Northwest University

# Transforming Domestic Violence in Rural Uganda:

## Using Conflict Transformation Theory to Devise Comprehensive Intervention Strategies

Anna Ruble

Dr. Forrest Inslee

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## Introduction

In rural Uganda, domestic violence stems from various social, psychological, political, economic, and cultural factors. These various and intersecting factors lead to complex patterns of behavior and interaction as well as severe power imbalances between men and women. Feelings of shame, inadequacy and disconnection can quickly lead to tension and conflicts. Such complex causation makes it difficult to effectively resolve these conflicts. It also discourages community development practitioners from creating and implementing comprehensive programs and services for survivors and perpetrators of domestic violence in order to successfully address domestic violence.

Current domestic violence interventions often focus on single-factor descriptions of conflict causation, particularly gender inequality and cultural explanations. While most of these descriptions of causes are valid, they are often incomplete and inadequate to address the complexity of domestic violence. Also, many current responses to domestic violence in Africa are based on a Western understanding of gender inequality, masculine identity, and individualistic ideals. Rarely, if ever, are such approaches contextualized to fit the unique needs, desires, and cultures of the people they are trying to help.

Transformational approaches to conflict and development offer new possibilities for community development practitioners, social justice advocates, and women's rights activists to effectively address the factors that lead to domestic violence. Unlike current responses to domestic violence, transformational approaches support a comprehensive understanding of the causes of domestic violence and aim to bring about social change, reconciliation, and equality. In rural Uganda, development practitioners can utilize a conflict transformation framework in order to better understand the causes of domestic violence, meet individuals' needs, and develop more

effective prevention strategies and programs for survivors and perpetrators. Through the lens of conflict transformation, community development practitioners can better understand *all* of the possible underlying causes of domestic violence. Such a comprehensive perspective will allow them to provide better services that consider the complexity of underlying causes while also addressing the presenting problem.

In part one of this thesis, I use data from my own qualitative research on domestic violence and gender in rural Uganda to describe the types of violence that women experience. I also describe the structure of Ugandan gender norms and the expectations for men and women in Ugandan society. In part two, I explore the current theories of domestic violence causes and review what other research and literature has found about the conceptualization of women's rights, gender inequality, cultural beliefs, economic and political factors, and poverty as the underlying causes of domestic violence. In part three, I discuss the current approaches to domestic violence in Africa and the need to expand our understanding of violence against women by incorporating intersectional and ecological lenses. In part four, I examine the differences between conflict resolution and conflict transformation and begin to develop a transformational framework for understanding domestic violence. Lastly, in part five, I describe ways in which this framework could be applied and the additional research that needs to be done in order to develop effective, transformational programs based in a Ugandan context.

**Scope and Terminology**

The scope of this thesis is limited to heterosexual, cisgender individuals and couples and assumes a binary understanding of gender. A major limitation of this thesis is that it does not explore violence against LGBTQ+ or gender nonconforming individuals or how practitioners can utilize a conflict transformation framework to address conflicts among same-sex couples.

Additional research is needed on gender identities, sexual orientation, and violence against LGBTQ+ individuals in a Ugandan context, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore these topics.

This thesis presents a transformational model for addressing conflict between men and women that results in domestic violence. This model is a departure from conventional approaches to domestic violence. While this model presents many possibilities for new intervention and prevention strategies, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to make specific program recommendations or provide concrete steps towards implementing the model. Rather, throughout this thesis I will argue for a shift in perspectives on domestic violence causation and prevention strategies as a means for guiding further research on specific program design and implementation.

Throughout this thesis I use the term "domestic violence" to mean any physical, psychological, sexual, or other violence against members of a family or individuals living in the same home. This primarily refers to male perpetrated violence against women, as in the case of spousal violence. However, this can also include female perpetrated violence against women, such as in polygynous marriages in which multiple wives abuse or harass each other. I also use the term domestic violence to encompass other family violence against women, such as fathers who abuse their daughters, mothers-in-law who emotionally abuse their daughters-in-law, and other forms of intimate relation violence in the home. Despite including these various forms of violence in my definition and discussion of domestic violence, I will be focusing solely on violence against women. Violence against men certainly does occur in domestic situations, and as mentioned above, women can be perpetrators of violence against men. Nevertheless, I will not be exploring the perpetration, victimization, or causation of violence against men in this thesis.

Also, while the term “intervention” can have some negative connotations, I have borrowed it from the field of social work and use it to mean “both therapeutic and advocacy-based action and aid that is designed to assist survivors and prevent violence” (Wood 5).

## Domestic Violence and Gender in Rural Uganda

In July, 2017, I traveled to southeastern Uganda for seven weeks. The purpose of my trip was to conduct a phenomenological study of domestic violence in rural Uganda. During my research, I interviewed fourteen individuals in Busia district, and organized two focus group discussions in the village of Majanji. Through my research, I sought to understand the lived experiences of survivors of domestic violence and other community members in rural Uganda, particularly among the Samia tribe.

During my research, I asked participants how violence against women manifests in the context of rural Uganda. For example, do women experience physical abuse such as being beaten or caned, do they experience psychological and emotional abuse, and do men exhibit controlling behaviors? I also wanted to know how women protect themselves against or resist gender-based violence, whether or not they report it and to whom. Other questions focused on gender norms and expectations for men and women in Ugandan Samia culture. I wanted to understand men’s and women’s perceived roles in society and what happens if individuals do not meet the cultural expectations for their gender or comply with their assigned role. I also sought to understand how individuals in rural Uganda define gender equality and what they think about female empowerment.

### Types of Violence Against Women

Through my research, I found that physical violence is the most widely recognized form of domestic violence in rural Uganda and is therefore presumably the most common. Other

research suggests that in Uganda approximately 65% of women have experienced at least one type of violence in their lifetime (Ogland et al. 873). There are several limitations when trying to understand the types of violence that women in Uganda experience. One of the most challenging is the fact that most violence is rarely reported or treated. If survivors do seek treatment, it could be several days or weeks after the incident. Also, violence that is reported to the police is seldom formally reported. Despite the uncertainty of the exact scope of the problem, violence against women is common, especially in domestic settings.

*Physical Violence*

Physical violence against women can range from slapping to extreme and life-threatening abuse. In terms of domestic violence among family members, the most common type of physical violence against women is “caning,” which refers to a man beating his wife, intimate partner, or female family member with a stick (Anyango; Taaka). Caning is commonly used as a punishment for children and dogs and when used against a woman serves to reinforce her inferior status (Taaka). Samuel Wafula, a medical practitioner who runs a women’s health clinic in Busia, described treating much more severe cases of physical violence. Samuel recalled a woman who came to the clinic after her husband had poured boiling water on her head, neck, shoulders, chest, and arms. Her burns had become septic because her husband had waited several days before allowing her to go to the clinic for treatment.

Physical violence also occurs in the form of rape and sexual assault. Raphael Oseche, a probation officer at the Ministry of Gender and Social Development in Busia, said that his office receives an average of twenty cases of sexual assault per day throughout Busia district. Oseche believes this is partly due to the fact that Busia is a high-traffic border crossing between Uganda and Kenya, and there are high rates of crime and prostitution in the area. Sexual assault by

unknown perpetrator is common because of this and many perpetrators get away without ever being caught. Sexual assault is also common in intimate relationships or when the perpetrator is someone that the victim knows. Cases of intimate partner sexual violence are often not reported, however, because of a general distrust of and skepticism towards law enforcement and the legal system (Oseche). Sexual violence is also under-reported due to stigma and the "prevailing perception that a 'married' woman cannot be raped by her spouse since a woman is not expected to refuse his sexual advances from her spouse" (Kaye et al. 629)

### *Psychological Abuse*

What is classified in the West as psychological or emotional abuse against women is also common in rural Uganda, though culturally that behavior is not understood or talked about as being abusive. For the purposes of this thesis, I will refer to such behaviors as psychological abuse. The examples of psychological abuse described here come from the lived experiences of the research participants, though it is important to note that the participants themselves did not use the term "psychological abuse." Nevertheless, they did express that these experiences were unwanted and harmful to their mental or emotional health and self-esteem, hence why I have decided to term these experiences psychological abuse.

These behaviors include such actions as a man blaming his wife for financial problems or calling her a curse on the family when they experience misfortune (Taaka). Psychological abuse is also common from a man's family towards his wife. In an interview, Irene Okotch described being relentlessly taunted and ridiculed by her mother-in-law and brother-in-law. Okotch explained that her husband's family frequently yell at her, call her names, and make fun of her because her mother is deaf, which is seen as a curse. Okotch also explained that they similarly

mock her children, calling them stupid like their mother and grandmother. Okotch said that her husband does nothing to stop his mother and brother because he does not want to offend them.

The emotional trauma of abuse continues when women are unable to report the violence they have experienced. Rather than standing up against their abusers or reporting abuse to friends, family, or authorities, women simply continue complying with their husband's wishes and cultural expectations in order to avoid more fights and possible abuse (Namukose). Most women do not report abuse to the police out of embarrassment or fear of retribution if the police tell the husband that they reported abuse (Namukose; S. Wafula). Other women do not report violence to the police because of corruption and extortion. Police officers will often ask for bribes to fill out the appropriate forms or not to tell the woman's husband that she came in to report him (H. Wafula; S. Wafula). Some women may choose to go to local community or religious leaders to report abuse and ask for help and advice, but these leaders often advise them to return home and settle the matter as a family (Okotch; Namukose; Taaka).

Many women will, in fact, separate from or divorce their husbands if the abuse becomes too frequent or severe, yet this comes with a great deal of emotional trauma as well. If a woman divorces her husband she must leave her children in his custody (Taaka). Because "the cultural belief is those children are from that man. So, there's no way you can take them unless the child... is still very young... But when they are around eight, nine, ten [years old] and above you have to leave them at their home [with the father]" (Anyango). Many women are left with the impossible choice between continued abuse or abandoning their children.

### *Male Controlling Behaviors*

Similar to psychological abuse, male controlling behaviors are often not perceived as abusive or even necessarily controlling in Ugandan culture. Because of the social hierarchy of

men being superior to women, these behaviors are typically accepted as cultural and social norms. Despite this, I refer to these behaviors as controlling behaviors. Again, the examples of controlling behaviors that I describe come from the first-hand accounts of my research participants. When describing the experiences of these controlling behaviors, the participants all reiterated the fact that they were unwanted behaviors and the controlling behaviors limited their independence and decision-making autonomy.

A study on intimate partner violence in Uganda found that "male partners' controlling behaviors [are] the main predictors of IPSV [intimate partner sexual violence]" (Wandera et al. 6). Common male controlling behaviors include "being jealous if their partner talked with other men, accusing her of unfaithfulness, not permitting her to meet with female friends, and trying to limit contact with family" (Wandera et al. 6). According to my participants, most men do not allow their wives to work, especially outside of the home, for fear that the woman might have an affair or become independent and therefore disrespectful (H. Wafula; Taaka; Anyango; Namukose). Even if a woman does work and earn an income, her husband is still entitled to her money. In an interview, Taaka Claire described working as a teacher at a primary school. She explained that her husband would take all of her earnings, even though he had a job of his own, and would spend her money however he saw fit. When Taaka finally decided to leave her husband, she had no money and no savings to support herself because her husband had taken and spent all of her income. This is just one example of the many ways in which abusive men seek to manipulate and control their wives and female family members.

### *Family Violence and Polygyny*

Polygynous marriages can also be a source of violence and emotional trauma for women in Uganda. The Samia tribe traditionally practiced polygyny and many Samia men still take

multiple wives today. The cultural belief that men were not created for only one woman leads many Samia men to seek multiple wives and other extramarital partners (Anyango). Polygyny is often practiced for social status, as men with multiple wives and many children earn greater respect from other men. Polygyny is also practiced for economic reasons as more wives means more children which means more hands to help with agricultural work (H. Wafula). In a study of polygyny in Ghana, Amy Ickowitz and Lisa Mohanty found that "polygynous women are more likely than monogamous women to experience domestic violence, as well as believe it is deserved in some instances" (97). Polygyny combined with the cultural expectation that men are the sole providers for the family can cause economic and social tensions that lead to violence (H. Wafula). Polygyny can worsen situations of poverty and can put greater pressure on men to provide for multiple families. This pressure to provide when a man is financially unable to can become a threat to his masculinity and cause him to lash out in violence. Polygyny can also cause animosity between wives which leads to conflicts, violence, and threats of witchcraft (Anyango; H. Wafula).

### *Structural, Cultural, and Symbolic Violence*

It is clear that women experience many types of violence, but other types that are not discussed in much of the research are structural violence, cultural violence, and symbolic violence. Structural violence stems from a structural perspective of society which "assumes that social structures shape human identities, interests, and interactions, providing, to an extent, both the possibilities and limits for human action" (Moe-Lobeda 72). Structural violence occurs when these social structures create inequalities and power disparities between groups. Structural violence is "the physical, psychological, and spiritual harm that certain groups of people experience as a result of unequal distribution of power and privilege... Structural violence

degrades, dehumanizes, damages, and kills people by limiting or preventing their access to the necessities for life or for its flourishing" (Moe-Lobeda 72). From a structural perspective, the violence that women in Uganda endure stems from inequalities produced by the social structure and hierarchy. Women are less powerful and less privileged in Ugandan society, and therefore are limited or prevented from accessing certain rights and advantages that are accessible to men through their higher status, such as employment outside of the home.

Cultural violence, although similar to structural violence, is distinct in that it is made up of "those aspects of culture that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence. Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right – or at least not wrong" (Moe-Lobeda 75). Throughout my research, many participants mentioned that physical violence against women is simply part of Samia culture (Taaka; H. Wafula). In Samia culture, it is a long-held belief that the man is the "head of the household" (H. Wafula). There is some uncertainty about whether this belief is truly from Samia culture or if it was adopted along with other Christian beliefs and Biblical teachings during colonialism (H. Wafula; Taaka). Either way, every person that I interviewed mentioned this belief and its prevalence in Ugandan culture and social life. This belief is often used to justify direct violence against women and the structural violence found in the social hierarchy. As another example, the cultural belief that women should act as caretakers for children and other family members is often used to justify their exclusion from paid employment.

The Mifumi Project is an organization in Uganda that aims to end the practice of paying a bride price. Solomy Awiidi, the Legal and Policy Officer for Mifumi Project, explains that there are many reasons that a man might give for abusing his wife:

> Most will say, like from the East, most of them will say, "I'm beating my cows [a reference to the bride price]." From the North, where I come from, they're going to say it's a sign of love. Apparently - this is what I've heard - the women say if your husband doesn't beat you it means he's seeing another woman. So, everything you do is okay with him because he's seeing some woman out there. While, on the other hand, if he beats you up maybe he's noticed that you've annoyed him or you've done something to the children that he doesn't like. So, he has interest in your life and in what you're doing, so he beats you as a sign of love. Other men beat women because, I mean, he's the boss in the home. That's what he knows. He's the head of the family, he has a right to discipline. Then, for some, their excuse is the Bible. A woman should be submissive to her husband, so if she's not being submissive, how do you get her to listen? Hit her. (Mifumi Project 21:12-22:19)

All of these reasons could be considered cultural justifications and, therefore, forms of cultural violence.

Lastly, symbolic violence is the "naturalization, including internalization, of social asymmetries" (Holmes 156-157). This naturalization and acceptance of power and privilege inequalities between men and women only perpetuates the inequalities further. The French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, wrote:

> Both men and women perceive themselves and the other as part of a world "naturally" made up of such dichotomous schemata as "high/low, male/female, white/black, etc." Thus, social actors have no other option than to perceive themselves and their world through schemata produced by asymmetric power

> relations. The asymmetries comprising the social world are thus made invisible, taken for granted, normal for all involved. (qtd in Holmes 157)

Through symbolic violence, cultural beliefs about the abilities and roles of men and women come to be perceived as natural and therefore unnecessary to change. Men and women also internalize these asymmetries, believing that they do in fact fit the socially prescribed role that is assigned to them. This naturalization and internalization results in women who believe they truly are inferior and that they cannot be autonomous and independent. It also results in men who believe they are superior and that it is their natural privilege and responsibility to control and discipline women. Not only do structural, cultural, and symbolic violence perpetuate domestic violence and conflict between men and women, but it also limits both groups from realizing their full potential.

**Gender Roles and Expectations**

A major aspect of Ugandan culture is comprised of the roles held by men and women within society. These gender roles and the accompanying expectations for behavior dictate how men and women interact and participate in their families, social institutions, and the economy. To Western eyes – especially Western feminists – these gender roles appear to be steeped in patriarchal power imbalances and male dominance. It is important for Western community development practitioners and activists to understand the cultural norms surrounding gender roles, but it also important to recognize their history. It is beyond the scope of my research or this thesis to explore the connections between Ugandan gender roles and the country's colonial legacy, but I do believe there is a connection (Leach; Megahed and Lack). There is also the centuries-long history and culture of various tribes to consider. Gender roles are a significant part of Ugandan life and culture. It is important to recognize that gender roles in Uganda did not

develop in the same way as they did in other contexts, such as the West. Therefore, they cannot be viewed as analogous to Western gender roles nor compared to them.

It is important to note that in my research as well as the research of others, it is clear that women suffer – or, at the very least, are prevented from flourishing – under such strict gender roles and expectations for behavior. I do believe that these gender roles will need to expand and change before any significant economic or social development can take place. Yet, such change takes time and is usually best initiated from the inside out. Any Western community development practitioner or women's rights activist would do well to tread lightly when it comes to shifting the perspective on gender roles in Uganda. In order to be most effective, Western practitioners and activists should work closely with Ugandan men and women and allow them to take the lead on such initiatives. Efforts towards social and cultural change will also be more effective when they come from a place of respect and understanding, instead of anger and blame.

*Domestic Virtue*

In their book *Women, Work and Domestic Virtue in Uganda*, Grace Bantebya Kyomuhendo and Marjorie Keniston McIntosh explore women's experiences through critical periods in Ugandan history from 1900 to 2003. What Kyomuhendo and McIntosh call a "model of Domestic Virtue" is a set of expectations for women and their prescribed role in society (2). During this period in Ugandan history, these gender roles and expectations were "based on shared African and British concerns, with roles for women clearly distinguished from those for men" (Kyomuhendo and McIntosh 2). These roles dictated how both men and women were expected to behave and defined their participation within the family:

> Women were valued for their contributions within the family, perceived and applauded as wives and mothers who produced food and cared for their

> households. Husbands had authority over their wives, and women were expected to be submissive and deferential to all men. Excluded from decision-making and control over resources, women were not supposed to work outside the home. (Kyomuhendo and McIntosh 2)

These same gender roles and expectations continue today, especially in rural settings. The participants in my research mentioned these roles frequently, corroborating the model of Domestic Virtue. They explained that as the head of the household, a man is expected to protect and provide for his family, handle the family's finances, and make decisions for the family. Women, on the other hand, are expected to carry out all domestic duties, such as cooking, cleaning, caring for children, and being obedient to male family members (Anyango; Namuge). During a focus group discussion, I asked participants what words they would use to describe a "good" woman. Their responses included the words, "disciplined," "patient," "hard-working," "faithful," and "respectful" (Nabwire; Nangobi; Nafocho; S. Auma; Nafula).

Hillary Wafula explained that a common saying among the Samia is "it is the man who builds and the wife who cares," meaning that men build, provide, and protect the house and the family while the women care for the house and family by cooking and cleaning. Much like other patriarchal cultures, men are expected to never show weakness or emotional vulnerability (H. Wafula), while women are expected to be humble and obedient, withhold their thoughts and opinions, and respect their male family members - especially their husbands and their husband's family (Anyango; Namuge). Another common belief is that women "should behave like a servant to the husband" (H. Wafula). Women who resist these traditional cultural expectations and gender roles are seen as disrespectful, irresponsible, and "big-headed" (J. Auma). Domestic

violence is commonly caused by fighting when a man feels disrespected by his wife or when she otherwise disobeys or disregards cultural expectations and gender roles (H. Wafula).

Based on my research, it appears that these cultural expectations for men and women and their prescribed gender roles are intended to create stability within the family. Men and women are meant to work as a team in order to ensure that their family and property is taken care of and maintained. However, these norms and roles insidiously shift the power structures from equal partners serving distinct yet important roles to male superiority and female subordination. This not only stifles women's autonomy and potential, but it also creates conflict, violence, and impeded development. During a focus group discussion, I asked participants how they felt when faced with these roles and expectations. Ajambo Topista said, "I feel no peace. No happiness." Several women said they felt "tired," and "stressed" (S. Auma; Nabwire; Nerima; Ounbo). Jane Nafocho, who appeared to be the oldest in the group, said "I have ten children. I am always sad. My husband is just there [not doing anything]."

It is unclear why gender roles that are so harmful to both men and women persist. Honorary Dr. Miria Matembe, a former cabinet minister and co-drafter of the 1995 Ugandan Constitution shared her perspective on the issue:

> Both men and women do not know who a woman is, and that is the reason why they treat her as a secondary class citizen or as rubbish or something like that. Because they do not know that women are full human beings in their own right. Society does not know the potential, the talents, the wisdom of women and it does not know that the denial of the ability to realize their potential is a denial of Uganda's development. (Mifumi Project 31:56-32:29)

Clearly, any development efforts or attempts to end violence against women must address the inequalities between men and women. They must also seek to establish alternative definitions of male and female roles within the family and society.

In their research on women's roles in the development of Uganda, Florence Wakoko and Linda Lobao argued a similar point:

> Women's vulnerability is related to their structurally subordinate position in the workplace, the household, and the broader society. Analysts argue compellingly that this structurally subordinate position limits their access to resources, presents barriers to change, and devalues women's real struggles by obscuring them as agents of change. (310)

Without broadening the scope of gender roles and expectations, women will continue to be discouraged from participating in economic activity. This not only stifles economic growth, but also limits women's autonomy and potential.

## Theories of Domestic Violence Causes

Theories of the causes of domestic violence and their prescribed interventions have taken many forms over the years. In Africa and around the world, various approaches have attempted to end violence against women, though many of them have failed to fully explore the underlying causes. Most theories of domestic violence causation center around single-factor explanations. Examples of such explanations include feminist theories that point to gender inequality as the single contributing factor to domestic violence or cultural theories that blame traditional beliefs for violence against women.

A review of the literature on domestic violence in Africa quickly reveals limitations in these single-factor descriptions. These theories, based on human rights and feminist perspectives,

cultural analyses, and explanations related to recent shifts in economic and social structures are often seen as mutually exclusive. While many of these theories raise valid arguments and may in fact contribute to interpersonal conflict and domestic violence, much of the literature on domestic violence in Africa rarely adopts a comprehensive perspective. Consequently, such literature recommends specific intervention approaches based solely on a single cause. Such interventions are insufficient and ineffective when implemented on their own. These narrow approaches "do not address the complexities of individuals' social positions, generally and specifically, in relation to domestic violence" (Bagshaw et al. 20). They also overlook many of the nuances and individual variations behind perpetration and victimization, as well as the intersectionality of causative factors.

In her article "Theories of Domestic Violence in the African Context," legal scholar Cynthia Grant Bowman explores theories such as rights theories, feminist theories, cultural explanations, "society-in-transition" explanations, and "culture of violence" explanations (849-850). In African domestic violence literature, Bowman points out that "explanations explicitly based upon economics are relatively rare, as are theories that ground the phenomenon in individual psychology or family dysfunction, although these are common in the United States literature" ("Theories of Domestic Violence" 850). As Bowman describes each theory of domestic violence in Africa and its prescribed interventions, she points out that these interventions are insufficient to solve the problem of domestic violence when implemented alone. She writes, "To eliminate, or even just substantially diminish domestic violence there will require, as in the United States, an effort on many fronts, including piecemeal legal reform as well as major social reconstruction and the investment of resources on the part of society to provide safety for women" ("Theories of Domestic Violence" 863). As Bowman suggests, a

more comprehensive approach is needed to understand domestic violence causation and the factors that lead to victimization and perpetration. A comprehensive approach is also necessary to develop appropriate and effective solutions to such a complex problem.

Below I will explore more in-depth some of the theories of domestic violence causation and the types of interventions that stem from those theories. I will focus specifically on human rights theories, cultural theories, and feminist theories. I will also explore the lack of literature on the connection between domestic violence and poverty. I will discuss the current approaches to domestic violence intervention in Africa which are based on the three main categories of causation theory. Finally, I will argue the importance of a comprehensive and intersectional perspective on domestic violence.

**Rights Theory**

According to organizations such as UN Women, a division of the United Nations that focuses on the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment, "violence against women and girls is a grave violation of human rights" ("Ending violence against women"). The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 (United Nations Human Rights). The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, was written and adopted in 1993 (United Nations General Assembly). These agreements recognize violence against women as human rights violations and state that "Women are entitled to the equal enjoyment and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field" (United Nations General Assembly 3). These agreements hold states responsible for eliminating all types of violence against women and ensuring that women are afforded equal human rights, as defined by the United Nations General Assembly (3-4). Despite these

agreements and the rights afforded by them, “Not enough is done to prevent violence, and when it does occur, it often goes unpunished” (“Ending violence against women”).

Domestic violence in any form (i.e. physical, sexual, psychological, economic, etc.) is clearly considered a violation of a woman’s human rights. The work of human rights organizations has brought about tremendous legal reform. Despite this progress, remedies to domestic violence based solely on a human rights perspective do not address the needs for intervention and support at the local, community, or individual level. Legal reform is important and due to pressure from the international community and agreements such as CEDAW and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, many countries now have laws against various forms of gender-based violence, including domestic violence.

Nevertheless, this top-down approach to addressing violence against women leaves gaps in the multi-level process of eliminating a complex issue like domestic violence. While many countries have laws against gender-based violence, they are often not enforced. There are also issues of contextualization in certain cultures where individual rights and autonomy are not valued in the same way as in Western cultures. Bowman argues for the cultural contextualization of domestic violence interventions in Africa, explaining:

> Traditional African societies typically are not based upon the individualism that underlies much of our social thought. In particular, the family and its interests are considered prior to the individual, and a woman’s status is a derivative one… In a context where the notion of personal autonomy is not common, especially for women, claims articulated in terms of individual rights and equality may indeed sound foreign. They also are unlikely to attract the widespread support necessary to effect social change. (“Theories of Domestic Violence” 851)

Human rights organizations have made significant contributions to the fight against domestic violence and other types of gender-based violence. Still, there is a need for more local, individualized interventions that take into consideration cultural beliefs, traditions, and individual factors of victimization or perpetration. While women's rights conventions are important, they are insufficient to solve the problem of violence against women on their own.

**Feminist Theory**

Feminist theory forms the foundation for most domestic violence interventions today. According to feminist theory, domestic violence is a symptom of gender inequality, patriarchy, and gender roles. Perpetration of domestic violence is seen as an attempt to reinforce patriarchal power structures and gender roles. This understanding of domestic violence and the subsequent interventions to address gender inequality and violence against women began during the second wave feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s. During this period,

> Rather than blaming survivors for the abuse, advocates sought to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. This form of abuse was viewed as a product of a patriarchal culture that allowed and even celebrated the domination of women by men. The violence experienced by women at the hands of their partners was viewed as part of a culturally sanctified effort by men to control women. (Wood 20)

This perspective of violence against women, particularly domestic violence or intimate partner violence, still dominates the discourse today. Most of the literature on domestic violence around the world - but particularly in Africa - points to gender inequality and male domination as the causes of domestic violence.

While gender inequality certainly contributes to interpersonal conflicts between men and women and may lead to domestic violence under certain circumstances, relying on feminist theory as the sole explanation or cause of domestic violence ignores many other contributing factors and may, in fact, result in unintended outcomes. Domestic violence interventions based on the theories of second wave feminism seek methods of punishment for perpetrators rather than rehabilitation. While there are certainly problems that arise from gender inequality and masculine dominance that lead to domestic violence, this angry, retribution-seeking approach is ineffective and incomplete. Feminist domestic violence interventions focusing entirely on retributive justice may only further hostilities and perpetuate the cycle of violence.

Feminist theory also fails to address several key questions about victimization and perpetration. In their research on domestic violence in Australia, Bagshaw et al. found that "patriarchy does not explain why some men are violent to their partners and others are not, nor does it explain female aggression to male and female partners" (20). This criticism holds true in other cultural contexts as well. Another problem with feminist theory and its perspective on domestic violence is the "assumption that male supremacy underlies all forms of victimization; this assumption fails to account for racism, the impacts of colonization and other covert mechanisms that regulate the lives of colored women and men" (Evans 37). Victims of domestic violence become victims due to various and complex factors, much like how perpetrators of domestic violence become perpetrators. Feminist theory fails to address the factors that lead to victimization and perpetration outside of gender inequality.

Feminist theory and the idea that domestic violence is caused by gender equality dominates so much of the domestic violence literature, programming, and intervention strategies that other causal theories are often overlooked or declared as false. In her argument of the need

for an intersectional perspective of domestic violence, Susan Evans explained, “The ‘truths’ about domestic violence, produced and reproduced in policy and practices of the government and non-government sectors, are informed by an agenda that privileges gender inequality, and more specifically male supremacy, as the cause of domestic violence” (37). Other causal theories and explanations are simply seen as irrelevant or entirely false. Because of this, the majority of domestic violence programs and interventions in Africa are aimed at achieving gender equality through legal reform, creating employment opportunities for women, educating women and girls, and enforcing punishments for perpetrators.

The problem with this dominant perspective of causation is that it limits the types of interventions that organizations employ to address the problem of domestic violence. These limited interventions can actually cause more harm than good, depending on the social, political, and cultural context in which they are implemented. For example, an organization that adopts a feminist perspective of domestic violence and views violence against women as stemming from gender inequality may implement programs to help women gain employment and earn an income independent from their partner. Without concurrent educational initiatives for men about why it is beneficial for everyone for their wives to work, this may lead to further violence. Feminist theory also supports the idea of a woman leaving the abusive relationship, which may go against cultural norms and traditions in particular contexts and could lead to the woman becoming marginalized or disowned by her family. Rather than following a single theory of causation that offers a limited understanding of the problem, domestic violence interventions should be based on a comprehensive and intersectional perspective that considers various factors of victimization and perpetration and offers solutions based on individual needs and cultural preferences.

Unfortunately, the current agenda of Western feminist activists involved in women's rights in Africa appears to be related more to conversion than transformation. Determined to overturn the patriarchy, some Western feminists tout their own brand of Western feminist ideals as the only way forward for oppressed women around the world. They focus on individualistic, male-blaming types of female liberation. Instead of seeking solutions that liberate men and women together, or approaches that consider the specifics of cultural and historical context, they blindly plow forward demanding that all women must follow their lead or remain oppressed. Andrea Cornwall and Althea-Maria Rivas critique this type of approach, explaining that it is "unlikely to deliver the kind of transformation that would create the more just, more equal, and happier world that we would all like to see" (410). They go on to explain that instead of "seeking to convert people through gender training or gender analysis, working with the interests that we have in common provides a far stronger basis for successful alliance building" (Cornwall and Rivas 410). In a Ugandan context, these shared interests could be goals such as poverty alleviation and economic development. By focusing on how domestic violence and gender inequality detract from these goals, activists can shift the focus from individualistic, male-blaming agendas to contextualized, respectful, and transformative approaches.

**Cultural Theories**

Much of the literature on domestic violence in Africa contains causal theories centered around cultural traditions and practices. These cultural explanations can be direct, such as arguments that physical violence against women is accepted or even encouraged in traditional African cultures, or indirect such as arguments that emphasize the "uneven distribution of power within traditional African marriages, the impact of polygamy, the acceptance of male promiscuity, the power of the extended family over the married couple" and other assertions that

traditional or contemporary African cultural values condone violence against women (Bowman, "Theories of Domestic Violence" 853). Causative theories of domestic violence in Africa that are based on cultural explanations offer a limited and often ethnocentric perspective on the issue. Cultural change over time, varying interpretations of tradition, and differences among subgroups such as tribes, religious groups, and urban versus rural groups make generalized cultural explanations irrelevant and unhelpful in addressing domestic violence.

Some theorists believe there is a "culture of violence" in modern Africa, arguing that in African cultures, violence is seen as an acceptable way to handle conflict (Bowman "Theories of Domestic Violence" 857). These theorists point to civil wars, disputes between religious and tribal groups, high rates of rape, and other instances of violence across Africa to argue that violence must be an acceptable practice in Africa and that African cultures actually condone violence (Moore 778; Bowman "Theories of Domestic Violence" 857). Some theorists acknowledge that this "culture of violence" could stem from colonial legacies and see it as an inevitable result of the violence inflicted upon Africans by colonialists. Other theorists ignore colonial legacies entirely (Bowman "Theories of Domestic Violence" 857). This causal theory of domestic violence being a symptom of a larger "culture of violence" is problematic for several reasons. First, it is a generalization of the beliefs and practices of hundreds of African cultures and subcultures. This theory also infers a stance of ethnocentrism and racism, painting a picture of Africans and African cultures as barbaric and unable to handle disputes without the use of violence. This theory calls for interventions centered around greater law enforcement and stricter punishments for perpetrators. Regardless of its ethnocentric and racist inferences, domestic violence interventions based on this theory offer little hope for reconciliation, transformation, or positive future change.

**Domestic Violence and Poverty**

According to the World Health Organization's 2002 World Report on Violence and Health, "people with the lowest socioeconomic status are at greatest risk" of experiencing violence (244). Much of the literature on domestic violence in Africa ignores the link between poverty and violence. Factors related to poverty, such as lack of education and unemployment, greatly contribute to the risk of both victimization and perpetration of domestic violence (World Health Organization 244). Mental and emotional trauma are also common among individuals living in poverty. Social stigmas associated with men who cannot provide for their families can have extremely damaging effects psychologically on men and can cause women to hold unreasonable expectations for their husbands. Some social scientists have proposed that "men living in poverty [are] unable to live up to their ideas of 'successful' manhood and that, in the resulting climate of stress, they [will] hit women" (Jewkes 1424).

Susan Evans calls mental and emotional trauma stemming from poverty, such as feelings of shame and stigmatization the "hidden injuries of class" (38). Evans argues that these factors should also be considered when examining the link between poverty and domestic violence (38). For those living in poverty, class stigmatization can lead to feelings of shame, guilt, inadequacy, and disconnection. Coupled with a lack of material resources, this can often lead to tensions between family members and result in outbursts of rage and violence. In his work on domestic violence and poverty, violence expert James Gilligan suggests:

> People who are relatively poor in a society are not essentially more violent but are more likely to be disrespected and treated as less than human and the feelings (shame and worthlessness) evoked from such treatment make violence more of an option for these people. (qtd. in Evans 40)

In my own research, all of the participants agreed that poverty is the greatest contributing factor to domestic violence in their communities. In an interview, Anyango Flavia said:

> [Poverty] contributes a lot [to domestic violence] because you have your children, you have the needs and you have no money so you end up fighting every time, quarreling every time... Maybe we don't have soap, he [the husband] says "I don't have money. I already spent everything. I don't have money," and you begin quarreling, even fighting.

Many of my participants explained that such cultural expectations for men and women lead to tensions in situations of poverty. It is important for domestic violence interventions to take into consideration these mental and emotional effects of poverty and how they might contribute to victimization and perpetration.

Thach Duc Tran et al. conducted a survey of men and women in 39 low- and middle-income countries to better understand their attitudes towards intimate partner violence (IPV). They found that "living in a rural area, a household in the poorest quintile, being aged under 25 years, having limited education, or ever having been partnered were all associated with higher likelihood of attitudes accepting of IPV against women" (4-5). Clearly, the acceptance of intimate partner violence is associated with poverty and factors of poverty. Interestingly, the authors recommend educational programs to change these attitudes towards IPV, yet they do not mention incorporating poverty reduction programs into the same effort (Tran et al. 11-12).

Understanding poverty and how it contributes to domestic violence victimization and perpetration should be a priority for those interested in ending violence against women. Unfortunately, other causal theories, particularly feminist theory and gender inequality have dominated the discourse and limited the scope of domestic violence interventions. More research

is needed on the connection between poverty and domestic violence victimization and perpetration. Poverty reduction efforts are also needed to help prevent these factors that lead to violence against women.

## Current Approaches to Domestic Violence

Currently, domestic violence in Africa is typically addressed with approaches based on feminist theories of causation and a top-down approach based on a rights perspective. These include efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as legal reform, educational initiatives, economic development, and improved health services for victims. Some organizations have also established shelters for victims of domestic violence (Bowman, "Domestic Violence" 485). While these are effective intervention strategies, they are rarely implemented in concert with other remedies and typically only focus on addressing one aspect of causation. This leads to an incomplete perspective on domestic violence causation, insufficient programs and support for survivors, and efforts that are ultimately ineffective.

A major problem with the current approaches to domestic violence in Africa is that interventions and programs for survivors and perpetrators are often copied from or based on Western approaches to domestic violence. Many interventions lack the necessary cultural contextualization to generate enough local support to create lasting social change. In her article "Domestic Violence: Does the African Context Demand a Different Approach?" Cynthia Grant Bowman argues that "the remedies that are both possible and likely to be effective in a particular setting must be sensitive to the context in which the violence occurs" (473). This means that programs and interventions must take into consideration the social, political, economic, and cultural context in which they will be implemented and must recognize all of the causal factors from each of these domains. Clearly, "a diversity of remedies and approaches is necessary to

address the problem of domestic violence" (Bowman, "Domestic Violence" 491). In his book *Walking with the Poor,* Bryant Myers shares this sentiment:

> Holistic practitioners need to develop a deep understanding of the complexity of poverty and its many dimensions and expressions. They need to be able to use the lessons of the social sciences... to understand the causes of poverty – material, spiritual, psychological, cultural, and sociopolitical. They need to be able to develop sophisticated understandings of the local social-political-economic-religious context and how this context works for and against the well-being of the poor. (224)

Practitioners must understand the complexities and nuances of the contexts in which they work. Unfortunately, not enough organizations utilize the wisdom of local community members. Part of developing a deeper contextual understanding is learning from individuals who know the local community and people well. Weakness in current approaches stems from a lack of input and support from local community members.

Another major weakness of the current approaches to domestic violence intervention in Africa is related to how NGOs (non-government organizations) and CBOs (community-based organizations) are structured and how they operate. Unfortunately, "the need for rapid, quantifiable results, encourages project managers to focus on certain forms of projects with tangible outcomes, rather than addressing deep-rooted inequalities which cannot easily be measured" (Willis 118). Organizations that rely on donors and that are led by board members who wish to see rapid and dramatic results are often limited in their potential scope of impact. The truth is that there are aspects of domestic violence causation, victimization, and perpetration that are not quantifiable and do not lend themselves to quick fixes and impressive results. In

order to end violence against women, we must take a more comprehensive, intersectional, long-term, qualitative approach. In terms of true transformation, relying solely on the numbers will not work.

Based on my research and the experiences of my participants, it is clear that domestic violence in rural Uganda can stem from a variety of cultural, political, social, and economic causes. In order to address these issues, I believe the focus of interventions should be two-fold. The first priority must be to provide immediate assistance to women who are victims of domestic violence in order for them to escape unsafe situations and get the medical and psychological treatment that they need. At the same time, community development practitioners must aim to understand the underlying causes of the conflicts that lead to domestic violence and seek to create alternative relationship structures and patterns of engagement.

## A Comprehensive and Intersectional Perspective of Domestic Violence

Both victimization and perpetration of domestic violence can stem from a myriad of social, political, economic, and cultural sources. In order to be effective, interventions must consider and seek to address each of these contributing factors and dimensions concurrently. One way of doing this is by adopting an intersectional perspective of domestic violence. According to Michele Bograd, "intersectionality suggests that no dimension, such as gender inequality, is privileged as an explanatory construct of domestic violence, and gender inequality itself is modified by its intersection with other systems of power and oppression" (227). An intersectional perspective of domestic violence recognizes that violence can be caused by many different factors, these factors are not mutually exclusive, and these factors vary between individuals and cultures. Michael Kaufman eloquently expresses this idea:

> The act of violence is many things at once. At the same instant it is the individual man acting out relations of sexual power; it is the violence of a society – a hierarchical, authoritarian, sexist, class divided, militarist, racist, impersonal crazy society – being focused through the individual man onto an individual woman. (qtd. in Bagshaw et al. 47)

In order to effectively understand domestic violence causation, activists and advocates must adopt an intersectional perspective of the social, political, economic, and cultural factors that contribute to domestic violence.

An intersectional and comprehensive understanding of domestic violence can better address the individual needs of both survivors and perpetrators. Though it may be daunting to analyze domestic violence situations with a comprehensive and intersectional perspective, it is essential in order to provide the most effective and most culturally appropriate support. Susan Evans explains, "We must always consider the multiple and competing components of a person's social identity (including class, gender, race, dis/ability, age, religious affiliation, sexual orientation) to better understand their experience" (37).

Causal theories such as rights theory, feminist theory, and cultural theories limit our understanding of a survivor's or perpetrator's experience to their violation of rights, their experience of gender inequality, or their acceptance of cultural traditions. These causal theories, when used in isolation to analyze a domestic violence situation, offer a limited perspective of the victims' or perpetrators' experience. Conversely, a comprehensive, intersectional perspective allows advocates to better understand all of the contributing factors in the situation, all of the social identities at play, and all of the influences of social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions. A comprehensive, intersectional perspective also allows practitioners to customize

interventions to the needs of the individual, “rather than assuming their universal applicability” (Bograd 283).

**Ecological Model of Domestic Violence**

In her 1998 article, “Violence Against Women: An Integrated, Ecological Framework,” Lori L. Heise argues that violence against women is a “multifaceted phenomenon grounded in an interplay among personal, situational, and sociocultural factors” (263-264). Building on the work of Jay Belsky on the etiology of child abuse, Heise applies Belsky’s four levels of analysis to violence against women in order to develop a framework of causation. These four ecological levels, as seen in Figure 1, include personal history (ontogenic), microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Heise 264).

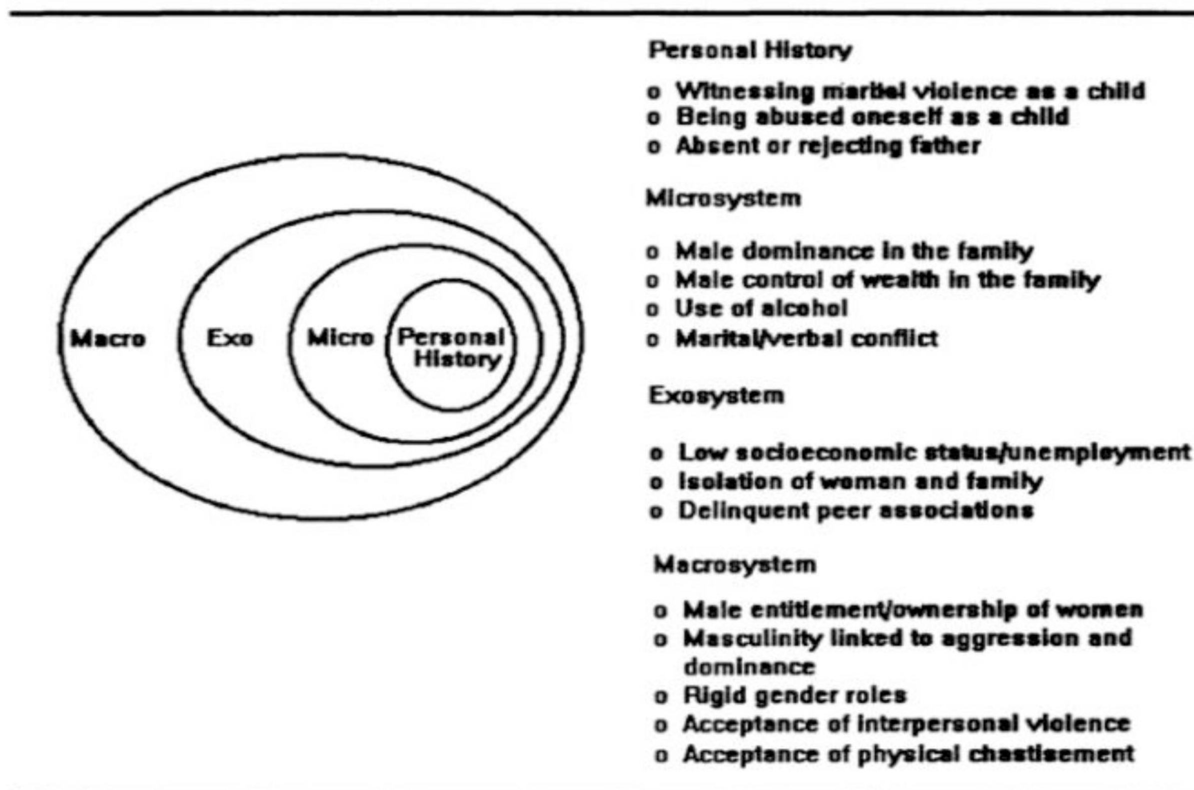


Figure 1: Ecological systems of violence against women (Heise 265)

Personal histories include individual factors of perpetration or victimization such as psychopathologies or trauma. Microsystem factors emerge from “the immediate context in which the abuse takes place – frequently the family or other intimate or acquaintance relationship” (Heise 264). The exosystem includes the economic and social institutions within the context such as “work, neighborhood, social networks, and identity groups” (Heise 264). Macrosystem factors involve the culture or society at large. Factors stemming from one or several of these ecological levels may contribute to or cause the perpetration of violence against women.

Many of these factors emerged within my own research, particularly factors within the micro-, exo- and macrosystems for both the perpetration and victimization of domestic violence against women. One limitation of my research is that I was unable to interview any male perpetrators and, in fact, I interviewed only a few men at all due to time constraints and the fact that few men were willing to talk to me. Therefore, my research cannot corroborate Heise’s ontogenic or personal history factors of perpetration. The factors that particularly stood out in my research, though, include male dominance and control of the wealth within the family (microsystem), marital/verbal conflict (microsystem), low socioeconomic status/unemployment (exosystem), and rigid gender roles (macrosystem).

Interestingly, masculinity as aggression and dominance did not emerge in my research as a macrosystem factor of domestic violence perpetration. Heise explains that “not all cultures define manhood in terms of dominance and aggression; some focus on being a good father and provider or have no strong notions of manhood at all” (277-278). This is certainly true of Ugandan culture. Despite having clearly defined gender roles and concepts of masculine behavior, aggression, dominance, and violence did not emerge in my research as important aspects of masculine identity in Ugandan culture. Instead, male roles as providers, protectors,

and leaders are more strongly valued. It is easy to assume, especially from a Western understanding of masculinity in which aggression and dominance are prevalent, that cultures that value male dominance in the family also value masculine identities of aggression and violence. This could not be farther from the truth and it serves to emphasize the importance for activists – especially Western activists – to adopt an ecological or integrated understanding of violence causation in order to avoid such assumptions.

This framework brings up several important considerations for practitioners when they are designing and implementing domestic violence intervention and prevention programs. As previously mentioned, single-factor explanations for domestic violence causation are extremely limited and the interventions that stem from them are often ineffective. Adopting an ecological, multidimensional understanding of domestic violence causation allows practitioners to dissect the extremely complex realities of domestic violence perpetration and victimization. Heise presents an example scenario of how these multidimensional factors can intersect and lead to violence in Western culture:

> Consider the case of a man who was abused as a child (ontogentic) and has a strong need to feel in control (ontogentic); who exists in a culture in which maleness is defined by one's ability to respond aggressively to conflict (macrosystem), and where "good" women are supposed to be submissive (macrosystem). Suddenly, he loses his job (exosystem) and his wife, who has become more empowered after participating in a community group, decides to get a job; this leads to power struggles, conflict, and violence in the relationship (microsystem). It could be that this man would not have become violent if he had not lost his job and been threatened by his wife's growing autonomy.

> Alternatively, given sufficiently strong ontogenic and macrosystem factors, perhaps the man would have been violent even without the additional exosystem stressors. (Heise 285)

While this example is based on a Western cultural context, it highlights how shifting personal, microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystem factors can influence relationship dynamics and thereby change the exact causation of violence. If practitioners were to design programs that aimed at preventing or changing only one of these factors, they could be entirely ineffective or even make matters worse.

For example, notice how in Heise's scenario the violence could have stemmed from the exosystem factor of the wife becoming empowered through a community group and deciding to get a job. Many NGOs and women's rights organizations focus attention on these types of programs. However, in this scenario, it caused a chain reaction that led to microsystem factors of violence such as "power struggles, conflict, and violence in the relationship" (Heise 285). Without properly addressing the causes of violence against women at various levels of the ecological system, practitioners may inadvertently create new problems that lead to further violence.

## A Transformational Approach to Domestic Violence

A transformational approach moves beyond mere problem solving and instead focuses on how to build a new reality. A transformational approach is particularly important in addressing domestic violence because it is such a complex issue. As Lori Heise showed with her ecological model, domestic violence can stem from factors on various levels. A transformational approach focuses on creating change on every level - from the individual, to the community, and to the society and culture at large. As I have argued, it is important to understand the ecological and

structural systems that contribute to domestic violence causation. I now argue that it is equally important to devise intervention and prevention strategies that also take these various levels into consideration. It is not enough to address the presenting problems of domestic violence alone. A transformational approach considers the presenting problems, but also examines and addresses the underlying causes as well. This comprehensive perspective is critical when dealing with a complex problem like domestic violence.

For domestic violence in rural Uganda, a transformational approach is not only more effective at addressing the immediate, presenting problem, but it also seeks to create positive social change by addressing the underlying causes of the conflict and constructively envisions alternative relational systems. Whatever the cause of domestic violence, such conflict prevents social and economic development. It also prevents both men and women from living healthy, harmonious lives and from realizing their full potential. A transformational approach seeks to change that.

**Conflict Resolution vs. Conflict Transformation**

To develop a transformational approach to domestic violence, I propose that practitioners should base their programs on a conflict transformation framework. Conflict transformation differs from conflict resolution in many ways. International peacebuilder, John Paul Lederach explains that the aim of conflict resolution is to address the immediate problems that conflict creates. Lederach goes on to explain that "resolution is content-centered" meaning that it focuses on what the conflict is about or how it manifests into a presenting problem (*Conflict Transformation* 29). Conflict transformation, on the other hand, "includes concern for content, but centers its attention on the *context* of relational patterns. It sees conflict as embedded in a web and system of relational patterns" (Lederach, *Conflict Transformation* 30, original

emphasis). Transformation seeks to understand what the conflict is about and how it manifests in the presenting problems *as well as* the underlying causes that started the conflict in the first place.

Lederach defines conflict transformation as "envision[ing] and respond[ing] to the ebb and flow of social conflicts as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships" (*Conflict Transformation* 14). This definition includes two important points about conflict transformation and how it differs from conflict resolution. First, as previously stated, conflict transformation focuses on the content as well as the context of the conflict. This leads to a more well-rounded approach to handling the conflict as well as the problems it creates. Conflict resolution has a limited perspective on solutions because of its limited focus on content. Lederach explains:

> The impulse to *resolve* leads toward providing short-term relief to pain and anxiety by negotiating answers to presenting problems. Those answers may or may not deal with the deeper context and patterns of relationships which caused the problems. (*Conflict Transformation* 31)

While conflict resolution may alleviate some of the pain caused by the conflict, it does not get to the core of what is really causing the conflict in the first place. Secondly, conflict transformation "envisions the presenting problem as an opportunity to engage a broader context, to explore and understand the system of relationships and patterns that gave birth to the crisis" (*Conflict Transformation* 30). A transformative approach to conflict optimistically views the conflict as an opportunity. If handled correctly, it is an opportunity that can lead to positive changes that will benefit everyone involved.

Seeing conflict as an opportunity for transformation allows us to identify destructive patterns, injustices, broken relationships, and other problems that are hiding underneath the surface of conflict. Rather than using conflict resolution to answer the question "How do we end something we do not desire?" conflict transformation allows us to ask "How can do we end something not desired and build something we do desire?" (Lederach *Conflict Transformation* 29-30). When applied to a problem such as domestic violence, conflict transformation seeks to understand not only how we can end domestic violence, but also how we can build healthy relationships between men and women within society.

A transformative approach to conflict allows practitioners to see multiple layers of the conflict. These layers help us to see different aspects of the conflict and better understand how to address its presenting problems and its root causes. In situations of conflict, Lederach writes, we have a "tendency to view conflict by focusing on the immediate 'presenting problems.' We give our energy to reducing anxieties and pain by looking for a solution to the presenting problem without seeing the bigger map of the conflict itself" (*Conflict Transformation* 8). Rather than restricting ourselves by examining conflict through a single lens, we must seek to understand conflict by viewing it through multiple lenses and we must create interventions based on multiple perspectives. We must also remember that the point of a transformative approach is to "conceptualize multiple change processes that address solutions for immediate problems and *at the same time* processes that create a platform for longer-term change of relational and structural patterns" (Lederach *Conflict Transformation* 38, original emphasis).

When applying the framework to the conflicts between men and women that lead to domestic violence in Uganda, we must first examine the conflict through the "episode" lens. According to Lederach, a conflict episode is "the visible expression of conflict rising within the

relationship or system, usually within a distinct time frame" (*Conflict Transformation* 31). In the case of domestic violence, an episode of the conflict would be an individual incidence of violence. The moment a man lashes out in physical, psychological, or sexual violence against his wife or female family member is an episode of conflict. When a woman is frustrated by her inferior social position and lack of power and autonomy and she discharges her emotions through violent outbursts, infidelity, or shouting at her husband or children, this could also be considered an episode of the conflict. In a relationship there may be a single conflict episode or there may be hundreds. Regardless of the number of episodes or the form that they take, they are indicative of deeper, more complex issues and a broader conflict. When seeking to understand these episodes of conflict, it is important to remember that "immediate issues are rooted in a context - in patterns of relationships and structures, all with a history" (Lederach *Conflict Transformation* 34).

These patterns make up the conflict "epicenter," which Lederach defines as "the web of relational patterns, often providing a history of lived episodes from which new episodes and issues emerge" (*Conflict Transformation* 31). In conflicts that lead to domestic violence, the epicenter is made up of the gender roles, power dynamics, economic pressures, and emotional stressors that dictate how men and women interact. Episodes of conflict can be traced back to the epicenter and the epicenter produces the conditions from which each episode stems. Resolving individual episodes of conflict may be easier and less time consuming. But, in order to create positive, transformative change, it is essential to dig deeper into the patterns in which each episode is embedded in order to understand the relationships and systems that make up the epicenter of conflict. We must remember that "a transformational approach seeks to understand the particular episode of conflict not in isolation, but as embedded in the greater pattern" or the

epicenter (Lederach *Conflict Transformation* 16). As previously discussed, conflict transformation also views conflict as a vehicle for positive, transformative change. Episodes of conflict lead us to examine the epicenter of conflict and identify which relational patterns and systems must change. For peacemakers, community development workers, social justice advocates, and others working to reduce domestic violence in Uganda and other countries, it is easy to focus on individual episodes of conflict and seek to alleviate the immediate pain, suffering, and injustice that victims experience. Yet, "to encourage the positive potential inherent in conflict, we must concentrate on the less visible dimensions of relationships, rather than concentrating exclusively on the content and substance of the fighting that is often more visible" (Lederach *Conflict Transformation* 17).

**Problems as Opportunities**

A key aspect of transformational development is the ability to see problems as opportunities for future growth and change. A transformational approach "requires that we develop a capacity to see the immediate situation without being captivated, overwhelmed, or driven by the demands of presenting issues. It requires an ability to avoid the urgency that pushes for a quick solution" (Lederach *Conflict Transformation* 48). So often in community development, practitioners seek solutions that resolve problems quickly, provide clear, quantifiable evidence of positive impact, and have the potential for sustained success. A transformational approach seeks a different perspective. Instead of focusing on quick fixes and easy solutions, "we look through the issue to bring into focus the scene that lies beyond the immediate solution" (Lederach *Conflict Transformation* 49). While this type of perspective may highlight many deep-rooted and complex issues that are behind the presenting problem, it also illuminates the areas in which change is most needed.

The conflict episode points toward the epicenter from which it stems. In domestic violence, each altercation points toward deeper and more complex issues that must be resolved, such as rigid and limited gender norms, inequalities between men and women, suffering from poverty and emotional stress and trauma. There is no doubt that domestic violence is a serious problem that should be addressed. At the same time, it highlights opportunities for growth, change, transformation, and reconciliation for everyone involved. Domestic violence is not to be taken lightly, but from a transformational perspective it should not be viewed as yet another problem to be solved, but rather as an arrow pointing to the root of many problems.

**Short-Term Responses, Long-Term Solutions**

Another key component of a transformational approach is the ability to devise short-term responses and long-term solutions. When developing programs to address domestic violence, if practitioners only focus on short-term responses they will never achieve lasting impact or sustainable change. At the same time, if practitioners only focus on long-term solutions they will leave people suffering in the present. A transformation-oriented practitioner must learn to "create strategies that integrate short-term response with long-term change" (Lederach *Conflict Transformation* 50). Short-term and long-term orientation may at times seem too complex or even contradictory to be effective. But a transformational approach always asks, "How can we address 'A' and at the same time build 'B'?" (Lederach *Conflict Transformation* 52). Or in more applicable terms, "How can we address domestic violence and at the same time build gender equality, economic and social development, and peace between men and women?" Transformational development practitioners must always bear in mind how they can alleviate immediate suffering and solve presenting problems while also creating lasting change and preventing future conflicts.

## Practicing Transformational Development

By understanding the framework of conflict transformation, practitioners can develop a model of transformational development and apply it to domestic violence in rural Uganda. Unfortunately, a substantial amount of additional research is needed in order to develop and implement effective programs based on a transformational framework in a Ugandan context. For practitioners to adopt a comprehensive, ecological, intersectional, or transformational perspective of domestic violence will require a complete paradigm shift from current approaches. This is a process that takes time and requires a great deal of patience, dedication, open-mindedness, and humility on the part of the practitioners. While a transformational perspective is new and departs from the conventional methods of development, advocacy, and women's empowerment, I believe it is a necessary shift.

There are many practitioners who are working towards such a shift already in the areas of social change and economic development. There are also research methods that are inherently transformational in their approach. Such methods and practices could be used to further expand the concept of transformational practice and domestic violence intervention and prevention. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to recommend specific action steps toward developing intervention and prevention programs, the following methods and practices can be used as a starting point for practitioners who wish to practice transformational development, especially in response to domestic violence.

### Transformational Research

An important shift in the field of community development has been the transition from a needs-based approach to asset-based community development (ABCD). Traditional models of development focused on what the poor lack and sought to provide for their needs through quick-

fix problem solving and paternalistic aid programs. An asset-based approach, on the other hand, recognizes that individuals and communities have talents, resources, and social capital that can be leveraged and utilized in a way that allows the community to develop from the inside out. Transformational development begins with a mindset grounded in ABCD.

Two methods of inquiry and research that stem from an asset-based approach are asset mapping and appreciative inquiry (AI). Asset mapping involves using "individual or group-based interviews to catalogue the assets of a particular community" (Corbett and Fikkert 126). Once the asset mapped has been developed, community members and the facilitators can use the asset inventory to "determine the best way to leverage these assets to improve the community and solve problems" (Corbett and Fikkert 126). Similarly, appreciative inquiry uses a generative cycle of analysis to uncover what has been successful within an organization or group, appreciate those successes, and build upon them (Hammond 5-6).

When it comes to addressing domestic violence, shifting from a needs-based approach to an asset-based approach is essential. Short-sighted and narrow-minded methods of problem-solving will not end violence against women. Instead, practitioners must learn to recognize what works in relationships between men and women in a particular context and build upon those strengths. In order to implement asset-based and transformational approaches, practitioners must understand that:

> Successful conflict transformation should be geared towards supporting and initiating those social processes that are necessary for producing context-specific answers to these dilemmas. This implies a participatory approach and a willingness to learn on the part of those who might come from the outside in order to support local conflict transformation. (Harders 150-151)

Practitioners of transformational development must be willing to work closely with local community members to better understand what works and what does not in a given context. Their approaches must consider the local perspective in order to be successful.

In Uganda, for example, there are aspects of relationships between men and women that work. While Ugandan gender roles may seem extreme in comparison to Western culture, they are meant to create an effective partnership between men and women. The breakdown in this partnership happens because of stressors such as poverty, power inequalities and other factors. Looking at the relationships between men and women in Uganda through an appreciative lens would allow practitioners and community members to build healthier relationships and tackle problems such as poverty and domestic violence together, rather than remaining at odds. To effectively implement a transformational model to end domestic violence, practitioners must begin with an asset-based and appreciative approach.

**Reconciliation and Social Change**

Another key component of a transformational approach is not only transformation of the conflict itself, but also transformation of the people involved in the conflict. In their book *Reconciling All Things*, Katongole and Rice explain that "reconciliation begins with a transformation of the human person" (45). Without this personal and individual transformation, change of perspective, and acceptance of a new way of doing things, transformation and reconciliation will not be possible. In his book *Exclusion and Embrace*, Mirsolav Volf states that "the struggle against oppression must be guided by a vision of reconciliation between oppressed and oppressors" (109). While reconciliation is an important part of the conflict transformation model, it is important to keep in mind that reconciliation may not be desired or even possible between survivors and perpetrators. Conflict transformation practitioners must always be

conscious of and respectful towards the wishes of the people they work with. But, broader reconciliation between men and women in general and on the community level may be possible. In fact, it may even be necessary in order to effectively prevent domestic violence from continuing.

Reconciliation and social change are necessary in order to end violence against women in Uganda. However, these are slow change processes that take time and must ultimately come from within the community itself. Social entrepreneur Leilah Janah advises development practitioners that "trying to change social mores from the outside hardly ever works. Change has to come from within the community" (77). This is not to say that conflict transformation practitioners cannot facilitate these processes of change, but rather that they must do so from a place of humility and not paternalism or ethnocentrism. Below I describe several approaches to reconciliation and social change that could complement a transformational model for addressing domestic violence. I present these approaches to serve as stepping stones toward developing future programs and social change models. Additional research and evaluation is needed in order to understand exactly how these approaches could be implemented in a Ugandan context. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to develop exact parameters for such programs, but I hope that the following approaches will serve as examples of what is possible when using a transformational model.

### *Lament: Motivating Change*

According to Pruitt and Kaufer, two conflict transformation practitioners, "A methodology that aims at social change has to take the participants through the deeper levels where they become aware of and reflect on their own thinking, and where they can build commitment for social change" (56). This type of awareness could also be called lament, which

Katongole and Rice so eloquently define as "the prayer of those who are deeply disturbed by the way things are" (78). An important part of the social change and reconciliation process is to expose the truth behind domestic violence, its ugliness, and how it detrimentally affects society as a whole. By understanding how domestic violence impedes individual, community, and national development and wellbeing, community members may become more open to the idea of social change. Katongole and Rice went on to explain:

> There is in lament a desperation – even more, a demand – for something deeper, something beyond, something more. Those who are not easily consoled have entered a place of restlessness. They've opened their hands to accept a different vision. They are now ready to receive a better hope. (89)

People who experience lament over injustice and violence are ready to take the necessary steps toward change and transformation. Any attempt to apply a transformational model to domestic violence must consider how to motivate people to change their mindsets and behaviors. Additional research is needed in order to understand how to do this effectively in a Ugandan context.

### *Contact Theory: Starting A Dialogue*

Another important step in a transformational model is to start a dialogue between men and women. This dialogue must focus on the episodes of conflict and how they affect men and women, but it must also focus on the epicenter of the conflict and how it can be positively transformed. Such dialogues could be implemented on the community level through workshops. James O'Neil and Marianne Roberts Carrol conducted a workshop on gender roles in America and wrote that the workshop design "assumed that adults need to talk with each other about sexism and gender role conflicts as part of the healing process. Additionally, it was assumed that

alliances between men and women were possible and necessary for growth and understanding for each sex" (193). Such workshops are excellent examples of the types of interactions that contact theory recommends.

Brenda Salter McNeil described the effectiveness of contact theory in reconciliation and conflict transformation (33). According to Salter McNeil, contact theory states that "relationships between conflicting groups will improve if they have meaningful contact with one another over an extended period of time" (33). Jim A.C. Everett described Pettigrew's three stage model for generalization in contact theory, writing:

> First is the decategorization stage, where participants' personal (and not group) identities should be emphasized to reduce anxiety and promote interpersonal liking. Secondly, the individual's social categories should be made salient to achieve generalization of positive affect to the outgroup as a whole. Finally, there is the recategorization stage, where participants' group identities are replaced with a more superordinate group: changing group identities from "Us vs. Them" to a more inclusive "We." (Everett)

This model provides a useful outline for how to structure a dialogue among men and women about gender inequalities, gender-based conflicts, and domestic violence and could easily be adapted for a Ugandan context.

### *Cultivating Peace*

While motivating change and opening up a dialogue between men and women, it is important for transformation practitioners and participants to understand that these efforts are seeking to create a better future for everyone, not to lay blame on the perpetrators of violence. In his book *Reconcile*, Lederach explains that "creating space for interaction is not based on seeking to establish who is right or wrong, or on agreeing or disagreeing. It is basically a stance

of connecting and embracing their experiences. It is the gift of recognition and acknowledgment" (99). It should be the goal of these approaches to recognize and acknowledge the violence and abuse that women endure, while also recognizing and acknowledging the pressures and limitations placed on men. In order for these interactions to be productive and transformative, participants must be willing to come together with their "heart in their hand" rather than with accusations and blame (99).

Conflict transformation practitioners must remind participants to practice what Rick Love calls the art of reproof. Love writes, "We neither distance ourselves from offenders nor do we go on the attack. Instead, we tell them how they have hurt us, where we think they were wrong, or where we think they caused conflict" ("Jesus-Centered Approach to Peacemaking" 4). The process of transforming domestic violence conflicts should seek to create peace among men and women. Rick Love also wrote, "True peace is not just the absence of conflict but the presence of harmony" ("The Church as Reconciling Community" 1). In order for men and women to live in harmony, they must explore their differences, seek to recognize, acknowledge, and understand each other's struggles, and work together toward a better relationship, rather than blaming each other for their problems. This may seem idealistic and it is certainly not easy. To achieve such interactions on a large, community-level scale, practitioners must carefully design and continuously evaluate the types of transformational programs they implement.

**Poverty Alleviation**

While reconciliation and social change are important steps in the conflict transformation process, poverty alleviation must also be a priority. Poverty greatly contributes to the conditions in which domestic violence most often occurs. In order to end domestic violence, we must address poverty. Social change and reconciliation are not enough, nor is economic development

enough to end violence against women when implemented alone. As social entrepreneur Leila Janah argues, “increasing income alone is not enough to move the needle as far as it needs to go. But it doesn’t make any sense to run NGO programs that say, educate the population about women’s rights while ignoring the income issue” (80). To truly make a difference in reducing domestic violence, practitioners must focus their attention both on social change and poverty alleviation.

Janah, again, argues that “the only way to solve poverty is by creating economic agency, which also shifts the balance of power. That plays out in a tremendous way in communities where women have traditionally been repressed” (80). In my own research in Uganda, it was clear that women are desperate for work that will allow them to be financially independent. In an interview with primary school teacher Sylvia, she said of her job, “I like to work so that I can be able to also sponsor myself when I want anything. Instead of asking permissions. I want to work” (Nekesa). Studies have shown that when women are able to earn an income, the entire family benefits. Women are more likely to spend their earnings on better nutrition, housing, and education for their families (Janah 75). Economic development programs that allow women to earn an income will go a long way in elevating the quality of life for everyone in a family or community. Programs targeting women should be implemented carefully though, especially in areas like rural Uganda where many men feel uncomfortable with the idea of their wives working. Every effort should be made to also provide opportunities for men and to ensure the safety of women who wish to work outside of the home. Careful planning and evaluation are crucial when implementing such programs for women in contexts like rural Uganda.

## Conclusion

Domestic violence in rural Uganda is a complex problem that stems from an individual's personal history, tension in interpersonal relationships, and other economic, social, and cultural factors. Unfortunately, current responses to domestic violence are narrowly focused and limited in their understanding of causation. Too often, current approaches such as initiatives to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, economic development strategies focusing on women, and health and legal services for domestic violence survivors focus on problems rather than solutions. Their focus is on providing for short-term needs and bandaging social brokenness rather than on long-term solutions and transformational change for all involved. Because of this, current approaches are insufficient and ineffective.

Despite the depth and complexity of the problem of domestic violence, it is imperative for development practitioners and community members to adopt a comprehensive and intersectional understanding of domestic violence causation. Development practitioners and community members must also recognize the potential for positive change and transformation. By using a conflict transformation framework, these practitioners and community members can identify the various elements of conflict and create interventions and solutions that address the presenting problems as well as their underlying causes. Transformational responses consider every level of causation, including personal histories, interpersonal relations, and economic, social, and cultural stressors. Responses based on a transformational model of development seek to appreciate the inherent strengths within individuals, the community, and the culture and to further build upon those strengths to create lasting, positive change. This type of holistic and transformational approach is the only way to create positive change that benefits men, women, and society as a whole.

Community development practitioners who wish to address challenging problems like domestic violence must continue to analyze the presenting problem in order to understand its underlying causes. Rather than imposing their own cultural ideals and methods of change, they should seek input and participation from community members. They must understand that true transformation comes from within a community itself. Once development practitioners and community members are able to understand these aspects of a transformational approach, they will finally be able to create lasting change.

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