

Ghana's Silent Crisis: Protecting Women and Children

By Sharon Willis Brown-Acquah

The peaceful image of Ghana is marred by the hidden realities of violence against women and children, particularly in rural areas. These vulnerable groups face issues like domestic abuse, rape, and maltreatment, which often go unreported and unpunished.

Recent crime statistics from the CDD-Ghana's Daily Crime Trend analysis ¹ highlight a concerning increase in crimes against women and children between 2023 and 2024:

Crimes Against Women:

- 2023: 96 recorded cases, with 27% being homicide and 25% rape.
- 2024: 194 recorded cases, with 23% being homicide and 21% rape.

Crimes Against Children:

- 2023: 12% of 403 reported crimes involved minors, with defilement accounting for 46%.
- 2024: 725 reported cases, with defilement making up 32%.

These figures indicate a worsening trend in the safety and security of women and children in Ghana. Furthermore, data from the Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (GDHS) reveals that more than 28.4 per cent of Ghanaian women aged 15 to 49 have experienced some form of domestic violence². This violence has significant emotional and psychological consequences for survivors.

¹ The matrix records the events across all sixteen (16) administrative regions of Ghana and comprises of twenty (20) categories of crime/violence indicators which include; Labor Unrest, Student Unrest, Demonstration/Protests, Riots, Political Violence and Vigilantes, Rape, Mining Related Violence, Homicide, Land guards and Civilian Brutality, Security Agents and Civilian Brutality, Robberies, Domestic Violence, Kidnapping, Chieftaincy disputes, Religious conflicts, Tribal and Ethnic Conflicts, Suicide, Mob Justice and Assault

² <https://ghanaianimes.com.gh/28-4-women-experience-intimate-partner-violence-gss/>

Several interconnected factors contribute to this crisis:

- **Economic hardships:** Poverty can exacerbate tensions within households, leading to violence.
- **Harmful cultural traditions:** Beliefs in male dominance and the inferiority of women can perpetuate abuse.
- **Weak justice systems:** Lack of effective law enforcement and access to justice for victims allows perpetrators to act with impunity.
- **Weak psychological support services:** Insufficient mental health support for victims hinders their recovery and reintegration.

Despite the existence of laws like the Domestic Violence Act (2007)³, the Human Trafficking Act (2005)⁴, and the Children's Act (1998)⁵, their effective implementation is hampered by:

- **Inadequate resources:** Insufficient funding that limits the capacity of institutions to address the issue.
- **Inefficient stakeholder coordination:** Lack of collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders weakens the response.
- **Official corruption or lethargy:** These issues have impeded the enforcement of laws and the provision of support services.
- **Limited public awareness:** Many people are unaware of the existing laws and support systems.
- **Challenges in victim support:** Survivors often lack access to free healthcare, forensic testing, and safe shelters, especially in rural areas. The limited number and urban concentration of support centers like the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) One-Stop Centers⁶ leave many underserved.
- **Health and Legal Barriers:** The unavailability or unaffordability of medical testing required for police investigations can prevent survivors from seeking justice.

Recognizing these challenges, the government has implemented initiatives like the Ghana National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (GHANAP 2, 2020–2025)⁷. Additionally, organizations like Pearl Safe Haven, the ARK Foundation, and UNFPA-Ghana's Orange Support Center, along with DOVVSU, provide crucial support services. However, these efforts need strengthening and broader reach.

³ <https://ir.parliament.gh/bitstream/handle/123456789/2448/ACT%20732.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

⁴ https://www.mint.gov.gh/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Human_Trafficking_Act_2015-1.pdf

⁵ [https://ir.parliament.gh/bitstream/handle/123456789/1772/CHILDREN%E2%80%99S%20ACT,%201998%20\(AC T%20560\).pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://ir.parliament.gh/bitstream/handle/123456789/1772/CHILDREN%E2%80%99S%20ACT,%201998%20(AC T%20560).pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

⁶ <https://judicial.gov.gh/index.php/publications/news-publications/js-latest-news/item/426-2022-02-10-08-39-31>

⁷ <https://www.un.org/shestandsforspeace/sites/www.un.org/shestandsforspeace/files/ghana-national-action-plan-2020-2025.pdf>

Recommendations for Moving Forward:

1. **Strengthening the Legal Aid Scheme:** Ensure strict enforcement and protection for all survivors, particularly marginalized groups. Establish specialized monitoring and evaluation frameworks and independent oversight bodies to investigate reported cases and improve transparency in Gender-based Violence (GBV) case outcomes. Explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and train service providers to be inclusive.
2. **Role of the Government and Private Organizations:** Increase dedicated funding and encourage corporate social responsibility initiatives to combat violence against women and children. Invest in capacity building through regular training for police, healthcare staff, social workers, and judges on GBV identification, sensitive case handling, and trauma-informed care. Develop uniform training materials and improve inter-agency collaboration. Provide mental health support for frontline workers.
3. **Role of the Ghana Police Service and DOVVSU:** Utilize technology to improve reporting mechanisms through secure mobile apps and 24-hour toll-free numbers with anonymous options. Integrate reporting platforms with law enforcement and healthcare institutions for coordinated responses. Implement electronic data collection and monitoring systems to ensure data privacy and inform policy and budget allocation.
4. **Role of CSOs, NCCE, Media, and Traditional/Community Leaders:** Conduct public awareness campaigns through community participation, delivering culturally appropriate content in local languages via radio, television, community announcements, and social media. Engage traditional and religious leaders as advocates against harmful practices and for gender equality. Support community-based programs that create safe survivor support groups and peer counselling networks, and train volunteers as first responders and referral providers.

Addressing Ghana's silent crisis requires a concerted effort from the government, civil society, communities, and individuals to enforce laws, raise awareness, provide comprehensive support to survivors, and challenge the root causes of violence against women and children.

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About the Author



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