THE SILENT CRIME: A SOCIOLOGICAL APPRAISAL OF

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN IN

YORUBA CULTURE OF NIGERIA.

BY

ALUKO, YETUNDE. ADEBUNMI PhD
AND
ALUKO-AROWOLO, OLUSOLA. SUNDAY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
OLABISI ONABANJO UNIVERSITY
AGO-IWOYE, OGUN STATE.
NIGERIA

Background to the Study/Statement of Problem

Although "sex" and "gender" are often used interchangeably, they are quite different and should be used distinctly. **Sex** refers to the physical differences between males and females, whereas **gender** refers to the different socially-prescribed roles of males and females. Gender roles are context-based and are learned through socialization (Ward, 2002). The physical differences between males and females are universal, whereas the gender roles are quite different and may prescribe all aspects of social life ranging from access to resources, public and private responsibilities, and patterns of courtship. Gender roles may change over time, but are reflections of long-standing assumptions that a society holds about men, women, boys and girls.

Building upon these differentiated roles, **gender-based violence** (GBV) is therefore violence that is directed at an individual based on her or his specific gender role in a society. It can affect females or males; however gender based violence affects women and girls disproportionately. It is violence intended to establish or reinforce gender hierarchies and perpetuate gender inequalities. Gender-based violence attacks the fundamental human rights of adults and children alike. Men and women, boys and girls, may all be subjected to gender-based violence. However, women and girls are by far the most affected group and will therefore be the principal focus of this study.

Gender-based violence may manifest in numerous ways: domestic violence (wife-battery, beatings) rape, torture, female genital mutilation trafficking, and forced prostitution and marriage etc. Although rape and other sexual abuses have been recognized as serious crimes under humanitarian law, only recently has the international community addressed these forms of violence as serious infringements on women's fundamental rights. Gender based violence occurs in both the public and private spheres. Many cultures have beliefs, norms and social institutions that legitimize and, therefore, perpetuate gender-based violence. The same acts that would be punished if directed at an employer, a neighbour, or an acquaintance often go unchallenged when men direct them at women, especially within the family.

Nigerian women like their counterparts in other parts of the world are constantly harassed, battered, maimed or killed simply because they are women. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) Report "Up to 70% of female murder victims worldwide are killed by their male companions and as many as one-third of girls are forced into their first sexual experience" (Wildaf, 2002).

Violence against women in Nigeria starts from the conception of the female foetus, through a woman's lifespan until old age. Most of the violence perpetrated against women are based on societal orientation as well as cultural and religious practices, the effect of which hampers the breath, well-being and productivity of women. Many men still beat their

wives and perpetrate other forms of physical and psychological abuse to prove their masculinity and superiority. Rape and sexual violence are also prevalent in most homes though largely unreported because of the social stigma to the victims. Many of the victims also do not speak out about violations of their rights due to lack of positive response from the society. The low perception of women as second-class or persons inferior to men has further perpetuated the justification for various forms of violence. Sexual violence against women exposes them to various health hazards such as unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions and the infection of sexually transmitted diseases such as the deadly HIV/AIDS virus.

Against the backdrop of these remarks, this study was designed to examine the nature of the various dimensions of domestic violence experienced by women in some selected areas in Alimosho local government area of Lagos State in Nigeria. What is the extent of this violence? How do Nigerian women interprete their experiences of domestic violence, and to whom do they report it? In what ways has culture influenced women's experiences within the home and the society at large? What are the health, consequences and finally their coping strategies?

Brief Literature Review

The few available literature on domestic violence in Nigeria contains accounts of violation of women's fundamental rights and

freedom. According to Amnesty International report (2005) on Nigeria, "on a daily basis women are beaten and ill-treated for supposed transgression, raped and even murdered by members of their family. In some cases, vicious acid attacks leave them with horrific disfigurements. Such violence is too frequently excused and tolerated in communities, and not denounced. Husbands, partners and fathers are responsible for most of the violence against women".

In Nigeria, women and girls are subjected to multiple forms of violence in the homes. However, the most common form of violence is wife battery ranging from slapping, kicking, verbal abuse, denial of financial resources, rape and death (Project Alert, 2001). Due to dearth of official statistics, it is difficult to establish the prevalence of domestic violence. However, it is believed that gender-based violence is of "epidemic proportions" (CEDAW, 1997) and is seldom reported because of fear of reprisal and lack of response from law enforcement officials. Statistics relating to this problem would not be available until women are motivated to report domestic and other forms of violence (CEDAW, 1997).

Domestic violence cuts across all communities in Nigeria and at times is excused by a woman's actions or in action. When a woman suffers violence due to failure to meet some socially accepted standards of behaviour, such failure is usually an accepted excuse for the violence she suffers especially within the family context. A woman could suffer violence for refusing sex, nagging or challenging the man's behaviour.

For example, if he takes a second wife or is alcoholic. She could be subjected to violence for not preparing meals on time, having or under suspicion of having sexual relationship outside the marriage and being accused of witchcraft (Effah, Mbachu and Onyegbula, 1995).

Interestingly, more women tend to justify the infliction of violence. In a survey carried out in 1999 (Amnesty International, 2005), a higher proportion of female than male respondents justified "wife beating", and this proportion was found to be higher in the northern central zone and lowest in the south western zone. In another survey carried out by Project Alert (2001) women and girls in Nigeria were asked about abuses within the family unit. Participants in the survey were picked randomly and included women working in the market, women in other work places, students at the university. In a particular state, Lagos State, more than half of the participants confirmed they had been beaten by their partners, boyfriend or husband. Some of the reasons why they were beaten included drunkenness, financial problems and refusing to have sex with the perpetrator. Many of the participants had reported physical and psychological injuries and threats to their family, the perpetrator's family and to their religious leaders while some just endured the abuse. None of the respondents was reported as having gone to the police to file a complaint or seek redress in court (Tejumola, 2007).

Cultural practices in Nigeria has tolerated and reinforced violence against women. Customary practices (customs and religion) across

Nigeria generally hold that the man is the head of the house and has the greatest control and decision-making pioneers. On marriage, the man is generally expected to pay the bride price to the family of the bride. This payment of bride price has led to the idea of ownership of the woman, the exchange of bride price being evidence of a commercial transaction. According to Akande (1993), the institution of bride price in traditional times was not conceived as a sale of the girl but was a proof of the girl's importance to both families. Her family must be compensated for her loss and it ensures that the husband's intentions are serious and not just a desire for frivolous association. In modern times however, the bride price symbolizes sale of the girl and ownership by her husband and his family.

Due to this misinterpretation of customary law, the woman is regarded as the property of the man who is entitled to discipline her as he thinks fit. The notion of subjugation of women is so entrenched that all in the society tend to accept violence against a woman as justified. The victim herself condones the violence and tries to enforce it on others. For example, the **umuadas** (daughters of the family who act as custodians of culture of the community) in the eastern part of the country have become notorious for their role in enforcing degrading and inhuman treatment on women married into their families. Any woman who tries to change or defy such cultural norm is usually punished and ostracized by the community. Where a victim is courageous enough to report incidents of domestic violence to law enforcement agencies, it is

trivialized and termed a "private matter". The victim is usually blamed for the incident and asked to "go home and be a good wife". Among the educated elites, domestic violence is accepted as a way of life and efforts to combat it is western and foreign (Eze-Anaba, 2006).

Theoretical Framework

This study is entrenched on the post-modern feminist theory. The proponents of this theory argue that society consists of a symbiotic order, and this can be explained using how children develop from birth. An important part of their development is the way they internalize this symbolic order. However, this process of internalization affects males and females differently (William, 2000).

In the first stage of development, which is the "imaginary phase", the baby has no awareness of itself as an individual. It can not differentiate between its mother and itself. In the second stage, the "mirror phase", the child begins to distinguish itself from its mother. When the child sees itself and the adult in the mirror for the first time, it fails to see the adult as a separate person, that the image is not real. Though later finally recognize that there is an image of itself which is separate from the adult. The child enters the mirror stage in which he or she has a conception of his or herself as separate from the other, in particular the mother.

In the third state "Oedipal phase", there is a growing divide between the child and the mother. The child does not want to be close to

the mother, he or she wants to provide for the mother what she is lacking. The child comes to realize that he/she have to communicate with the mother to express his/her wishes.

However, the child becomes aware that "the other" can only know them through the imperfect mechanism of language. "The other" cannot enter the child's head and see the world as they do. They can therefore only understand and meet the child's need imperfectly. The intervention of the father increases the child's sense of separation from the mother. Both the male and female child has to submit to the law of the father. During this phase, the boy child identified more with the father. Unlike the mother, the father was not originally seen by the child as an extension of him or herself. The father is seen as part of the symbolic order of language. Girls cannot identify with the father, because he is seen differently from them. Therefore, it is harder for the girl-child to accept fully, the symbolic order with its male connections. For this reason, boys and girls view the world from different perspectives. Language is essentially a male phenomenon. Women have to use a male language but cannot fully express themselves through it.

Relating this theory to the study, domestic violence emerged as a result of the inability of the male and female to understand the relationship between them. This is because the type of socialization process received from their early stage through interaction has shaped their behaviours. Both husband and wife perceive the relationship from

different perspectives. The way the husband will interpret the relationship will be different from the way the wife will interpret it, and vice versa. When this occurs, there is the tendency that the husband and wife are likely to step on each others toes. This is because women's feelings cannot be represented through the male language.

Methodology
Study Area

The area of study is Lagos state. Lagos state is divided into 20 local government areas, one of which is Alimosho Local Government, which is our specific focus of study. Lagos state was chosen as the study area for this work because of the fact that it is densely populated with an estimated population of about 12million (Otokiti, 2006) and people from various ethnic groups resides in it, which will be useful for this topic of research. The selected areas within the chosen local government area are as follows: Alimosho, Alagbado, Iyana-Ipaja and Ile-epo.

Sample Population

For the purpose of this study, one hundred and twenty (120) samples of respondents were selected from the total population. Sixty (60) male respondents and sixty (60) female respondents were selected and for each of the four selected areas thirty (30) respondents were assigned.

Sampling Techniques

The sampling technique employed was cluster and purposive samplings. The local government was clustered into four (4) zones as earlier mentioned. Based on the nature of this research work, the respondents were purposely selected from each of these four zones.

Research Instruments

Since the population of the study is mixed with both literate, semi-illiterate and non-literate, the researcher employed the use of both questionnaire and interview schedule as instruments to elicit information from respondents. So, on the whole about eighty- four (84) copies of questionnaire were administered to the respondents, while thirty-six (36) respondents were interviewed, which culminated into one hundred and twenty (120) respondents.

Findings

The socio-demographic characteristics of the subjects studied are descriptively diverse and this is presented in Table 1. From the table, the sample were selected using gender as a stratification variable, thus, we have a high representative of female population when compared to that of the male. Has stated earlier in the problem, women are by far the most affected group in terms of gender-based violence, hence our focus is on the dimensions and extent of violence experienced at different levels by these women in the last 2 years. Also is the health implications of the violence experienced.

When respondents were asked if they had experienced at least an act of intimate partner violence in last 2 years preceeding the survey 84.8% (56) said 'yes', while 15.2% (10) said 'No' (See table 2). Also, respondents who experienced intimate partner violence experienced multiple types of intimate partner violence.

Table 2: Been experiencing intimate partner violence

Responses	Female Respondents	Percentage
Yes	56	84.8%
No	10	15.2%
Total	66	100.0%

Field survey, 2007

In addition to this, from the perspectives of these women (see table 3) verbal/psychological (total ignoring) (21.2%) sexual violence (marital rape, sexual deprivation) (33.3%) and physical violence (battery) (27.3%) are the three prominent types of partner violence that women experience. Others are economic violence (18.2%) wherein the husband makes all/many decisions alone. From these, it can be inferred that more women who have experienced intimate partner violence have been victims of sexual violence. Infact, all the women were of the opinion that they have experienced all the four types of violence of concern in this study in the last 2 years.

Table 3 – Nature of Domestic Violence experienced

Nature of violence	Female respondents	Percentage (%)
Verbal psychological	14	21.2%
Sexual violence	22	33.3%
Physical violence	18	27.3%
Economic violence	12	18.2%
Total	**66**	**100.0%**

Field survey, 2007.

Also when respondents (both male and female) were asked what they feel could be cause of the incessant violence inflicted on women by their partners (table 4). About 19.2% said mainly when the husband does not have money to cater for the family; 16.7% said often times husbands who violate their wives are naturally violent; 15.8% were of the opinion that incidence of intimate partner violence occurs in unions where in the in-laws resides; 11.7% said that a woman's knowledge of her husband's involvement with extramarital relationship usually results in partner violence; 23.3% were of the opinion that women who are culturally disposed are more likely to experience intimate partner as against those who are gender positive.

Table 4: Causes of intimate partner violence

Causes of violence	Female	Male	Total	Percentage
Lack of money	13	10	23	19,2%
Naturally violent	12	8	20	16.7%
Presence of relatively	10	9	19	15.8%
Infidelity	8	6	14	11.7%
Culture	14	14	28	23.3%
Others	9	7	16	13.3%

Filed survey, 2007

Moreover, the rates of intimate partner violence are much higher among men who believe a husband in justified in beating and sexually assaulting his wife. The implication of this is that a man who is culturally disposed has the tendencies. Also, women who are culturally imposed have the tendencies not to see anything wrong in men either physically or sexually assaulting them. About 13.3% falls into the others category. They were of the opinion barrenness or inability to get pregnant

on fund often results into violence in marriages. Also, is the financial dependence of woman on men, who must submit to his whims and caprices to get anything from him.

Furthermore, when respondents were asked whether they have ever reported violence cases and who they usually report to when incidence of violence occur in their home (see Table 5 and 6), only about 330.3% were on the affirmative; while majority (56.1%) decline ever reporting the occurrence of violence in their homes; 13.6% did not give any response. Among the 20 respondents affirmed that they have reported cases of violence, only 20% said they have reported to their families and relatives; 15% said they have reported to their close friends, while a great majority (50%) did not give any response, only 15% has ever reported to the police. From this, it can be inferred that victims of domestic violence are not encouraged to reporting the perpetrators to the formal source but to informal sources.

Table 5: Reported cases of incidence of violence

Responses	Female respondents	Percentage
Yes	20	30.3%
No	37	56.1%
No response	9	13.6%
Total	**66**	**100.0%**

Field survey, 2007

Table 6: Health Consequences

Medium	Female respondents	Percentage
Relatives	4	20.0%
Friends	3	15.0%
Police	3	15.0
No response	10	50.0%
Total	**20**	**100.0%**

Field survey, 2007

On health consequences of intimate partner violence (see table 7) about 24.2% said it has usually resulted into sickness and death; 18.2% said it has resulted into mental disorder 303% said has resulted into serious physical injuries; and lastly 27.3% said sexual violence has always resulted into serious reproductive health problems like, miscarriages, abortion, forced labour, foetal diverse, and often time sexually transmitted Infections (STIs).

Table 7: Health Consequences

Health consequences	Female respondents	Percentages (%)
Sickness and death	16	24.2%
Mental disorder	12	18.2%
Physical injury	20	18.2%
Reproductive health problem	18	27.3%
Total	**66**	**100.0%**

Field survey, 2007

On coping strategies (see table 8), the top four perceived coping strategies were; physical violence (7.6%); endurance (30.3%); verbal violence (10.6%); separation (15.2%); and others like resorting to prayers and resolution of the issue (36.4%).

Table 8: coping strategies

Coping strategies	Female respondents	Percentage (%)
Physical violence 5	5	7.6%
Endurance	20	30.3%
Verbal violence	7	10.6%
Separation	10	15.2%
Others	24	36.4%
Total	**66**	**100.0%**

Field survey, 2007

Discussions

Gender-based violence is perhaps the most widespread and socially tolerated of human rights violations. The cost to women, their children, families and communities is a significant obstacle to reducing poverty, achieving gender equality and meeting the other millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Violence is a traumatic experience for any man or woman, but gender-based violence is preponderantly inflicted by men on women and girls. It both reflects and reinforces inequities between men and women and compromises the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims. The findings of this study will be discussed under these topics: causes and nature of domestic violence; reporting cases of violence; health consequences; and coping strategies;

Causes and nature of domestic violence

From this study a greater percentage (84.8%) of the female respondents have experienced one or more forms of violence from their intimate partners at one point in time in their marriage. Sexual violence happens to be the type of violence experienced by most of these women. The culture of Nigeria permits a man to demand for sex from his wife even when she is not disposed (either sick or tired) and not the other way round. Men who coerce their wives into a sexual act believe their actions are legitimate because they are married to these women. This is marital rape but it's never called so. The exclusion of marital rape on the ground that marriage implies consent perpetuate a woman is property. A woman

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is expected to give her husband her marital obligations as at when due not minding her state of mind and health. Denial of contraceptive is also another form of sexual violence these women experienced. The women said their husbands never give consent to their using contraceptives. As one of the respondents said:

"My husband says he married me to procreate and bear children for him".

This could be on the reasons of religion and cultural inheritance. Women in such families end up having as any children as they make. In most cases, taking care of such large number of children becomes a big problem, so such men may out of frustration, take to violence at the least provocation. In contrast, women who have no child in their marriages frequently experience violence with their spouses at the least provocation. Women in this predicament are times not treated kindly, because it is believed that they have little or nothing to contribute to their matrimonial homes since they have no children to inherit part of their husband's assets when such husbands die. In many cases a substantial proportion of women experiencing physical violence also experience sexual abuse by their intimate partners.

On the causes of domestic/gender-based violence. Respondents (19.2%) were of the opinion that when their husbands are unable to provide for the family, the woman is usually left to support the family economically. In order to compensate for their own feeling of weakness or

insecurity, many men resort to hitting the woman, become abusive, unnecessarily possessive and suspicious of the woman. The man resorts to domestic violence in order to stamp his mark of authority over the woman and members of his family. He sees this kind of power as the guarantee of his manhood. No matter a woman's socio-economic standing, she is expected to be subservient to the man. As a result of this patriarchy cannot be ruled out as the principal reason for the incidence of intimate partner violence (23.3%).

Reporting cases of violence

Violence against women has long been shrouded in a culture of silence. Reliable statistics are hard to come by, as violence is underreported because of shame, stigma and fear of retribution. It is not uncommon for women to be blamed for marital rape. In this study one of the reasons women remain silent is that violence against women is accepted as a "normal" aspect of gender relation. A large proportion of women believe wife beating may be justified for reasons such as refusing to have sex even when ill or not preparing food on time, disrespect to husband or husband's family members etc. The societal tolerance makes men get away justifying this violation of women's rights with sometimes very flimsy excuses as above.

As a result of the cultural tolerance, a large percentage of the incidents go unreported. Even the few reported cases are treated as 'Trivial' or 'Domestic' by the police. The tendency of the police is to

maintain a policy of non-interference so as not to be seen to be instrumental to marriage break-ups or family rifts. This evidently has discouraged many victims from reporting. It is also believed that the woman should never report the incidence of violence against her to the police. This is premised on the belief that there cannot be friendship between any two people after litigation.

Health Consequences

Effects of gender-based violence on women are multi-dimensional. It has been found to affect victims, physically, morally, psychologically, socially, financially etc. Wife abuse can be a significant cause of female morbidity and can eventually lead to female mortality.

Victims of domestic violence are also at increased risk for mental health problems and disorders. These include depression, anxiety disorder, suicide, eating disorders etc. Children who witness domestic violence are also not left out. They may suffer acute and long-term emotional disturbance, nightmares learning difficulties, aggressive behaviour etc.

Abuse before and during pregnancy, bleeding during pregnancy, increased risk of miscarriages, and abortions due to premature labour and fetal distress.

Lastly, women who have experienced intimate partner violence has high tendency to having sexually transitted infections (STIs). They are usually infected with STIs. Women who experience forced sex in intimate

relationships often find it difficult to negotiate condom use – either because using condom could be interpreted as mistrust of their partner or as an admission of promiscuity, or else because they fear experiencing violence from their partner.

Coping Strategies

Financial dependence, subordinate social status and a lack of legal rights and legal counseling services in many societies limit the ability of women to protect themselves or leave abusive situations. In this study it was found that respondents do not lay much emphasis on physical violence, verbal violence or separation. Majority believed that endurance (30.3%) and others like prayers and resolution of issues (36.4%) are the main coping strategies.

The endurance approach is premised on three basic assumptions namely; the incidence of violence will cease one day, and that for the sake of her children a woman should stay in a violent relationship, and the couple should be patient with one another. So usually, threats of deprivation can trap a woman and her children in abusive situations.

Recommendation

Sexual violence in homes has generally been a neglected area of research in most parts of the word, yet the evidence suggests that it is a public health problem of substantial proportion. Much more needs to be done both to understand the phenomenon and to prevent it.

Primary prevention of sexual violence is often marginalized in favour of providing services for survivors. Policy makers, researchers, donors and nongovernmental organizations should therefore give much greater attention to this important area. Priority should be given to the following:

❖ The primary prevention of all forms of sexual violence through programmes in communities.

❖ Support for culturally sensitive and participatory approaches to changing attitudes and behaviour;

❖ Support for programmes addressing the prevention of sexual violence in the broader context of promoting gender equality;

❖ Programmes that address some of the underlying socio-economic causes of violence, including poverty and lack of education, for example by providing job opportunities;

❖ Programmes to improve childrearing; reduce the vulnerability of women and promote more gender-equitable notions of masculinity.

Conclusions

The findings of this study confirm the fact that gender-based violence in the home cuts across every stratum of the society. Patriarchy and culture are strong factors enhancing gender-based violence. It can be concluded that, gender-based violence has negative consequences on victims. Abusive acts against women arise out of a multiplicity of cultural

circumstances influenced by power relations. Thus, patriarchy cannot be ruled out as the major reason for incidence of intimate partner violence. Gender-based violence is in part, rooted in gender and power inequities that marginalize girls and women within relationships and society overall. The pervious legal right of men to beat their wives-the notorious 'rule of thumb' – provides some insight into the institutionalization of gender inequities and gender-based violence. This corroborates Alemika's view, quoting a United Nations Report (1995) on a study in Nigeria states that "the explanation for violence against women in the home goes beyond the individual characteristics of the man, the woman and the family. It must look to the structure of relationships and the role of society in underpinning that structure. Violence against wives is a function of the belief fostered in all cultures that men are superior and that the women they live with are their possessions or chattels that they can treat as they wish and as they consider appropriate".

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Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Frequency			Percent	
Sex	N = 120			100%	
Male	54			45%	
Female	66			55%	
Age	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
16-25	12	15	10.0%	12.5%	22.5%
26-40	27	32	22.5%	26.7%	49.2%
41 and above	15	19	12.5%	15.8%	28.3%
Ethnic	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Hausa	12	9	10.0%	7.5%	17.5%
Ibo	13	15	10.8%	12.5%	23.3%
Yoruba	24	35	20.0%	29.2%	49.2%
Others	5	7	4.2%	5.8%	10.0%
Marital status	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Married	34	37	28.3%	30.8%	59.1%
Co-habiting coupled	10	17	8.3%	14.2%	22.5%
Divorced	10	12	8.3%	10.0%	18.3%
No of children	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
0	6	9	5.0%	7.5%	12.5%
1-2	16	27	13.3%	22.5%	35.5%
3-4	18	23	15.0%	19.2%	34.2%
Others	14	7	11.7%	5.8%	17.5%
Religion	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Christianity	26	32	21.7%	26.7%`	48.4%
Islam	22	27	18.3%	22.5%	40.8%
Others	6	7	5.0%	5.8%	10.8%
Education	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Primary	11	14	9.2%	11.7%	20.9%
Secondary	25	30	20.8%	25.0%	45.8%
Professional technical	9	11	7.5%	9.2%	16.7%
Graduate degree	9	11	7.5%	9.2%	16.7%
Occupation	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Business	12	14	10.0%	11.7%	21.7%
Civil servant	12	14	10.0%	11.7%	21.7%
Petty trader	24	21	20.0%	17.5%	37.5%
Full-house-wife	2	12	1.7%	10.0%	11.7%
No response	4	5	3.3%	4.2%	7.5%
Level of income	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
Below 10,00	13	16	10.8%	13.3%	24.1%
10,000-40,000	15	23	12.5%	19.2%	31.7%
40,000-70,000	18	19	15.0%	15.8%	30.8%
70,000 and above	8	8	6.7%	6.7%	13.4%

Source: field survey, 2007.