

The Dynamics of help Seeking Strategies used by Battered Women in Spousal Relationships in Nakuru West Sub-County of KenyaMary Wanjiku Wachira¹, Kibet Ngetich², Wokabi Mwangi³^{1,2,3}Department of Peace, Security and Social Studies, Egerton University, Nakuru, Kenya***Corresponding author**

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Abstract: The study examines the dynamics of help seeking strategies among battered women in spousal relationships in Nakuru West Sub County, Kenya. This research was motivated by the verity that even though wife battering has for long been recognized as not only a health hazard but also a grave violation of human rights, it continues to be prevalent in many families. Two theories; Battered Women Syndrome Theory and Survivor Theory guided the study. Snowball and purposive sampling methods were used to identify the sample size required. A qualitative research methodology employing an Interview Schedule, Focus Group Discussions and Key Informants Guides was employed as the tools of data collection and data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study found that (80.0%) of the battered women do not always seek help. This study recommends social solutions to wife battering because findings conclude that it is a social problem. The study also recommends that policies to curb battering be more stringent in order to deal with the menace thereby empowering women who are key pillars to family welfare and by extension stable society.

Keywords: help seeking strategies, battered women, spousal relationship

INTRODUCTION

Family stability is the nucleus to a functioning society. Spousal harmony and coexistence is fundamental to family stability and consequently a healthy society. Wife battering is a threat to family stability in that it not only adversely affects victims directly but also indirectly affects their children who are the futurity of any society.

The vice is highly prevalent in Nakuru West Sub-County as evident in the background to the study. Efforts by government and other stakeholders to encourage help seeking by battered partners have yielded very little. Hence, the need to carry out an analysis to understand the dynamics of help seeking by battered partners in spousal relationships in Nakuru West Sub County.

LITERATURE REVIEW**Help Seeking Behaviour by Battered Women**

Naved and others [1] outlines the many domains of a battered woman's life as her financial stability, the well-being of her children, her social status, and her psychological health, sense of self-worth, her hopes and dreams for the course of her life. They proceed to affirm that the threats to these domains may be greater than the threats of physical pain. Pence and Paymar [2] when exploring battered women's protective strategies noted that several factors have been highlighted as being instrumental in the choices pursued by a victim. Earlier studies revealed that coping for a battered woman is a shifting and not a static process in that individuals employ varying strategies according to the nature of the stressors, appraisal of the available coping resources and other situational factors [3]. The current study while concurring with the above reviewed studies that several domains of a battered woman influence help seeking will seek to highlight the specific domains influencing help seeking in the area of study. It also sought to determine the situational factors influencing the shift in help seeking strategies.

Institutional obstacles have also been outlined as basic factors influencing a battered woman's help seeking behavior [4], notes that many services are primarily organized around helping women leave their relationship and therefore if victims do not wish to leave they may find few relevant institutional services available to them. The current study, like the highlighted works is of the opinion that institutional obstacles may limit their use by battered women because women may be seeking help to aid them survive as they remain with their spouses and therefore not willing to give them up. The study went further to state that there are few or no documented works on institutional obstacles to help seeking in Africa and more so the area identified for the study thus the need for this study.

The Criminal justice interventions can have both therapeutic and anti-therapeutic effects for battered women thereby encouraging or discouraging help seeking [5]. West [6] enumerated therapeutic benefits as providing temporary safety, legal intervention, validates a victim's right to be free from violence, sends the message that domestic violence is criminal, informs victims of other services and enhances feelings of empowerment and liberation [7]. However, Tjaden and Thoennes [8] posit that although situational factors prompt battered women to report battering to the criminal justice systems the process may be anti-therapeutic as it involves a more arduous and adversarial experience. In addition, Vidales, [9] corroborates with the reviewed studies and add that other practical concerns such as financial support may make it difficult for them to seek out help. This study posits that though seeking the criminal justice system may be therapeutic it may be counter-productive especially if court sessions may involve children observe their parents accuse one another in a court of law.

Available literature infers that police response plays a critical role in situations of wife battering because they not only serve as gatekeepers to the criminal justice system but also channel deserving cases for prosecution [10]. In addition, the study documents that woman who had positive experiences with police were more likely to reuse the system in the future. The current study concurs with the above-cited authors that the initial contact with the police is critical because victims of wife battering take the next step based on their first experience with the police.

Bent-Goodley [11] pointed at cultural values and norms as key influencers in battered women's help seeking choices, thereby prescribing the range of coping strategies available or acceptable to them. The study adds that some cultures prohibit the use of certain active strategies and may incur serious familial or societal sanctions. In addition, the National Network to End Domestic Violence [12] hypothesized that in some cultures wife battering is an accepted practice. In his view, Romkens [13] argue that in communities where violence against women is widely accepted, the victims may be reluctant to seek help since this would be a break with social norms.

However if violence against women is strongly condemned in the community, battered woman will be more likely to seek help since domestic violence will be considered intolerable [14]. The current study is in agreement with the above mentioned writers that cultural and religious affiliations often limit the help seeking choices of battered women as such cultures may advocate for compromise rather than competition in conflict resolution. However, this study notes that there is no agreements by the cited authors on the how culture influences help seeking choices of battered women and therefore hopes to fill this gap in the proposed study area. The study went further to identify the specific cultural strategies used by battered women of different cultural backgrounds in Nakuru West Sub - County.

Battered Women Syndrome

The Battered Women Syndrome theory was born out of the research conducted by Walker [15]. The analysis noted that battered women's syndrome contains two distinct elements: a cycle of violence and symptoms of learned helplessness. Empirical evidence shows a cycle of violence as comprising of three phases: the tension-building phase, active battering phase and calm loving respite phase [16]. Further, these studies expound the tension-building phase as a stage that a victim is subjected to minor battering incidents such as slaps and pinches. In this situation, the woman tries to pacify her batterer by showering him with kindness or attempts to avoid him. However, the victim's attempts to pacify her batterer only work to delay the inevitable acute battering incidents, which follows and is characterized by the battering phase which usually last for a period of two to twenty-four hours. At this phase, the batterer places his victim in a constant state of fear and she is unable to control his violence by utilizing techniques that worked in the tension-building phase.

Further they argue, the victim upon realizing her lack of control, attempts to mitigate the violence by becoming passive. The final step is the calm loving respite phase or honeymoon phase where the batterer apologizes for his abusive behavior and promises that it will never happen again. Fox and others [17] posits that the behavior exhibited by the batterer then resembles the behavior he displayed when the couple first fell in love. He adds that this phase is the most psychologically victimizing, because the batterer fools the victim, who is relieved that the abuse has ended. However, with time, the batterer begins to abuse his victim and the cycle of abuse begins anew to the amazement of the victim. This theory can be used for this study to explain that the battered women become passive, indecisive along the cycle of violence, and helpless in the face of repeated abuse.

According to Walker [18], the second element on battered women's syndrome can be explained based on Seligman's view of learned helplessness, which details why women become passive after the cycle of recurrent battering. Furthermore, McClennen [19] and Watts [20] while corroborating with the previous study contend that in the domestic abuse ambit, sporadic brutality, perceptions of powerlessness, lack of financial resources and the superior strength of the batterer all combine to instill a feeling of helplessness in the victim. This aspect of learned helplessness is instrumental for this study as it can be used to show how a batterer's condition when enhanced by despair may lead women into

believing that they are powerless to escape thereby subjecting themselves into a continuing pattern of uncontrollable violence and abuse. This theory can advance suggestions why battered women usually do not actively seek help because of feelings of defenselessness. In addition by applying learned helplessness concept this study will change society's perception of battered women by dispelling the myth that battered women like being battered and will further offer a logical and rational explanation for why most do not disclose the abuse due to the feeling of helplessness. The Battered Women Syndrome theory views battering victims as passive and helpless in their circumstances and therefore does not explain objectives b and c and therefore the need to introduce the survivors theory to fill the gap.

RESULTS

Strategies of Help Seeking Among Battered Women

In order to understand on whether battered women seek help, this study sought to establish whether women always seek help every time they are battered. Table below gives a summary of the findings.

Table-1: Whether Battered Women always Seek Help

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No	48	80.0
	Yes	12	20.0
	Total	60	100.0
	Total	60	100.0

Majority 48 (80%) respondents indicated that they do not always seek help while only a minority 12 (20%) respondents said that they always seek help in response to battering. The results of the current study established that even though battering is common in the area, majority of the victims do not always seek help. These results are in agreement with the findings of earlier studies which established that wife battering is highly prevalent in many societies but is an under reported issue [21].

Immediate Strategies of Help Seeking

One of the key attributes of human behaviour is change. No one person behaves the same way consistently in different times and under different circumstances. It was therefore the intention of this study to establish whether battered women portray variances in their help seeking choices in the immediate and in the long-term. This therefore presented the need to analyse the immediate and long-term help seeking strategies used by battered women in the area under study.

To begin with, in regard to immediate strategies of help seeking it can be argued that like any other person in a crisis, the first thing that a battered woman needs is to be safe. If she is in danger, it is very difficult to think beyond the immediate crisis. In order to have a glimpse of the immediate action of battered women, the study was interested in identifying the immediate strategies to attain this safety. The results are presented in table below:

Table-2: Immediate Strategies of Help Seeking from

	Responses		Percent of Cases
		Percent	
Runs away	26	21.7%	92.9%
Screams for help	20	16.7%	71.4%
Reports him to his parents	20	16.7%	71.4%
Pleads for mercy from battering husband	17	14.2%	60.7%
Keeps silent	15	12.5%	53.6%
Goes to her parents' home	10	8.3%	35.7%
Hits back	5	4.2%	17.9%
Seeks assistance from a friend	4	3.3%	14.3%
Discuss the issue with spouse	3	2.5%	10.7%
Total	120	100.0%	428.6%

Results indicate that majority 26 (92.9%) responses were identified as running away from the scene of battering. It emerged that women run out of the house or moved to another room or go to a neighbors' house. Twenty (71.4%) responses show that victims scream for help. All who gave this answer indicated that they did so in anticipation that

someone would hear them and come to their rescue. Further, they noted that screaming was deemed useful as it would humble their spouses who may fear being branded as wife batterers.

An additional 20 (71.4%) responses were given indicating that victims reported the batterer to his parents. The respondents argued that since they lived in the same compounds with their in laws they immediately sought help from them. Seventeen (60.7%) responses highlighted pleading for mercy as an immediate strategy. The respondents indicated that since men are considered superior to women, humbling was a gesture of recognition of this superiority which they belief would stop the abuse. The results presented above could be interpreted to mean that patriarchy is likely to lead to tolerance and justification of men's violence against women. Fifteen (53.6%) responses indicated that battered women do nothing but keep quite when beaten. The respondents argued that they are helpless as their spouses have a right to beat them.

Ten (35.7%) responses highlighted going to the natal parent's home as an immediate strategy. The respondents who gave this answer said that they felt that their parents support was genuine. This study reveals that help is sought when there is trust between the victim and the people they seek help from.

5 (17.9%) responses indicated that battered women helped themselves by hitting back. However, those who gave this answer indicated that they did so when they were certain that they can run away to evade retaliation and intensify the assault. These results reveal that even though women sometimes retaliated by hitting back, it is a rare strategy and they do so with uttermost precautions.

An additional 14 (14.3%) responses were given stating calling or visiting a friend to seek advice about on the assault. The respondents said that they trusted their friends as they empathised with them and offered them socio-economic support. Results derived from this study indicate that trust in a friend encouraged help seeking.

Finally, a minority group consisting of 3 (10.7%) responses identified discussing the matter with the violent husband as the immediate strategy. They noted that they waited for irritation to cool down and then discuss the issue with the spouse. Respondents who gave this answer observed that this had helped eliminate the abuse. Results from this study could be interpreted to mean that the immediate help seeking strategies used by women in the area under study are predominately-informal strategies aimed at accessing immediate safety. Further, the results show that battered women need social support in someone who will listen to her.

Long Term Strategies of Help Seeking

For better understanding of the dynamics of help seeking, this study was interested in finding out the long-term strategies of help seeking. The results are presented in table below

Table-3: Long Term Strategies of Help Seeking

	Responses		Percent of Cases
		Percent	
Submission and perseverance	25	25.5%	100.0%
Report to police	22	22.4%	88.0%
Prayer	22	22.4%	88.0%
Separation and divorce	18	18.4%	72.0%
Report to FIDA	11	11.2%	44.0%
Total	98	100.0	392.0%

Out of the 98 responses given in response to the question, what the long-term strategies of help seeking majority 25 (100%) responses were given highlighting submitting to the spouse. The respondents argued that men are superior and must be treated as so. Results emanating from this study demonstrate an aspect of subordination of women thereby leading to non-help seeking.

Twenty-two (88.0%) responses were given indicating that a substantial number reported battering to the police. The respondents were of the view that they used this strategy when other strategies had failed and the victims were convinced that the abuse might not cease. It can be said that victims of spousal battering report to the police in anticipation that an end to battering will be realised.

An extra 22 (88.0%) responses were given to indicate that victims seek prayer or religious guidance and counselling in response to battering. The respondents argued that dependence on God was viewed a lasting solution to battering. The respondents further argued that they sought help from clergy because they got counselling which is therapeutic. 18 (72.0%) responses were given outlining separation and divorce as a long-term method in response to wife battering. The respondents asserted that they resorted to this method when they noticed that they might lose their lives in the hands of the one battering them due to severe and intensive battering.

Finally, 11 (44.2%) responses were given as reporting to FIDA. Respondents using this strategy argued that they did so because the organization offered them free legal advice and services. In summary results in this study, reveals that battered women used both formal and informal methods as long-term strategies to help seeking. The study found that long-term strategies were used as a final resort to battering.

Where Battered Women Seek Help

In order to get an in-depth understanding on the commonly used strategies on help seeking this study sought to identify specific areas where battered women seek help. Results on where battered women seek help are summarized in table below.

Table-4: Where Battered Women Seek help

	Responses		Percent of Cases
		Percent	
Husband’s relative	32	18.0%	100.0%
Village elders and Area chief	20	11.2%	62.5%
Religion(religious personnel and prayer)	20	11.2%	62.5%
Medical facilities	20	11.2%	62.5%
Neighbours	18	10.1%	56.2%
GBVRC Centres	16	9.0%	50.0%
Don’t seek help	10	5.6%	31.2%
Legal System (police and court case)	10	5.6%	31.2%
Runs away	9	5.1%	28.1%
Friends	6	3.4%	18.8%
Victims Parents	6	3.4%	18.8%
Divorce & separation	4	2.2%	12.5%
Marriage counsellor	4	2.2%	12.5%
Screaming	3	1.7%	9.4%
Total	178	100.0%	556.2%

The table above shows that majority 32 (100%) responses showed that battered women seek help from the batterer’s relatives. At the same time 6 (18.8%) response given indicated that victims seek help from natal relatives. All the respondents who gave these responses observed that consulting relatives yielded durable solutions. All the respondents who reported seeking help from natal parents said that their parents were non-judgmental and empathized with them.

An additional 10 (31.2%) responses were given stating legal methods. All who gave this answer enumerated legal methods of help seeking as reporting to police and filing a court case. They further observed legal strategies were used as a last resort when they had given up on their marriages due to frequent and severe battering. There was a common opinion legal methods were sought when informal strategies had failed and the victims had given up on their marriage. Seeking help from friends received six (18.8%) responses. Those who gave this answer argued that they sought help from friend because friends empathized with them and offered them psycho social and financial support.

CONCLUSION

According to this study, only a minority 12 (20%) respondents seek help and majority 48 (80%) respondents do not seek help. This scenario is worrying as it shows that majority of women experiencing assault are not accessing any assistance in spite of the adverse impacts of battering to individuals, family, society and the nation at large. Findings further show that battered women use both immediate and long-term strategies of help seeking. Results show that majority of immediate help seeking strategies aim at accessing informal social support. Further it can be derived from the study that the immediate strategies used aimed at ensuring safety, protective and immediate escape from the batterer.

Results show that the main immediate strategies used by battered women in the area under study include running away, screaming for help, talking to both natal and marital parents, calling a friend while a few hit back .

The long term strategies used aimed at finding durable solutions to prolonged battering. Findings reveal that majority 53 (204%) responses given indicated that victims use formal strategies of help seeking while the minority 47(188%) responses demonstrated that victims use informal strategies of help seeking. The formal strategies used included reporting to police 22 (88.0%) responses, separation and divorce 18 (72.0%) responses and reporting at the FIDA office 11 (44.0%) responses.

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