

NABWIRE'S STORY: HARSH REALITY OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN UGANDA

When Evalyn Nabwire 22, went into labour in March this year, she hoped the birth of her child would soften the tensions in her home. Pregnancy had been a fearsome journey, marked by her husband's constant reminder that he expected a son.

For him, a boy meant continuity, a future and an heir. A daughter, he believed, meant misfortune. What Nabwire did not know was that the woman her husband had left her for faced the same fate. She too had been abused and abandoned after giving birth to two daughters.

When the labour pains intensified, it was her mother-in-law who rushed her to hospital. Nabwire delivered a baby girl. When the news reached her husband, he refused to go to the hospital. He would not name the child. He cut off all support for the mother and baby. Nabwire, with no income of her own, returned home in Mayuge district, to a hostile silence and an empty house. Not even food was provided.

Days later, overwhelmed by despair and blaming the baby for the rejection she was facing, Nabwire threw her newborn into a pit latrine. It was an act she immediately regretted. Neighbours heard the infant crying and rushed to rescue her.

Angry residents turned on Nabwire, and later her husband. Police were called in to intervene. Investigations confirmed that the pressure and abuse she had been subjected to had played a major role in pushing her to the desperate act. An act she says she regrets.

Nabwire's experience is a stark reminder that gender-based violence (GBV) often grows quietly in homes, beginning with subtle control and deprivation long before it becomes visible. Her story echoes countless others in which women face emotional and economic abuse rooted in



Nabwire with her husband and their baby

ECONOMIC ABUSE

Across the world, economic abuse is becoming one of the most recognised, yet least understood forms of GBV. It deprives women of autonomy and traps them in relationships where they cannot make choices for themselves or their children.

A global review by Surviving Economic Abuse in 2022 included Uganda in its analysis of economic intimate partner violence. The study interviewed men and women aged 15 to 49, asking women whether they had experienced acts of economic abuse and asking men whether they had perpetrated them.

The questions focused on everyday forms of control, such as being prevented from working, having earnings taken away, being forced out of the home, or having a partner withhold money for personal needs even when the household

was struggling.

The findings showed that economic abuse is deeply rooted in many Ugandan homes. Most women reported experiencing it at some point, and many said it had occurred within the previous year.

Men's responses closely matched these accounts, with many admitting to restricting work, taking earnings, forcing partners out, or prioritising their own spending despite family needs.

The frequency of these acts paints a picture of relationships where financial control is normalised and often accepted as part of daily life. This pattern reflects what Nabwire endured. Economic abuse often becomes the silent root of desperate decisions, narrowing the options available to women already under emotional strain.

unequal gender norms.

The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, through

the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) defines GBV as violence

directed at a woman because she is a woman, or violence that affects women disproportionately. It is rooted

in power imbalances attached to gender.

As the world marked the 16 Days of Activism against GBV from November 25, to December 10, Nabwire's story reflected the painful reality behind global and national statistics.

A GLOBAL CRISIS

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), violence against women remains a global crisis, with very slow progress over the past two decades.

Partner violence affects women in every region, and girls as young as 15 face risks that shape their futures. Older women also continue to experience violence, though their stories are rarely documented with the same attention. For example, in the past 12 months, 11% of ever-partnered women aged 15 and above experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner. Despite decades of advocacy, the global decline in prevalence is just 0.2% annually. Sexual violence outside intimate partnerships remain widespread, 8% of women globally report such cases, though the real numbers are likely higher due to stigma and fear of disclosure.

The violence starts early, with 16% of girls aged 15 to 19 experiencing partner violence in the last year. Older women also face abuse, yet remain largely invisible in data and policy responses.

Globally, femicides (the killing of a woman or girl, in particular by a man and on account of her gender) continues to rise. In 2022, 89,000 women were

intentionally killed worldwide

POLICE RECORDS

Uganda's 2024 Police Annual Crime Report paints a wide and complex picture. Out of 218,715 cases reported last year, gender-related crimes featured prominently. Assault accounted for 29,580 cases, domestic violence for 14,073, sex-related offences for 14,425 and child-related offences for 9,408. Common assault alone accounted for 23,457 cases, many of which were linked to violence within homes. Domestic violence cases stood at 14,073. Defilement cases were recorded at 8,240. Buyende district was among those most affected by assault cases, coming second after Alebtong.

Homicides also featured significantly. Uganda recorded 4,329 homicide cases in 2024, a slight increase from 2023. Of the 4,411 victims, 594 were female adults. Motives ranged from infidelity to family misunderstandings and crimes of passion.

Murder through assault rose by 17%, with 1,340 victims. Mayuge ranked fourth in murder-by-assault cases with 29 victims, while Ntungamo district topped with 48.

Strangulation cases increased to 491 nationwide. Rwizi region recorded the highest number.

Cases of murder resulting from domestic violence decreased from 242 in 2023 to 183 in 2024. Out of these, 75 victims were female adults and 10 were female juveniles.

Children also bore a heavy burden. Uganda registered 9,408 child-related offences, including neglect, torture,

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