims of another. This means specific types of violence may not necessarily occur in isolation.

### **Coping Strategies**

Coping refers to people's ongoing effort to meet external and internal stressors perceived as exceeding their resources. People are motivated to use different strategies to cope with threatening situations that are impinged upon them. Domestic violence is one unique stressors that can affect individual functioning and requires coping (Lazarus, 1984). Experts and scientists report that women who are victims of domestic violence apply emotion-oriented strategies to cope with the domestic violence or its outcomes instead of problem-solving strategies (Lazurus, 2013). Avoidance style, which uses distracting thoughts, amusing, trying to absorb new activities, and getting entertained by social activities, as well as positive adaptation in response to unpleasant conditions, are some measures used for coping (Krok, 2015; Ungar & Perry, 2012; Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). A person's character is further strengthened by their inner ability, social skills, interactions with the environment and spirituality, and it is noticeable as

a positive trait (Pietrzak & Southwick, 2011; Zautra et al., 2010; Diener & Suh, 2000). Coping is seen as the most critical method in helping to reduce psychological distress and further enhances victims' survival (Mahapatro & Singh, 2020).

According to a study conducted on domestic violence and teachers, 6% of respondents were found to be indulging in focused emotional engagement while 94% were indulging in focused emotional disengagement as a measure for coping (Arul Mari et al., 2021). They cited sharing with trustworthy friends, avoiding being with family members, trying to be normal as if nothing happened, and only a minimum of 2% sought professional support from counsellors (Arul Mari et al., 2021). In a study, victims of domestic violence were found to use five forms of coping strategies to reduce the stress caused. These are filling in time, positive thinking, seeking formal service assistance, religious approaches and sharing problems with informal systems (Yusof et al., 2022).

While the quality of educators' personal and professional progress is linked to their psychological well-being and coping skills (Department of Education, 2014), concerns are on the rise about teachers' mental health and coping skills (Espinoza, 2015). This could affect their teaching roles. Teachers' happiness is crucial to maintaining a stable atmosphere for students (Bahari et al. 2016). However, this may not be easy when female teachers suffer domestic violence.

In Kitgum District, where this study took place, several reports on the civil conflict show domestic violence as one of the most persistent violations of women's and girls' rights and a significant public health problem in the region with high rates of violence, including 78.5% of women having experienced at least one type of domestic violence (Kitara et al., 2012; Uganda Demographic Health Survey, 2012; Clarke et al., 2019; Ssenkaaba, 2018). What remains to be brought to light are lived experiences of domestic violence and coping strategies among female secondary school teachers. This study, therefore, explored lived experiences of domestic violence by female teachers and coping strategies adopted.

## **Methodology**

### **Design**

The study employed qualitative approach. The choice of the qualitative approach was guided by Radical Feminist Theory (RFT), which advocates for

subjective inquiries to gain or procure knowledge. Because of the nature of the topic intended to seek participants' open views and explanations on feelings and values contained in the marriage partnership, the inquiry methods employed hoped to enable the researchers engage in honest conversations with the participants. The researcher's interest was to open avenues for the teachers who were victims of domestic violence and the managers of these victims to define and explain what works to enable them to perform their work well despite the problems they go through. The researchers employed the narrative method to explore the experiences of female teachers since narrative research encompasses a broad range of approaches, which are focused on gathering, analyzing, and presenting storied texts or personal accounts to establish a detailed description of the meaning of an individual's experience. By exploring their perception, the narratives made it possible to obtain multiple perspectives that further the understanding of domestic violence

### **Population and Sampling**

The study selected all 23 secondary schools in Kitgum District. Head teachers of these schools participated in the study through purposive sampling. While the study targeted all the female secondary school teachers, who are victims of domestic violence, in all the 23 schools in Kitgum, only 20 who agreed to participate became the sample of the study. The sample for the teachers was selected via snowball sampling. In all, 20 teachers who are victims of domestic violence were chosen as a saturated sample of those willing to participate in the in-depth interviews. The snowball sampling technique was appropriate since domestic violence presents a difficult-to-reach population.

### **Instruments**

The researchers collected data through interview schedules with the female teachers and the school heads.

### **Credibility**

The researchers ensured the credibility of this study through establishing well-organized audit trail. All observations and field notes from interviews were typed and filed chronologically. This provided efficiency in the analysis phase. The researchers had to do prolonged engagements with the participants to compare notes and check for possible distortions of the information. Before the interview sessions, the researchers drew the attention of the

participants to the fact that honesty was desired in the entire process and therefore strived to build confidence and trust and minimize reactivity between the respondents and researchers by getting close, explaining the purpose of the study and continuous interaction as well as addressing their fears.

### **Statistical Treatment of Data**

Thematic approach provided a structure for describing the experiences of female teachers in domestic violence and coping mechanism. The researchers read and re-read all written materials of the data collected, noting the initial ideas, and repeatedly listened to the interview audio recordings to gain initial impression of the narratives. Data collection and analysis went on simultaneously.

### **Ethical Consideration**

The Research and Ethics Committee (REC) of the Uganda Christian University and the Uganda National Council approved this study for Science and Technology (UNCS&T) (SS1273ES). The Kitgum District Education Office also authorized the study. In addition to participants' written informed consent, confidentiality of information and respect for participants' privacy were ensured.

### **Generalizability of the Results**

Although this study handled a small number of participants, findings are extrapolated to a wider population of female teachers in other secondary schools in Uganda. The context of this study supports the inference for the following reasons: Uganda's education system applies to all schools and the Acts, policies and regulations governing the management of schools are similar. The teachers and administrators are all trained at the same institutions and are most likely to behave similarly. Uganda's legal system and other laws are the same and, therefore, are bound to apply likewise, whether in strength or weakness.

### **Results and Discussions**

This section presents results of the study and subsequent discussions. It begins with presentation of demographic factors of respondents and then moves into the presentation of results through research questions.

### **Demographics of Respondents**

This section presents the demographics of respondents as appears in table 1.

In Table 1, most teachers were in the age group of 31-40 years scoring 60%) The number of teachers above 40 years was high. The percentage dropped in the age range of 24 to 30. From the demographics, domestic violence occurs among all age groups of married women. Majority had 1-3 children scoring 80%. Most female teachers (90%) reported attaining a bachelor's degree. Others occupied diploma education. This suggests that domestic violence affects women irrespective of academic level.

**Research Question 1:** What are female teachers' domestic violence experiences?

This study revealed that female teachers experienced physical, emotional/psychological and economic domestic violence.

### Physical Violence

Physical fights/Power and control manifest lived experiences of domestic violence. In the study, 15 of the female teachers interviewed mentioned having been beaten, and six confessed to having been left with injuries.

**Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of female schoolteachers**

Variables	Freq (n=20)	Percent (%)
<b>Age (years)</b>		
24-30	2	10.0
31-40	12	60.0
40 and above	6	30.0
<b>Number of children</b>		
None	1	5.0
1-3	16	80.0
More than 3	3	15.0
<b>Qualifications of participants</b>		
Bachelor's degree	18	90.0
Diploma	2	10.0
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	1	5.0
Married	11	55.0
Divorced/separated	1	5.0
Widowed	1	5.0
Cohabiting	6	30.0
<b>Subjects taught</b>		
Arts	17	85.0
Sciences	3	15.0

One of three teachers confirms the physical fights, saying: "... He gets annoyed, shouts at me, and beats me up. He wants to eat his meals at specific times. When I fail to follow the set time, he will refuse to eat food and become agitated and moody." She went on to say:

One day in the evening after supper, I was making my scheme of work. He called me; I went and knelt near him. He just looked at me and kept quiet. I immediately sensed danger. He asked me to get out of his sight... I picked up my books and left for the bedroom. He followed me and started twisting my arm ....

Some of these fights have always left marks on the female teachers, and two had to go to hospitals for treatment. They avoided going to work with Fresh injuries. One teacher, in tears, told a researcher how

she could not get medical attention because the facility wanted a police report. However, the husband's family told her never to go to the police to report a minor family dispute. She said:

... The second incident was when he knocked my head on the wall, boxed me and knelt on my stomach. I started bleeding from the scars of caesarian section, which got hurt. The health facility referred me to the government hospital because they wanted a police report. I felt devastated that the hospital, instead of helping me as an emergency, still wanted me to suffer.....

She broke into tears, and the researcher gave her space. The researcher then prayed with her and asked her whether they could continue the conversation, and she agreed, telling the researcher

that the prayer had strengthened her. She apologized for becoming emotional, but the researcher reassured her it was okay.

Four of the 24 head teachers confirmed that these female teachers suffer from physical violence.

This finding is consistent with earlier research that affirms that women suffering from domestic violence experienced a life of physical injuries and pain (Lee & Lee, 2022; Kaur & Grag, 2008).

### **Psychological/ Emotional Violence**

The lived experiences of the female teachers include lack of trust and verbal abuse, making them feel small and over-controlled, which degenerates into emotional conditions. All the twenty women interviewed revealed that the men tortured them psychologically and emotionally. One of the teachers, for instance, reported:

In due course, my husband became like a shepherd, following me everywhere. He could not allow me to attend any function, including school functions, without him, yet whenever I went with him, he would always be on the lookout. When I talked or smiled with any man, he would be offended. I hated being embarrassed by him in public....

Another teacher reported, "My husband privately set auto-voice recording in my phone, and while I slept, he would listen to my dialed calls." Another teacher confirmed verbal abuse that violates her in the following words: "One day, when I came home from work, I found him in a terrible mood, and he told me he saw me moving with men. He said, ' You collect men behind you like a dog on heat. Even a dog is better than you.'" He accused me of sleeping with male teachers, students and all men who care to release themselves on me.

One more teacher narrated her lived experience, which caused her long-lasting emotional distress:

I must not talk about this, madam, but maybe you will understand. If I explain, what my husband did to me in detail. I was pregnant, and he offered to go to town with me to buy maternity dresses. We moved to a few shops, but the prices were high, I decided to enter another shop. He chose not to enter with me. I bought the dress and left the shop, but he had left. I immediately sensed danger. On reaching

home, he demanded for food and did not wait for my response but started slapping and abusing me. He alleged that I remained behind to sleep with shopkeepers in return for the dresses.

She paused and explained how the man ordered her to the bedroom and to lie down for him to inspect how many men had slept with her. She looked down to the floor. I felt like I had a lump in my throat, but I controlled myself, remained silent, and waited for her to continue the story. She said, "He forced me to remain naked on the floor for more than 3 hours as he walked in and out of the room to abuse me and do unthinkable Things on me.... I lived with the shame and bitterness of his cruelty for long ..."

From the study, the psychological and emotional experiences, as explained by the victims, affected their functioning. This view is supported by earlier studies which found that emotional abuse can be devastating to the survivor who suffers silently, feeling manipulated and controlled (Walker, 1999).

### **Economic Violence**

All 20 women and six head teachers mentioned that many of the spouses were financially unsupportive, and responsibilities were left in the hands of the women. "Such economic exploitations lead to abuse in most cases"- one teacher reported. Another one said, "This man does not support me in any way. I use my resources to run the family. He is not hardworking, and this is the source of quarrels in the house, which ends up making all of us unhappy."

Nine of the twenty women interviewed said their spouses picked their money without seeking their consent. One teacher reported

..... I found him checking in my handbag more than three times, and he picked up the money. One time, when I asked him whether he had picked up money from my handbag, he agreed and said: 'Yes, I picked up the money that your boyfriend sent.' He then slapped me and asked me to keep quiet.

Another teacher said, "He took my savings and used it to marry a second wife. When I complained, he said that women do not own

anything, that whatever I owned belonged to him, and that he also owned me.....”

Although many head teachers agree that financial exploitation can cause domestic violence and that men should support their wives financially, the researcher also registered negative voices from four male head teachers. Such head teachers thought that women fight for equality and that there is nothing wrong if the men do not support them. A male head teacher said,

These women want to be equal. Why don't they fully confirm this through their financial muscles sponsoring domestic activities?” Another head teacher said, “Let these women know and know very well that men are the heads of the family and culturally, no woman owns anything, so when a man utilizes what the woman has brought home, there must be no resistance, no quarrel...”

**Research Question 3:** How do female teachers negotiate through the challenges of domestic violence while performing their duties?

This research question sought to establish how do female teachers negotiated through challenges of domestic violence while performing their duties.

From this study's findings, most female teachers sought informal ways as opposed to formal ways of coping with violence. In this context, informal ways of coping refer to seeking help from others like family members, (Parents and siblings), relatives, friends, peers, co-workers, women in similar situations and religious leaders. It also includes individual coping/ internal resources like crying, thinking positively, enduring, becoming quiet and being isolated, working harder and seeking refuge from God. Substance abuse and fighting are also taken to be informal coping strategies. On the other hand, formal ways of coping in this context include help-seeking from police, probation, courts and professional services like counselling. It also refers to separation or divorce.

### **Sharing with Others**

Female teachers reported coping by sharing their experiences with others. Sharing came as an intentional process, failure to control emotions and when sometimes, judging from their moods and behaviors, concerned people reached out to them.

Out of the twenty female teachers in the study, 75.0% reported sharing their domestic problems

with their families/relatives to seek help, get solutions, release the pain and get guidance. One teacher reported, “I share my problems with my mother, and she encourages me to persevere.....she told me, ‘I know this man is mistreating you..... Let education and your work be your first husband'. My mother's words have kept me strong.”

Others (65%) preferred sharing with peers. One of them said, “My colleagues encouraged me to keep on and get my consolation by working harder to make him realize my value.” Female teachers who sought support from friends reported that sometimes they lost supportive friends when their spouses threatened and scared them away, leaving the women in more pain. One more teacher said, "Domestic violence does not remain to hurt because of the pain the man inflicts on you only..., when my husband threatened my friends, two... stopped associating with me. Now I have no one to turn to when hurting ...."

The study revealed that out of twenty respondents, six often felt relieved after sharing their sufferings with women with similar experiences because they did not feel judged. Sometimes, they realized their experiences are more painful, thus giving them the courage to move on. One teacher said, “..... We usually share our hurts. It is good to know that you are not alone.” However, teachers in their early 30s felt this sharing was often useless because they cried and failed to find solutions.

This finding is consistent with previous studies where the integral role of social support in reducing the adverse psychological outcomes among survivors of intimate partner violence is recognized as vital for individuals' coping. Women who suffer from intimate partner violence encounter more positive than negative consequences when they disclose their pains to others (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010; Reeves & O'leary-Kelly, 2009). Although not all who are confided in are sensitive to the pains of these female teachers, across board, in professions like health workers, and women of low socio-economic status where research has been done, sharing experiences of domestic violence has been established as a suitable means of coping (Young et al., 2018). Therefore, Female teachers in domestic violence relationships should be encouraged to seek help by talking to others about their problems.

### **Using Internal Resources/Self**

Thirteen of the 20 female teachers reported coping by crying, thinking positively, enduring, becoming quiet and isolated, working harder and forgiving. They said they avoided negative energy by accepting problematic situations. They fought to prove their worth by keeping busy, which helped them perform their roles well.

The conversations with most female teachers turned from painful sharing to expressions of hope as they narrated their positive thoughts. One teacher said, "I moved away from self-pity.....I want the salary to keep me and my son, so I must teach all my lessons...." Another teacher stated, "I want to show this man that I can manage without his support, and the only way is by working harder...so I always keep this in mind and push on to perform all my duties....." These findings mean that there are female teachers who direct their frustrations positively by keeping busy. Many respondents narrated that working harder kept their minds away from the troubles caused by their husbands. One said, "To avoid loneliness, I make sure that I am swamped to forget about my dysfunctional family." Another teacher said, "The best is to do several activities with the students, to help you keep your mind away from the problems at home."

As testified by one teacher, female school teachers can still perform their work well, even in challenging situations: "I oversaw the compound and drowned my pain in nature, planting flowers. I developed this from my experience as a girl guide, for a guide sings and smiles under all difficulties. I received yearly awards for an organized compound.....I focused on my work."

Probing revealed that Intermittent, as opposed to chronic violence, gives female teachers time to focus when relative calm in a household exists. Similarly, the level of violence determines how they perform.

Six respondents reported that when they wanted to focus on their work, they avoided more problems from their husbands by keeping themselves isolated and quiet. They said they became emotional, frozen and nervous once near their husbands. One teacher said, "I became restrained because I knew asking for anything from him or complaining would cause a fight. I need my peace." However, engaging more with them revealed that this was a denial process without sustainable benefits. In this state of isolation, some agreed they felt self-blame,

frustration and bitterness. Two schoolteachers who were using this approach as a coping measure harbored suicidal ideation.

Nine female teachers (45%) narrated that crying helped them cope because it relieved their emotions and pain, giving them time to concentrate on their work. One teacher said, "... I got so tired of the verbal abuses ....Emotion overtook me, and I picked an iron bar to hit him. As I approached him, I broke down, started crying, and dropped the metallic object. I would have smashed his head."

This finding is in line with earlier research, where 16% of working women with domestic violence reported solving their problems independently (Stewart et al., 2021; Ararat et al., 2014). Such female victims could do so out of shame and not wanting people to know what is happening in their lives.

The finding further agrees with earlier studies that revealed that women involved in domestic violence displayed a stronger work identity that allowed them to move beyond negative experiences, live productive lives, excel at work, and develop stronger self-worth (St Vil et al., 2017; Hodges & Cabanilla, 2011) suggesting that female teachers who have solid convictions to remain functional even when being abused by their husbands, can perform well, focusing on what they love best at school. This can help restore their self-worth, make them look beyond the abuse, and help them continue performing effectively.

### **Having Fun with Peers**

Some respondents reported that they could move on by interacting with their peers, for such interactions lift their spirits. A respondent in her 40s said, "I make efforts to have fun with friends. This helps me to forget my challenges.... I have conversations with them but avoid talking about the violence."

### **Flexibility in Performing Work**

Six out of the twenty female teachers said they often tried to keep students busy when not ready to teach by giving work in the form of tests and assignments. These assignments reflected in neither the scheme of work nor the lesson plan to avoid being penalized by the school authorities and to avoid student complaints. One teacher said, "When I get to class without planning, I group the students and give them questions to discuss, as I move around the class without giving them meaningful



guidance.” Another teacher added, “I give them tests, and I only go to pick up the scripts...In that way, I keep them busy and nurse my pain without anybody noticing.” Respondents confirmed they knew lesson planning was vital for effective teaching and learning processes, yet they did the contrary. This action points to the verity that some coping measures may only help keep victims on salaries but not addressing productivity issues at school.

### **Seeking refuge in God**

Of the twenty women interviewed, eighteen reported coping by praying individually, with friends and with religious leaders and asking others to pray for them. One teacher stated, “I know God can help us in times of pain. I have learned to pray and direct all my care to Jesus.” Another teacher said, “Prayers have moved mountains for me. ....” The women reported that by praying they felt secure, happy and forgiving. Some of them confessed that prayers helped them to avert the suicidal tendency they harbored in their lives. One teacher explained how in the beginning she was always bitter but learned forgiveness: “The Bible teaches us to forgive, and forgiveness sets us free and gives us hope.”

Sharing with religious leaders has also been lifesaving to some. One teacher narrated,

... One day, I felt so lonely and helpless; the only way out was suicide. I bought Azithromycin. I wanted to be free from my husband, girlfriends, and stepfather. I called to tell Patrick to keep my daughter. Instead, I dialed the wrong number for a pastor by God's grace. I turned off the phone when I realized he was not Patrick. He called me several times, and I struggled to pick up the phone. He said my voice made him detect that I was in danger. He asked whether he could pray with me, and after that, I opened up to him. He followed me, and I got saved. That brought a change in my life.....

Some overcame their challenges by singing or listening to gospel songs, saying they felt joy as they sang. One teacher said, “... Initially, I sang traditional songs depicting sorrows, which helped to increase my pain. However, when I began to sing gospel songs, I felt lifted.” She smiled and started singing, “...It is well with my soul.....” one of the researchers joined her and they prayed together before continuing the interviews. This finding aligns

with previous studies which revealed that women in domestic violence seek refuge in God (Meyer et al., 2023; Dwarumpudi et al., 2022; St Vil et al., 2017). Hope in the bible kept the women moving.

### **Seeking Counselling Services**

All the respondents agreed that they required counselling. However, they said, accessing such services was not easy because such facilities were unavailable in the schools where they teach. Only one teacher admitted that she benefitted from professional counselling. She explained,

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy was used on me while studying counselling. I had to talk about my pain to the entire class. This became a handy tool to address my trauma.” She said: “Before the counselling, I would cry a lot out of shame. My husband forced me to abort. This decision affected me severely... I would see this baby crying in my dreams, but sometimes, even during the day, she would sit on my lap....I know I killed him; I know I destroyed my womb.....”

### **Formal Measures of Coping**

Eight respondents brought out formal measures in coping by reporting to the police (2), Reporting to probation and child welfare office(1) or separating from husbands (5) Few cases were reported to the police and the probation office because they were always discouraged by culture and society. Many wanted their marriages to work, so exposing their husbands would worsen the situation. Concerns for children drove them back. One teacher said, “I was encouraged to fight for my children. I lost weight; I became lonelier and could not prepare my lessons. I missed my lessons and distanced myself from students. It was then that I decided to go to the probation office.”

Female teachers reported to the police only when they had severe problems. One of them narrated, “... I went with a male friend to a drinking joint. He followed us, started fighting and he tore the clothes of the male friend. He wanted me and the man to be arrested, but instead, we arrested him.” She further said,

People pleaded with me to release him. Nothing was binding us; he already had another woman and was not justified to come and interfere with my life. Our life continued being scandalous. I felt very

uneasy going to school to do my work and I did not know how to take the shame away.

One teacher said, she reported to police when she was seeking redress after her husband took away from her a motorcycle that she used the money given to her for compensation after losing a limb in a motor accident. She narrated: “..... I wanted the motorcycle to be under my care. However, it became complicated since the logbook was in his name. The female police officer advised me that negotiating with his family was the best way....” She said,

To date, I live in hurt. This man knows how I Struggle. He got me when I had both legs. Since the accident that maimed me, he turned against me. How could he register the motorcycle in his name? Why must he laugh at me this way? His wish for me is to die.... I am bitter....Life has lost meaning.

She struggled to hold back tears and sobbed when she finished her story. I had to disengage her from the conversation, which continued after a few days. Such narratives make it difficult for female teachers to perform their roles even when they try to cope.

Five women interviewed had separated from their husbands. Staying away allowed them to recollect themselves and continue in their professional roles. One teacher narrated:

One night, he pulled me from my sleep, saying he heard someone whispering at the window .... We started to argue, and from that day, he started sleeping with a machete under our bed, saying he would use it to cut the men coming to me. I wanted to leave, but he said if I did, he would kill me. I lived in fear and could not prepare my lessons. I feared even going to school. Later, I read the story of someone who killed his children and wife out of jealousy. I knew this was a message from God and that I would be the next. I decided to leave...

Some head teachers agreed with separation and legal ways of coping. One said, “I propose divorce in the worst-case scenario. Once they accept that nothing can change, let them walk out. They can have time to rebuild their lives and perform their duties effectively.” Such comments seem to come

from genuine concerns. This finding aligns with an earlier study confirming that only a few victims of domestic violence access formal services (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005). However, it contrasts with a study where 50% of the women who experienced domestic violence reported having accessed at least one formal system and that approximately 50% to 75% of them felt they had received helpful responses (Rayner-Thomas et al., 2016; Swanberg et al., 2005).

### **Alcohol Abuse**

Of the twenty teachers interviewed, two said frustration led them to drink alcohol excessively to make them forget the pains and humiliation, to annoy and hurt their husbands and to get the courage to confront them. However, it caused them more pain and eventually affected their teaching performance. One teacher said, “My husband was the sole friend I had. It was too much to bear When it dawned on me that I was losing him. I resorted to heavy drinking.....” She continued saying,

I would drink in male company and come back drunk. I would go to the dormitories under the guise of doing night surveillance and abusing the girls. The worst was when the head teacher found me drunk and fallen by the roadside.....She called me, and on realizing my problems, she moved closer to me....

This situation is consistent with what other teachers experienced as revealed by Øverup et al. (2015).

### **Fighting**

Another counterproductive coping strategy, as given by female teachers, is fighting the men, their girlfriends and their relatives. Female teachers always believed that the husbands’ relatives contributed a lot to making them suffer, so fighting them was a way of expressing their feelings, hurting them and stopping them from meddling in their families. Displacing hostility on them was good coping since it relieved them in the short term. However, in the end, it was negative. This tally with earlier studies, which found out that sometimes women tried to fight back and become defensive, defying their husband's demands and adapting to negative coping strategies (Young et al., 2018). Such coping strategies are not helpful, resulting in regrets and more pain.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Domestic violence cases that took place include being beaten tortured and injured. Such experiences originated from power and control by their spouses. Experiences faced include verbal abuse, neglect and deprivation, which in most cases affected female teachers' self-esteem and confidence. Women further suffered economic violence through exploitation and lack of financial support from the spouses.

The victims used multiple ways to cope with the situations. The approaches used include sharing experiences with others, having fun with peers, flexibility in performing work, seeking refuge in God, alcohol abuse and fighting. Formal measures of coping includes reporting the cases to the police and separation.

## Recommendations

The study recommends faith-based interventions as remedy for supporting women who face domestic violence. This could be accomplished through deploying religious workers like school chaplains or other appropriate religious person to give support to such victims. The study further recommends provision of guidance and counselling experts in schools to provide similar services.

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