

# Gender Based Violence: Performance Appraisal of Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Ghana

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## Abstract

Researching on the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in mitigating gender based violence in Ghana has become necessary particularly in the Accra Metropolis due to high rate of its reported cases. Qualitatively, Descriptive survey design was employed for the study. Purposive, convenience and random sampling techniques were used to select the respondents for the study. The main instruments used in gathering relevant data were a semi-structured questionnaire and an interview guide. The research revealed that, emergency shelter, counselling, legal aid support and medical assistance are provided by NGOs to victims. Financial assistance, educational support and advocacy programmes are also offered to victims to address their problems. The study recommended that NGOs should set up telephone hotlines where victims in distress can reach out to these organizations for immediate assistance.

## Keywords

Performance, Appraisal, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), Gender, Violence, Ghana

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## 1. Introduction and Background

This paper presents the Ark Foundation, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in mitigating gender based violence in the Accra Metropolis in Ghana. The paper is structured into five (5) main sections namely; the Introduction, Review of the Literature, Methodology, Findings and Discussion and the Conclusion. The first section introduces the structure of the paper, the context and aims and objectives of the paper. The literature review section reviews the relevant literature on issues pertaining to mitigate gender based violence. The methodology section presents a broad description of the methodology and procedures adopted in the conduct of the

study. Findings resulting from the study are presented and discussed in the section following the methodology and conclusion with recommendations.

The various United Nations' institutions since 1992 and 1993 have worked relentlessly to eliminate all forms of violence directed specifically against women. For example, in the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action was geared towards the elimination of sexual harassment, exploitation and trafficking of women and other traditional or customary practices that violate the rights of women [1]. Ghana has also made some efforts at addressing violence against women along with several other countries. In 1979, Ghana was part to the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and signed the then organization of African Unity's African

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charter on Human and People's Right in 1981. These two instruments guaranteed women several rights and freedoms, including; freedom from customs and traditional practices that discriminate against women and freedom from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatments. Ghana has also made some efforts to integrate some of these standards into national legislation as evidenced by the drafting of several amendments to existing laws, including aspects of the criminal code which prohibits female genital mutilation, cruel widowhood rites and other traditional practices considered to be harmful to women. Women and Juvenile Unit of the police service (WAJU), now Domestic Violence Victim Support Unit was set up in 1999 to specifically address issues of violence against women and Juveniles. The Criminal Code of Ghana and Ghana's 1992 constitution protects women from various forms of abuse that violate their human rights. The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs as well as Non-governmental organizations have been providing training for all categories of people – Lawyers, magistrates, Judges, Police officers, social workers, who are involved in investigating and dealing with those who commit violence against women for improved sensitivity and seriousness to the issue and to ensure improved corrective measures for perpetrators of violence [2, 3].

Civil society and governments around the world have acknowledged that violence against women and girls (VAWG), including domestic violence, is a violation of basic human rights and a global policy concern. In recognition of this international attention, "eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres" is one of the targets against which Sustainable Development Goal number 5–aimed at achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls–will be measured. To further underscore the importance of tackling VAWG, the "elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls" was chosen as the review theme at the 60th Session of the United Nation's (UN) Commission on the Status of Women in March 2016 [4].

In recent times, Government and non-governmental organizations have seen the need to end violence against women in the society, particularly those that are associated with spousal violence (wife beating) and sexual violence (rape). One of these non-governmental organizations is "The Ark Foundation, Ghana". Ark Foundation is an advocacy-based human rights non-governmental organization in Haatso, Accra. Its primary purpose is to seek the protection and promotion of the human rights of women and children. Ark was registered in 1995 and began to operate on a full-time basis in February 1999. The programmes and activities of Ark seek to rid society of attitudes, belief system and practices which nurture and tolerate discrimination, abuse

and violation against women and children. Ark provides integrated services, including counselling, legal assistance, temporary shelter, small assistance funds and rehabilitation to survivors of violence. This is conducted through the Crises Response Centre (CRC) Project. In view of the countless number of services that Ark offers to survivors of violence, particularly those associated with spousal violence and sexual assault, this study was intended to investigate how effective Ark has been in mitigating this problem in Accra. The study sought to examine the extent to which "Ark Foundation, Ghana, a local non-governmental organization has helped to curb violence against women in Ghana, particularly those that are associated with Spousal Violence (wife beating) and sexual violence (Rape) in Accra Metropolis. The study was guided by this research question- To what extent has Ark Foundation addressed wife beating and rape issues in Accra Metropolis?

## 2. Review of the Literature

Violence against women has gained root in the global world. As a result of national and international levels of advocacy carried out by women's rights activists, and with the passing of the convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW), gender violence has gained increased recognition and attention worldwide and serious efforts are being made to address it at all levels. In 1996, the World Health Assembly passed a resolution calling for public health interventions to combat violence. The 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing adopted a platform for Action which declared that violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objective of equality, development and peace. At 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, nearly 180 countries recognized the role of violence in the definition of women's reproductive health, which includes the right of all to make decisions concerning reproduction, free of discrimination coercion and violence [5].

International conventions and legislation are just beginning to be translated into action at a level that can effectively protect women- the level of families, communities and even national governments. The initiatives are a beacon for women at the grassroots, where there are efforts to pull the issue out of the closet and to clearly define gender-based violence as a problem for society. This is the more reason why in November 2001, representatives from ten United Nations agencies met in Geneva in Switzerland to discuss their work on interpersonal violence and find ways to coordinate future efforts in this field. Although United

Nations agencies had previously collaborated successfully on conflict-related violence, little interagency work had been done to prevent everyday acts of violence and crime-incidents that affect individuals, families, communities and institutions such as schools and workplaces. In a message to representatives, the then United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan stated that Men and Women everywhere have the right to live their lives and raise their children free from the fear of violence. 'We must therefore help them to enjoy that right by making it clearly understood that violence is preventable and by working together to identify and address its underlying causes' [6]. Participants outlined a range of collaborative activities they would undertake. These included the preparation of a guide to United Nations resources and activities for the prevention of interpersonal violence, highlighting the core competencies of each agency in preventing interpersonal violence and identifying areas not currently addressed by United Nation Organizations. Based on this guide, a web site was developed to help participating agencies exchange information and to serve as a resource for other United Nation agencies, governments, non-governmental organizations, researchers and donors [6].

In recent years, some countries have taken significant steps towards improving laws relating to violence against women. For example, in July 1991, Mexico revised its rape law in several important ways. A provision that allowed a man who rapes a minor to avoid prosecution if he agrees to marry her was eliminated [7]. On the 9<sup>th</sup> June 1994, the Organization of American States adopted the inter-American Convention to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against Women, a new international instrument that recognizes all gender-based violence as an abuse of human rights. This convention provides an individual right of petition and a right for non-governmental organizations to lodge complaints with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights [7].

In Australia, a National Committee on Violence Against Women was established to coordinate the development of policy, legislation and law enforcement at the national level as well as community education on violence against women. In 1991, the government of Canada announced a new four-year Family Violence Initiative intended to mobilize community action, strengthen Canada's legal framework, establish services to help victims and stop offenders and provide housing for abused women. In Burkina Faso, a strong advertising campaign by the Government, as well as television and radio programmes on the unhealthy practice of genital mutilation were launched to educate and raise public awareness about the dangerous consequences of such an operation. A national Anti-Excision Committees were established in 1990 by the present head of state. Today, the practice of genital mutilation has been eliminated in some

villages of Burkina Faso. In others, there has been an incredible drop in the number of girls excised [7].

Interventional programmes for gender-based violence include all activities that aim at providing women who have been abused with specific needs for their mental, physical, moral and social development [8]. NGOs are all forms of private organizations set up by individuals or groups for the purpose of pursuing certain aims, policies or programmes independent of government. Though they can be international, national or local based, they have the characteristics of being voluntary, independent, non-profit and self-serving organizations within civil society [9].

Notably, NGOs have certainly increased their outreach in recent years, both in funds they spend and the number of people they deal with. Rough estimates in the 1980s suggested that their activities touched 100 million people in developing countries, but currently, the total is nearly 250 million and will rise in the years ahead [10].

Teachers, civil society organisations, human rights organizations and Government should raise awareness of the unacceptability of student sexual abuse, and promoting the notion that stopping student sexual abuse is everyone's responsibility. Educate the public, especially policymakers, about the true nature of female sexual abuse in Ghana. Various forms of student sexual abuse issues need to be addressed. Strategies like continued examination of counselling services in public senior high schools to give advice on sexual maturation and concerns such as assault, sexual harassment and teenage pregnancy should be provided to female students. Necessary provisions should be made for female students with special needs so that they can care for themselves and become productive resources for the society [11]. NGOs have attracted considerable attention in recent times and the growth in their numbers has made them a distinctive sector within civil society, where they cover a wide span of activities. In the developed world, women's crises centres and battered women's shelter have been the cornerstone of programmes for victims of violence against women. In 1995, there were approximately 1800 such programmes in the United States, 1200 of which provided emergency shelter in addition to emotional, legal and material support to women and their children [12]. Such centres generally provide support group and individual counselling, job training programmes, assistance in dealing with social services and with legal matters and referrals for treatment for women abused.

Some NGOs which see the maintenance of shelter as being expensive instead set up telephone hotlines and "safe houses" where women in distress can seek temporary shelter in the home of neighbours. Some communities have designated

their local place of worship as a temple where women can stay with their children overnight to escape drunken or violent partners. NGOs frequently recruit and train outreach workers who visit victims of violence in their homes and communities, advocate individuals who have been abused with information and advice, particularly with help in negotiating the intricacies of the legal system and of family welfare and other benefits [12].

A number of NGOs in Ghana such as the Ark Foundation, The Gender Centre, Advocates for Gender Equity, Action Aid, and ABANTU for Development among others have intensified programmes such as awareness creation, advocacy, counselling services, financial assistance and credit facilities to address economic needs of women to make them less dependent on their abusive husband [13]. For example, WILDAF (Ghana), an international NGO based in Ghana has since September 1992 trained over three hundred women leaders of grassroots organizations on legal education and leadership skills with the view to helping women to articulate their needs by intensifying issues which could form the basis for future planning for rights awareness programmes or law reform [14]. The sensitization programmes adopted by these NGOs will make people aware of the various forms of violence against women and that they constitute offence and therefore must not be condoned [13].

It is therefore worthwhile to note that the efforts being put in place by NGOs and other development partners are steps in right direction in addressing gender based violence issues, particularly in Ghana. Public awareness of sexual abuse must be intensified through the media for the general public to know about sexual abuse and its effects on the development of students. There should be advocacy campaigns for institutions mandated to deal with abuse and for that matter, sexual abuse to play their roles effectively. Programmes to sensitize students and adults about student rights and sex education in general should also be designed and introduced in the districts [15].

### 3. Methodology

Qualitatively, interpretative research technique was carefully chosen for this study. Triangulation was used to test the consistency of findings obtained through the semi-structured questionnaire and interview guide conducted. Purposive, convenience and random sampling techniques were used to select the of Ark Foundation (NGO) workers and victims (their clients) as respondents for the study. In all there are nine-five (95) workers of Ark Foundation as well as their clients. A sample size of 50 respondents, representing fifty - nine percent (59%) of the entire population was randomly selected for the study. This was made up of five (5)

programme officers, five (5) Programme Coordinators, three (3) Social workers, two (2) Volunteers, fifteen (15) rape victims and twenty (20) wife battered victims. The qualitative data was analysed by the use of the interpretative method based on the themes arrived at during the data collection. The themes were related to the research question and interpreted on the number of issues raised by respondents. These were based on question on the semi-structured questionnaire and interviews.

## 4. Findings and Discussions

Any individual, group of people or organizations that commit themselves to the task of ending gender based violence must recognize that it is a difficult task that requires a multi-faceted approach. Indeed, it will take a great deal of commitment, sustained interest and adequate allocation of resources for us to make headway to save the lives of millions of women from the brutalities of men. The annual reports from 2007 to 2008 of Ark Foundation discuss a number of activities that aim among other things to mitigate gender based violence. These include counselling, temporal shelter and rehabilitation, medical assistance support and capital support. Others include community awareness programs which lay much emphasis on sexual assault awareness campaign and church-based anti-violence programme.

### 4.1. Counselling

Counselling is an integral part of the services provided by Ark Foundation to its clients. All abused women are taken through various forms of counselling such as face-to face meetings, telephone interviews and internet interactions. This enables the needs of the clients to be well addressed. As part of the intervention, victims are referred to clinical psychologists for professional advice. In 2007 for instance, fifteen (15) clients who were made up seven (7) wife battered victims and eight (8) rape victims received counselling services. In 2008, ten (10) wife battered victims and ten (10) rape victims equally received counselling services. These counselling services centred on how victims could seek legal redress on legal actions against perpetrators. By this process, clients are encouraged to make their own choices and decision to enhance their self-awareness and potentials for resolving their own problems. The process also empowered the clients to a level where they could be independent.

### 4.2. Legal Counselling and Representation

Legal services have been very beneficial to clients. There are volunteer Lawyers who provide legal counselling and also represent clients in court. In 2008, the legal centre forwarded

sixteen (16) cases to the Juvenile, Circuit and High courts in Accra and Tema. Ten (10) of these cases were pre-financed by Ark Foundation. These efforts by Ark Foundation have made clients prefer to settle their cases with the legal centre than to go the court.

### **4.3. Temporary Shelter and Rehabilitation**

Temporary shelter is the last resort for clients at risk of abuse after all avenues have been explored. In 2008, twenty-one (21) clients, made up of fifteen (15) rape victims and six (6) wife battered victims were admitted to the shelter. Majority of these clients were mostly referred from agencies like Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU). By 2008, all the twenty-one (21) clients had been rehabilitated and resettled. Eleven (11) out of the fifteen (15) rape victims went back to their families, while the remaining four (4) remained at the shelter because, their cases were still in court and were being assisted by Ark Foundation. However, the entire wife battered victims resettled into new communities of their choice, because they feared that they would still be harassed by their husbands. Regular follow up were often made by Ark to ensure that clients were fully integrated into their new environment.

### **4.4. Medical Assistance and Support**

Apart from the psycho-social support that Ark offers to clients, medical support needs are also offered to clients for treatment. Medical officers diagnose women who have been abused and are being advised to seek legal redress. Counsellors of Ark Foundation visit hospitals more often to respond to cases that need attention. From 2007 to December 2008, eighteen (18) rape victims and twelve (12) wife battered victims benefited from medical assistance [16]. Also, counsellors of Ark Foundation visit hospitals twice for counselling service.

### **4.5. Capital Support**

In Ark Foundations' bid to empower clients, they assist the clients through the provision of small grants to embark on income generating activities of their choice. Clients of school going age are also given educational support to enable them continue their education. In 2008, Ark supported twelve (12) rape victims through junior, senior and tertiary levels of their education. Also, fifteen (15) wife battered victims were provided with subsistence aid in the form of cash for their travel expenses, food and related costs as they follow up on their cases. These initiatives by Ark have empowered the clients to undertake skills training and trade of their choice.

### **4.6. Community Awareness Program (CAP)**

As part of Ark's effort to address gender based violence

problems, two (2) activities have been implemented under the Community Awareness Program (CAP). These include Sexual Assault Awareness Campaign (SAAC) and the Church Based Anti-Violence Program (CAVP).

#### **4.6.1. Sexual Assault Awareness Campaign (SAAC)**

The main purpose of the Sexual Assault Awareness Campaign program is to raise public awareness on the incidents, causes and impact of sexual assault, particularly on women and children. In this direction, Ark Foundation has been offering training for officers at Department of Social Welfare and Domestic Violence Victim Support Unit on how to conduct and write social enquiry reports. Apart from that, a number of Police Officers in the Eastern Region, particularly Akim Oda District have been trained on sexual and gender based violence to equip them to understand issues related to these vices. Also, street and market campaigns in Accra are being frequently organized to raise public awareness on issues of sexual and gender based violence. From 2007 to 2009, according to Ark's record, a total of twenty-five (25) awareness campaigns have been conducted in designated districts in and outside Accra.

#### **4.6.2. Church Based Anti-Violence Program (CAVP)**

Church Based Anti-Violence Program is vigorously undertaken by Ark Foundation to commit the church and other religious leaders to the debate to work on sexual and gender based violence. The aim of the program is to support specific churches and religious bodies to develop coordinated community action-oriented response systems within their institutions to address sexual and gender based violence. For this reason, Ark has held more than ten (10) fora in selected churches in Accra to sensitize them on issues of domestic violence and sexual assault. This has created the platform for Ark to assess how sexual and gender based violence issues are being handled by the various churches. Members in the various churches have been well equipped with how to handle violent related issues.

### **4.7. Victims' Perceptions About Ark Foundation's Interventional Programmes**

This section reports on the perceptions of victims on the various interventional programmes instituted by Ark Foundation. Indeed, all the clients interviewed had the following to share with the researcher. Majority of the victims who constituted 69% claimed that they benefited from the emergency shelter and rehabilitation programmes of Ark Foundation. For instance, ten (10) rape victims of school going age were enrolled in school and fourteen (14) wives

who had been beaten by their husbands due to financial problems were engaged in business and skills training before going back to their families.

Also, 80% of the victims, made up of twelve 34% rape victims and 46% wife battered victims confirmed that they were taken through counselling services and this has largely empowered them to solve most problems on their own. The victims said that they have had enough knowledge and skills on how to resist the temptation of being abused, and appropriate place to immediately seek redress. Another area where victims see Ark standing tall in its interventional programmes is the legal services that it offers to clients. All the victims acknowledged the effort of Ark to offer them free legal services. For instance, a rape victim whose case had been long overdue and was at the verge of giving up commended Ark by saying, *"I would have been out of school if it had not been for the representation by Ark's Lawyers"*.

Concerning medical support, majority of the victims reacted positively to the medical support that Ark Foundation has been offering them. They said for instance that their medical bills are being paid for them. Also, Ark Foundation has registered them into the National Health Insurance Scheme and now enjoy free medical care. A 32-year-old client who was kicked by her husband in the stomach in order to destroy her pregnancy had this to say:

*"I am very grateful to Ark Foundation's workers for their medical and legal support. I am equally grateful to Ark for the assistance I had when they pre-financed my legal case when it was sent to the court when my husband kicked my stomach. May God richly bless all workers and restore all energy lost"*

According to a study conducted by Commonwealth Fund in the developed world, women crises centres and battered women's shelters have been the cornerstone of programmes for victims of violence against women [12]. These centres generally provide support for group and individual counselling, job training programmes, assistance in dealing with social services and with legal matters and referrals for treatment for women abused. This study conducted by Commonwealth Fund is in line with the findings that NGOs provide emergency shelter, counselling, legal aid support and medical care to rape and wife battered victims. Moreover, the findings indicated that financial assistance and advocacy programmes are offered to victims, and this confirms the assertion put forward that a number of NGOs in Ghana have intensified programmes such as awareness creation, advocacy, counselling services, financial assistance to address the needs of abusive women [13].

In conclusion, there is clear evidence from the above analysis that the various interventional programmes instituted by Ark

Foundation have yielded a good result. This could be deduced from the responses given by their clients, as shown in table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Victims' rating of Ark Foundation's performance.

Performance of NGO	Clients	Percentage
Excellent	12	34.0
Very Good	19	54.0
Good	2	6.0
Average	2	6.0
Total	35	100.0

Source: Field study, 2009.

Table 1: above illustrates the performance of Ark Foundation (NGO) as far as their interventional programmes are concerned. Out of the 35 respondents of both rape and wife battered victims, 34% of the clients indicated the performance of the NGO as "Excellent," 54.0% indicated 'Very Good', while only 6.0% indicated the NGO's performance as 'Good'. However, 6.0% of the respondents indicated 'Below Average' to be the performance of the NGO. The above analysis therefore suggests that majority of the victims appreciated the good performance of Ark Foundation.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

It is therefore very imperative for legal interventions to be formulated and action taken as effective means of bringing gender-based violence to an end, otherwise, the menace will remain a growing problem for Ghanaians.

The study revealed that, no respondent indicated telephone hotlines as one of the measures to address gender-based violence problem, it is therefore recommended that, NGOs should set up telephone hotlines where victims in distress can reach out to these organizations for immediate assistance.

The government should support women organisations to prioritise the coordination of programmes and policies across sectors such as health, justice, social welfare and education to ensure that the composite needs of survivors of gender-based violence are addressed. It is also recommended that, the Domestic Violence Bill that has been passed into law in 2007 must be seen in its fullest implementation to enhance the protection of the right of women.

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