



‘Our Culture does not permit us to Report Abuse Cases to Authorities’: Contributing Factors to Intimate Partner Violence among Migrant Female Head Porters in Kumasi, Ghana

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Abstract

Intimate partner violence has been in existence and is a social problem in many countries including Ghana. Studies on intimate partner violence over the years have focused on the general population by neglecting certain groups of people like migrant women who are more vulnerable to it. It is based on this that this study explored the contributing factors to intimate partner violence among migrant female head porters in Kumasi, Ghana. The study adopted a qualitative research design in which 20 participants were interviewed. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were adopted. Findings of the study revealed that individual factors such as drug and alcohol abuse, low level of education, childhood exposure to violence and personal beliefs contributed to the abuse of migrant female head porters. In addition the study found that family/relational factors like interference from extended family members and disagreement on the time to have sexual intercourse contributed to abuse. Moreover, social structural factors like poverty and societal attitudes and perception contributed to abuse. Polygamy and cultural beliefs also served as socio-cultural factors that contributed to abuse. Based on the findings the study recommended that specific programs should be developed by the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit of the Ghana police service to limit the occurrences of intimate partner violence among migrant women.

Keywords: Intimate Partner; Intimate Partner Violence; Female Head Porter; Intimate Partner Relationship; Migrants.

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1. Introduction

Intimate partner violence has been in existence for quite some time and it continues to be a major problem for both human right and health in many countries including Ghana. Intimate partner violence also known as domestic violence refers to the physical, sexual, psychological, economic and financial violence perpetrated by an intimate partner against the other [1]. These forms of violence committed by an intimate partner may include but not limited to kicking, slapping, punching, stabbing, death threats, insults, false accusation, shouting, and forced sexual intercourse [2]. Intimate partner violence is an extreme indicator of gender inequality in society [3], and an act that strips victims of safety in their homes and communities [4]. It is the most common form of violence against women which usually leads to death, physical injury, functional impairment, reproductive and mental health problems [3].

Reports on intimate partner violence show that it occurs in all countries, cultures and cuts across societies irrespective of classes, races, religion and ethnicities [5]. Intimate partner violence is a major international, social and public health problem in both developed and developing countries [6]. Globally, an estimated 35% of women have experienced some form of intimate partner violence, 70% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence in their life time and almost half of all women who died in 2012 were killed by their intimate partners [3].

In Ghana, it is estimated that one out of three women has experienced physical violence at the hands of a current or previous partner [2]. In addition, two out of ten women experienced their first sexual intercourse with an intimate partner through forced means, and three out of ten women are forced by their male partners to have sex sometime in their life [2]. This shows that majority of women in Ghana may have experienced intimate partner violence in one form or the other, in the course of their life time. Intimate partner violence, particularly physical abuse has become a daily occurrence in Ghana as reported by the media [7]. At least 2,795 cases of wife battery and assault were reported to the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit of the Ghana Police Service in the year 2013, and this number increased to 5,212 cases in 2014 [8].

Although women could be perpetrators of violence in relationships with men, majority of the abuses are inflicted on women by men, and the consequences of the violence are more for women as compared to men [9, 10]. Even though many population- based studies on intimate partner violence have been conducted in Ghana [7, 11, 12, 13], those that focus on women always concentrate on the larger population by often ignoring certain key populations of women with much vulnerability to violence [14]. Nonetheless, there may be unseen and minority groups who are more vulnerable to intimate partner violence among women. Example of such minority groups vulnerable to partner violence are migrant women because they face more difficult time escaping abuse in intimate relationships [15].

Migrant women who are in intimate relationships experience higher levels of intimate partner violence [16] and different factors come together to contribute to such higher levels of experiences. Migrant women often feel trapped in abusive relationships because of various factors, such as language barriers, social isolation and lack of financial resources [15]. Often, migrant women face discrimination both due to their status as migrants and as

women [17]. Migrant women become more vulnerable and are exposed to countless abuses especially when their residence is dependent upon a relationship with a man [17]. Consequently, they find it difficult to leave the abusive relationship regardless of how severe the abuse is because they rely on their partners as their sole means of support [18]. If a woman migrates from her home of origin to another place, she faces subordination not only as a woman, but also as a minority on a foreign land regardless of the class to which she belongs in her place of origin [19].

It has been found that alcohol and drug addictions by intimate partners contributed to the abusive cases among migrant women in North Carolina and New Jersey [20, 21]. In addition, Tonsing [22] believes that cultural factors such as women's perception of making the marriage work, stigma attached to women for leaving abusive relationships, strong emphasis on maintaining the family privacy by not exposing partner abuse considered as a private family matter, and concerns for children, are contributing factors to partner violence among migrant women. Sometimes lack of knowledge about laws and rights, and available services also contribute to the perpetuation of intimate partner violence among migrant women [23].

Moreover, migrant women usually lack the social support since they leave their entire social support systems behind in their country of origin making them more dependent on their partners for emotional, social, and financial support [24]. Since their abusive partners become their sole social support, migrant women remain in the abusive relationship until their conditions get worse. Furthermore, childhood sexual abuse and witness or experiences of family violence during childhood have been found to contribute to partner violence among migrant women [25, 21]. Other factor such as interference from extended family members, and multiple intimate relationships by partners expose migrant women to partner abuse [26, 27, 28]. These and many other factors could trap migrant women in abusive relationships.

Although studies have been conducted by some scholars on migrant female head porters in Ghana [29, 30, 31], not much is known about the factors that contribute to their experiences with regard to intimate partner violence. The study seeks to contribute to filling this research gap by exploring the contributing factors to intimate partner violence against migrant female head porters in Kumasi.

1.2 Theoretical Perspective

Ecological Framework (Bonnie E. Carlson in 1984) [32]

The ecological framework explains factors that cause and maintain partner violence in society. It is a modified version of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of human development propounded in the 1970s. The ecological framework has been adopted by researchers to explain the issue of violence that occur in intimate relationships (e.g., Ali & Naylor [33]; Heise [24]; World Health Organization (WHO) [5]). For example, the WHO [5] used this model to explain the contributing factors to partner violence at the individual level, relationship level, community level and societal level; and has recommended the ecological framework as best suited in explaining the contributing factors to domestic violence.

The ecological framework explains partner violence under four different and interrelated levels; which are the

individual, family/relational, social structural and socio-cultural. The individual level focuses on what each partner brings with him or her to the relationship like self-esteem, attitudes, values, age, beliefs learned in one's family, abilities, subjective perceptions and personal weaknesses. At the family level, the relationships among the couples, between the partners and their friends and family members can contribute to the perpetrator of intimate partner violence. The social-structural level explains the context of the community in which social relationships occur. Carlson [32] described the social structural level as major institutions in society such as the school, the workplace and law enforcement agencies that cause and maintain partner violence. The sociocultural level refers to societal norms, cultural values and belief systems that exist in the context of the broader society. The ecological framework is applicable to the study because it helped to explain the individual instances of partner violence against migrant female head porters, as well as domestic violence as a social problem. It helped the researcher to understand the multiple factors that contribute to partner violence at different levels and the interaction between different factors within and across levels.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

A qualitative research design was used for the study. According to Creswell [35] qualitative research method focuses on discovering and understanding the experiences and perspectives of participants. The researcher used a qualitative approach because it provided an avenue to ask open ended questions that helped obtain in-depth, rich and descriptive information [36]. In addition, the verbal narratives of the participants provided a reflection of their individual and personal experiences using their own voices [36]. The qualitative research approach enabled the researcher to explore and obtain in-depth information about the experiences of intimate partner violence among migrant female head porters in Kumasi.

2.2 Study Area

Kumasi is the regional capital of the Ashanti Region of Ghana. It has a total surface area of 254sqkm and located in the center of the Ashanti Region (Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly (KMA), [37]). According to the Ghana Statistical Service [38], the population census conducted in 2010 recorded a total of 1,722,806 people in the Kumasi metropolis but this was estimated to increase to 2.5 million people by the year 2015 as a result of its role as a commercial city. The city's population is always on the increase since past decade as a result of youth emigration from other regions as well as rural areas within the region [37]. The study was conducted in the Kumasi metropolis in the Ashanti region because the city's status as administrative and commercial centre has led to the influx of many female migrants from the three northern regions in Ghana, to engage in economic activities. Participants were selected from the Kumasi central market and Adum business centre because many female migrants are located in lorry stations and market centres where they help retailers and wholesalers carry their loads in exchange for money.

2.3 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to select participants for the study. Purposive sampling

as defined by [39] is the deliberate choice of an informant due to the qualities the informant possesses. Purposive sampling was used to select key informants from Domestic Violence and Victim Support Units (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service because they work and receive reports on domestic violence cases. Snowball sampling was used to recruit migrant female head porters and their group leaders. According to Noy [40] snowball sampling is the process by which the researcher accesses participants through contact information provided by other participants. This participant refers the researcher to other participants who are contacted by the researcher and they refer him or her to get other participants [40]. The researcher's first point of contact was the head porters' group leaders where permission was sought from them to talk to the migrant female head porters. With the help of the group leaders, the researcher was able to get access to the migrant female head porters.

Due to the sensitive nature of the study, the researcher familiarized himself with the female head porters and made friends with them. The researcher then moved to another group and the same procedure was used. Based on the criteria for inclusion potential participants were contacted for the study. The sample size was 20 and this included migrant female head porters (16), group leaders of the head porters (two), and officials from DOVVSU in Kumasi (two). The researcher selected migrant female head porters who were 18 years and above, had lived in Kumasi for at least two years, were currently or previously engaged in an intimate relationship and had experienced partner abuse in the current or previous intimate relationship. The researcher selected women who had migrated from the Upper East, Upper West and Northern Regions of Ghana.

2.4 Method of Data Collection

Data for the study were collected through in-depth face to face individual interviews. The interviews were conducted using open ended questions based on the objective of the study. Topic guide was developed by the researcher based on the research question to ensure the interviews were relevant to the study and it was used to collect the interviews. The topic guide was written in English and translated into Twi (a Ghanaian Language) by the Linguistics Department at the University of Ghana, Legon. This was done in order to conduct the interviews based on the language preferred by the participants. Interviews with the migrant female head porters and their group leaders were conducted in Twi and the key informant interviews with DOVVSU were conducted in English. The interviews were carried out in places convenient for participants. Participation in the study was voluntary. The purpose of the study was explained to participants and their consent sought before they were included in the study. With permission from participants, the interviews were audio recorded. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and an hour.

2.5 Data Handling and Analysis

Primary data were stored on a computer, password protected and copies were stored on external drive to prevent data loss. The data were analysed using the six-step thematic analysis proposed by Creswell [35]. All the interviews with participants that were conducted in Twi were transcribed into English. In order to familiarize himself and obtain a general sense of the information, the researcher read through all the transcribed data for several times. This was followed by coding which involved taking transcribed data, segmenting participants'

views that were similar in meanings into categories and labelling those categories with a term. The researcher generated themes out of the descriptions of participants for analysis. These themes were then used as the major findings and they appeared as headings during the analyses. The researcher then described the data to clarify and make full meanings from the experiences of participants. Interpretations were made by analysing and presenting the data.

2.6 Trustworthiness and Credibility

The researcher adopted thick description by Creswell and Miller [41] to demonstrate the quality of the findings. Thick description according to Creswell and Miller [41] is achieved through the lens of people external to the study such as readers, supervisors and examiners. It is a procedure for establishing credibility and reliability in a study by describing the setting, the participants and the themes in rich details [41]. The voices by participants are good experiences to show that readers can also experience the same abuses migrant female head porters have experienced. Such events being described by participants can happen to readers should they find themselves in the same situation in a different or same environment. In addition, the discussion and analyses section of the findings can help provide readers the understanding. This is because the findings were related when compared to other findings.

2.7 Limitation of the Study

Migrant female head porters who participated in the study spoke multiple languages because they came from three different regions namely the Northern region, Upper East and Upper West region. Only those who could communicate in English and Twi languages were included in the study. The findings are therefore not meant to generalize the experiences of all migrant female head porters in Kumasi.

3. Results

3.1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Ten of the migrant female head porters had migrated from the Northern region and were Dagombas, five from the Upper West region (Waala tribe) and one from the Dagaati tribe of the Upper East region. All the migrant female head porters had stayed in Kumasi for at least two years, with one who had stayed for as long as 15 years. The ages of migrant female head porters ranged from 18 to 45 years. Seven of them had no knowledge of their date of birth, but their ages were estimated to be more than 20 years. Nine of the migrant female head porters experienced abuse in their current relationships whilst seven in their previous relationships. In terms of education, 14 had no formal education and only two had completed junior high school. Two (the director and his female deputy) of the key informants were from the Ashanti regional Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) office. The group leaders were a female and a male who had been in Kumasi for 10 and 14 years respectively.

3.2 Factors that Contributed to Intimate Partner Violence among the Migrant Female Head Porters

There were many factors that contributed to the perpetration of intimate partner violence among the migrant female head porters. These factors are presented under the following themes (a) individual level, (b) family/relational level, (c) social structural level and (d) socio-cultural level. These themes were guided by the ecological framework and are analysed based on the various levels proposed by the theory.

3.2.1 Individual Factors

Some head porters talked about the fact that their partners' addiction to alcohol and drugs facilitated their abuse. The abuse usually occurred when the perpetrators were under the influence of alcohol and drugs such as Indian hemp. One participant talked about her partner's alcoholic behaviour:

My husband started drinking alcohol and got addicted to it. For me I believe this sexual harassment is as a result of his alcoholism. Whenever he is drunk, he wants to have sexual intercourse with me. Sometimes when I am in my menstrual period he would still want to have sex with me by force (Head Porter, 11).

In addition, another migrant female head porter mentioned her partners' drug addiction as a contributing factor to her abuse:

My boyfriend smokes Indian hemp (weed) and whenever he is high, he abuses me. Because I endure so much pain, I advised him to stop but it is difficult for him to do so outright. He smokes it secretly without my knowledge and when I find some in his pocket I throw it away (Head Porter, 7).

Another migrant head porter revealed that her partner abused her physically and chased her with a cutlass any time he smoked. This was her comment:

My partner smokes Indian hemp. He smokes a lot and always beats me whenever he is under the influence of the Indian hemp and cigarette. After he smokes for the day and I ask him for money it turns into a fight. He beats and threatens to kill me with a cutlass (Head Porter, 8).

Moreover, the low educational level of migrant female head porters also emerged as a contributing factor to their abuse. A female DOVVSU officer revealed that the lack of respect some uneducated women show their partners lead them to fight unnecessarily and therefore experience abuse in the process:

Have you not heard people say that educated women cannot marry? The issue is, I am empowered, educated, I have my job and I am also aware that my dignity matters, so if I see that your actions will not grant me freedom, I will call it quit. That is the secret, but I tell you educated women do understand marriage well and so would not allow someone to maltreat them. Also, educated women have self-respect as such would not insult their husbands in public to warrant any abuse...but for the uneducated women, most often they insult their husbands on the street without any shame using phrases such as foolish man... your big head which results in the abuse. This is the case with female head porters (DOVVSU Female Official).

A male DOVVSU officer shared that women with minimal or no education are not empowered enough in terms

of resources and also do not know that the abuse they experience infringes their rights. He revealed that this put them in a disadvantageous position to endure the abuse:

The fact of the matter is that, when people's educational level is low, they become ignorant about the law. The victims do not know that their rights are being abused and even the perpetrators, when you arrest them, they are still adamant and think that what they did was right. I have also realised that the women lack educational empowerment. Most of them are not as educated as the men, as such if they find themselves in a relationship with educated men, they (women) are easily abused. The women tend to endure the abuse because they solely depend on the men for survival...the same thing happens to the female head porters (DOVVSU Male Official).

One group leader had a similar view he shared on the low educational level of participants:

Because the female head porters' educational level is very low, they are easily deceived and taken for granted by the men (Male Group Leader).

Moreover, it emerged that some perpetrators were quick tempered which on many occasions led to the abuse of the female head porters:

My husband as a person gets angry with me so easily, he insults and abuses me verbally in the process. He has a very bad temper as an individual (Head Porter, 16).

In support of this, one female head porter mentioned that because her partner was a stammerer by nature, he got angry with her easily:

My boyfriend easily gets angry with me when I speak to him; he stammers and you know by nature such people are easily annoyed (Head Porter, 3).

Childhood exposure to violence of some female head porters contributed to the perpetuation of abuse. One head porter talked about her exposure to abuse during childhood when her father constantly abused her mother:

I stayed with my mother and my step-father. I remember well that my step-father used to abuse my mother verbally because she always complained about his inability to provide for the children's needs. I also remember one day when my stepfather beat my mother because she asked him money for her business. They always fought on issues relating to money so I think it is the same in every relationship (Head Porter, 14).

On the other hand, one perpetrator's attitude was a demonstration of his father's attitude. This was revealed by a migrant female head porter:

My husband's behaviour runs in their family. He behaves the same way as his father and brothers as well. Other family members behave the same way so I will say he took such behaviour from the family. None of his family members treat their wives well (Head Porter, 9).

Additionally, some personal beliefs of some perpetrators served as a contributing factor to partner abuse among

the head porters. One group leader revealed that the men thought their abusive acts would deter the female head porters from engaging in certain acts that would make them promiscuous:

Head porters are also abused by their partners when they go for family planning and other programs without informing them. Last time one head porter was beaten by the boyfriend because she went to register for health insurance without informing him. The men think that once the head porters do the family planning, it will provide an avenue for them to engage in multiple sexual relationships and cheat on them (Male Group Leader).

3.2.2 Family/Relational Factors

It was revealed that many migrant female head porters stayed in the same house with their in-laws and the nature of activities of the in-laws played a role in the perpetration of intimate partner violence:

My husband had the support of his family members so nothing could stop him from abusing me.... all of a sudden some of his relatives that I was in good relationship with started hating me for no reason...the family influenced him a lot because they loved the second wife more than me (Head Porter, 2).

In addition to this, one participant said that her in-laws blamed her for not satisfying her husband sexually and advised the man to go in for a second wife:

People see him beating me, even his own parents...his parents always shift the blame on me accusing me for refusing to have sex with my husband. We were staying in the same compound so they saw whatever went on....his parents' attitude gave him the urge to abuse me more because they advised him to get another woman if I was not able to satisfy him sexually which he eventually did (Head Porter, 11).

Furthermore, it was found that some migrant female head porters were sometimes forced by their partners to forgo their businesses in order to perform household duties. The head porters encountered abuse when they refused the demands of their partners:

What actually brings about the verbal abuse is he sometimes tells me to stop going to work or delay going to work and cook for him so he can enjoy the meal when he returns from work. If I wait and cook for him I will lose customers and if I do not go to work at all I will not get money for the day ... so I do not honour his demands but go to work. When he comes back and there is no food he will insult me verbally. When I deny cooking for him early in the morning before he goes to work, it leads to a fight (Head Porter, 15).

It also emerged that the time to engage in sexual intercourse with their partners brought about abuses. Some partners had the habit of having sex with the head porters any time they wished to. The head porters had no say in negotiating when to have sex with their partners:

At times, he may want to have sex with me but if I am not in the mood, I refuse and he easily gets angry and would stop talking to me for days... if I talk to him he won't mind me... I will go and carry this heavy loads during the day; come back home very tired and still he wants to have sex with me every day (Head Porter, 17).

3.2.3 Social Structure

The study found that as a result of poverty, some partners were not able to take proper care of the migrant female head porters. The discussion of money always led to a fight. Some of the men did not have good jobs to cater for the head porters and their children:

My husband never gave me money, all he did was to give me some of the maize he sells in the market...I had to suffer because as a woman you need to go and carry loads in order- to prepare something from the maize. As soon as I asked him for money it resulted in a fight. All the fights we had were due to money... if you give your wife money all these fights will not happen (Head Porter, 5).

To buttress the issue of poverty as one major cause of intimate partner violence, one officer from DOVVSU gave account of a domestic violence case she handled:

...the scenario I told you, all arrangements were made to pay the money to the man and as a result we were able to arrest him. We held him in custody until he was granted bail and eventually we processed him for court. The perpetrator and his family members gave the female head porter (victim) two thousand Ghana cedis to forget about the case and run to the north. You know, this is somebody who had come all the way from the north in search of money and so because of poverty she took the money and they made sure she moved to the north. She forgot about the fact that her right and dignity were violated; I had no witness for the case because the victim was nowhere to be found. As I'm talking to you the case could not continue (DOVVSU Female Officer).

Societal attitudes and perceptions on domestic violence contributed to the act. Some community members had the perception that intimate partner violence needed to be dealt with in the home and as such cases were not to be taken to or handled by institutions:

If there is such an abuse, the family members of the perpetrator will go and see some chiefs and dignitaries within the community to come and plead on the perpetrator's behalf. The victim will then mount pressure on you to drop the case so that it is settled in the house because it is a domestic issue...if you say no, she will not come to you at all- and as an officer you will not have anyone to prosecute because you have no witness (DOVVSU Female Officer).

One group leader talked about the fact that he had become an enemy within the community because he reported abuse cases:

When there are cases of abuse, I take the victim to the hospital and then to the police station....I know the DOVVSU coordinator so when such issues crop up, I make a complaint and the perpetrator will be arrested. But when the person is arrested, the Zongo (community) people and their relatives would come to plead and he will be released.....they make it a family matter and all my efforts become useless. Sometimes I become an enemy to some of the guys in the Zongo due to such actions I take against abusers (Male Group Leader)

Moreover, institutional failure was found as a major factor that contributed to intimate partner violence. The

DOVVSU coordinator revealed that they lack specific programs to deal with domestic violence cases among vulnerable populations like migrant female head porters:

Anytime MSIG organises the female head porters to educate them on reproductive health, they invite us to give a talk on domestic violence. We take the opportunity to educate them on safety precautions and effects of domestic violence and how they can reach us in times of help. Aside this, there is no other peculiar programme singled out for female head porters to help them deal with intimate partner violence. All other programs are for the general public of which they are included (DOVVSU Male Official).

It was revealed that DOVVSU as an institution had limited resources to carry out their duties:

DOVVSU does not have enough resources to execute its duties and responsibilities especially in issue related to intimate partner violence. We use our own resources; for example, our private cars in the sensitisation programmes that we do, which limits our impact (DOVVSU Female Officer).

The power relations between men and women in society also facilitated intimate partner violence. It was found that the patriarchal system gave men the privilege to abuse their partners. One key informant had this to say:

I think that our culture does not also help...our culture grants men privileges as heads of families which gives them power over women in terms of responsibilities and leadership roles. As a result of patriarchal arrangements, some men believe that they have the- power and the right to assault their partners. Some of the partners believe that they have the right to abuse the migrant female head porters (DOVVSU Male Official).

Also, the study found that, issues of intimate partner violence were underreported because of the culture of silence. One key informant gave credence to this:

A woman will be staying in a compound house receiving a lot of abuse in full glare of the people in the house and no one will care to report. The victims themselves feel reluctant to report, how much more eyewitnesses. The whole situation is like, you have a sore on your leg and you cover it with your trousers, if it is opened someone will see it and help you with some treatment....but because people cover the abuse and it continues until it reaches a dimension which becomes difficult for institutions to notice and deal with (DOVVSU Male Official).

More so, perpetrators were sometimes influenced by their friends in the community they lived. These friends played an active role in the abuse of migrant female head porters. One participant shed light on this:

I think my husband got influenced by a couple of friends he had...Sometimes his friends bragged about how their wives could not refuse to cook for them. Such words from his friends pushed him to insult me when I refuse to cook for him (Head Porter, 14).

3.2.4 Socio-Cultural Factors

One socio-cultural practice that permits men to marry more than one woman was discovered as a contributing factor of intimate partner violence. One head porter revealed that her partner had intimate relationships with four other women aside her:

Apart from my son, my husband has four other children all with different women. He claims he is a 'maalam' (spiritual healer) and he has taken advantage of that by sleeping with women in the locality. I have no say because Dagombas can marry four...this has given him the opportunity to maltreat me how he likes (Head Porter, 1).

A female head porter revealed that her partner married another woman when she was five months pregnant and his attitude towards her drastically changed:

He married another woman when I was about five months pregnant and all of a sudden his attitude towards me changed. The arrival of the second wife led to so many misunderstandings between us (Head Porter, 2).

Drawing from personal experience, this female group leader revealed that, her husband had eight wives including her, and she was of the view that men who engage in multiple relationships are liars and abusive:

Some of the fights are as a result of the polygamous nature of many relationships, which often bring about rivalry among the female head porters. As I said earlier, any man who has more than one wife is a deceiver... he is not consistent with his words so it always brings about fight among the wives. My husband for example, got married to seven women and I was the last one so there were always fights between us. Sometimes the other wives would gossip about me to our husband and this always resulted in beatings (Female Group Leader).

It also emerged that, the cultural beliefs of female head porters prohibited them from reporting cases of abuse to mandated institutions which then led to more abuse;

...because of the abuse I was going through, some people advised me to report my husband, but you see, some of the Dangombas' customs and beliefs do not permit women to report their husbands to authorities especially when there are children involved. In some cases if you report and it leads to an arrest of the man, he can denounce paternity of the child. As for me I am enduring the abuse because of my child (Head Porter, 1).

One head porter indicated that according to their custom, reporting her husband would be disgraceful and could lead to her death after his release from the police cell:

In our tribe (Waala), one cannot report a man to be arrested once they are both married, your family members would not even take it kindly with you if you take such action...it is not good to report your husband for beating you and it is considered a disgrace according to our custom. Another thing is that, the man can even kill you after returning from the police station because the same anger that caused him to beat you can make him kill you as well (Head Porter, 3).

Some participants also believed that reporting their partners to institutions would serve as a bad omen to their

sons in the future:

Our custom (Dagaati) does not permit us to report our husbands to institutions like the police and social welfare. I have five children now and two of them are boys, if I should- report my husband to be arrested because he is abusing me, in the future when my sons get married, the same thing will happen to them. For us, in our custom we do not believe in institutions solving issues related to partner abuse (Head Porter, 12).

Furthermore, it was discovered that family members of the head porters relinquished all responsibilities once they got married. Some female head porters called their relatives back home to inform them about the abuse, but received no response:

...when my husband came to beg, my parents told me that he paid my bride price so I needed to give him a child. That is what usually happens in the north; my father insisted that I should go back to my marital home because he had already accepted a cow and other items from him (husband). He even cited my mum as an example that because he paid for her bride price, she gave him a child so I should do the same. My husband told me he cannot accept the bride price back because I have not given him a child (Head Porter, 16).

One participant revealed that customarily, women are considered as being properties of their husbands after marriage and it leads their relatives to be removed from their lives irrespective of the circumstance:

I called my parents to inform them about the abuse but no help came. In our custom (Waala) when a man pays your bride price you become his wife and your relatives can no longer interfere in your affairs even when you are in need. In cases where you are experiencing physical or verbal abuse, they will not help you. You only have to endure and they will only come in when you are at the point of death (Head Porter, 2)

4. Discussion

The findings of the study support the ecological framework by Carlson [41] which contends that, there are various interrelating and interdependent factors that contribute to the perpetration of intimate partner violence. The findings indicated that, multiple factors contributed to partner abuse in intimate relationships among migrant female head porters. For example, in this study, the demographic characteristics of head porters showed that only two had primary education while the rest had never been to school. As a result of their minimal education, they had little or no knowledge about their rights or institutional support. Due to that, the migrant female head porters thought their partners had the right to abuse them in their relationships. Many of them had no knowledge in terms of institutions that could support them in their abusive relationships. The minimal level of education of the migrant female head porters also crippled their employment opportunities making them reliant on their abusive partners for financial support. This supports the explanation that at the individual level of the ecological framework, low educational level of people predisposes them to partner violence. Moreover, the study found that perpetrators who were addicted to alcohol and hard drugs abused the female head porters. The abuse intensified anytime their partners were under the influence of a substance. This supports the assumption by the ecological framework by Carlson [41] and previous studies conducted among immigrant Latinos by Moracco and colleagues [20]; and Zarza and associates [21] which found perpetrators' addiction to

drugs and alcohol as the contributing factors to partner abuse.

Some migrant female head porters witnessed their mothers being abused by their fathers during childhood and some perpetrators had the same violent behavioural attitudes as their fathers. The migrant female head porters accepted the abuse in their relationships because they believed that it was like that in every relationship since their mothers also experienced it. It was found that the perpetrators learned their fathers' abusive behavior and imperiled it on the migrant female head porters. This indicates that, family background and childhood exposure to violence by victims and perpetrators are major contributors to intimate partner violence among migrant female head porters. This also verifies studies by [25]; and Zarza and his colleagues [21] conducted among Mexican immigrants and Latinos in the USA respectively. Evidence also showed that many migrant female head porters stayed in the same house with their in-laws and the nature of relations, behaviours and activities of these in-laws played a role in the perpetration of intimate partner violence. The actions of the in-laws sometimes instigated the perpetrators to abuse female head porters. This is consistent with studies conducted by Clark and contemporaries [27]; and Jordan and Bhandari [28] which found that women who lived in the same home with their husband's family and in the same building with their husband and his extended family members were at an increased risk of experiencing intimate partner violence. Having multiple partners emerged as another factor that contributed to intimate partner violence among migrant female head porters. The perpetrators had multiple partners which sometimes brought about jealousy and rivalry among the head porters leading to their abuse. Anytime the migrant head porters complained about their partners' polygamous behaviour, they were subjected to abuse. Additionally, due to the multiple relationships by the perpetrators, they could not support the financial needs of the migrant female head porters and their children. This is in line with Abrahams and colleagues [26] study conducted in Cape Town which found perpetrators of partner abuse engaging in multiple relationships. It was very outstanding in the findings that, the cultural perceptions of migrant female head porters that married women were prohibited from reporting their partners to institutions in cases of abuse kept them in abusive relationships for a long time. Such beliefs prevented them from reporting to people outside their relationships about the abuse they experienced and this perpetuated more abuse. In addition, migrant female head porters as well as majority of people in their neighborhood perceived intimate partner violence as a family privacy and therefore exhibited a culture of silence towards it.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this study attest to the fact that intimate partner violence is a social problem. Migrant women experience intimate partner violence and are mostly affected by the problem. Once women migrate to a place, they become foreigners with no social support, no accommodation and no job. According to Moracco and colleagues [20], immigrant women are often without family and social networks they had in their home of origin. As a result, they become economically dependent on abusive partners. Moreover, once the migrant female head porters became involved in relationships with men, different factors combined to contribute to their abuse which confirmed the tenets of the ecological framework by Carlson [41]. They were mostly trapped in the relationships because when they complained or tried to resist the abuse, they were kicked out by their partners and some became homeless. The study therefore concludes that intimate partner violence has adverse impacts on the wellbeing of migrant female head porters. Since the study found that DOVVSU does not have programs

that specifically deal with intimate partner violence among migrant female head porters, it is recommended that the institution organize programs that will focus on the detection and reduction of intimate partner violence among migrant women. Also, given that institutional failure emanating from inadequate resources was one of the major contributing factors, the study recommends that there should be a budgetary allocation by the government to institutions like DOVVSU to help fund operations on domestic violence cases especially among migrant populations. Based on the findings that societal perceptions and culture of silence increase the spread of intimate partner violence among migrant female head porters, the study recommends that there should be a public sensitization by DOVVSU, National Commission for Civic Education and the Department of Social Welfare that the act is a human right issue therefore there should be changes in perceptions and existing culture to reduce its occurrences. Moreover, social workers as agents of social change should work with ethnic groups, religious bodies and institutions like schools within communities to help foster behavioral change that could contribute to intimate partner violence against vulnerable groups like migrant women.

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