

GENDER-BASE VIOLENCE THROUGH A VICTIM LENS ABOUT BARRIERS TO JUSTICE. QUALITATIVE REPORT

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Section 1: OVERVIEW:

The interviews revealed that a trauma inform approach to prevent or mitigate the impact of violence on women does not exist in Belize. There is no victim advocacy framework that includes investigating and interviewing a victim. While a domestic violence act exists, systemic biases, grounded in and shaped by generational violence, helps to perpetrate a cycle of psychological injury that undermine the intention of the law for both rights holders and duty bearers.

The established social infrastructure of violence practices is institutionalized in the magistrate court, in the form of short protection orders, inconsistent ruling that does not consider the safety of the victim nor psychological condition generated by the accused in court. The premise that the accused must confront his accuser in court, offers a disjointed, but dispassionate approach to advancing the principle of impartiality. Non-existent court advocates for the victims of violence and interventions to deal with perpetrators of gender-based violence creates a vicious cycle of violence that is passed unto children created out of these relationships.

While psychological power is at the heart of victim vs perpetrator relationship, the impact of violence on the will of the person to assert their dignity and rights have not been fully developed in Belizean court rulings. One example offer by an older woman, who said, “he tek me to a counsellor and he said to the counsellor I te her to Merida and something mi wrong with she!” The woman explained that there were together 38 years, had a shop and tried to smile while serving customers. Husband use to say, “what him mi di tell yo!” The woman said,

she use to “shake and tremble.” The violence got so bad, she said,” he threaten me with wah guineas pint, but I throw hot fat to avoid getting hit. He used to grab wah gun and hit me with it. “ The woman explained that her husband finally got a stroke and was placed in a home for the indigent. He is 63 years old and she was 56 at the time of the conversation. She explained that despite, limited mobility, he would still want to control her. Her violence stopped 6 months ago.

While section 53 may have established that the fundamental rights in Belize’s constitutions applied to LGBT Belizeans, legislative exclusion, limitation in investigative resources, mass production of judicial decisions at the Magistrates Court level in Belize makes mitigation interventions difficult to sustain. Often, leaving victims of violence, feeling as if the protection order is worth nothing despite going through the court process.

Add gender bias among female magistrates and the perception that they lack empathy, alludes to a culture of socialisation that women are to” put their best foot forward.” When they don’t, psychosocial policing of a woman mind and body tends to impact how a victim complaint is treated seriously in court which leads to the “weaponising of a woman’s femininity.”

While Belize has a Domestic Violence Act, a Plan of Action for Gender Base violence and a protocol for interventions, in practice, only rudimentary interventions occur, leaving victims of violence to navigate their way through the system to support themselves.

Section 2: Literature Review:

In a protocol developed for Belizean judicial officers, it was found while 93% believe the protocol was very or extremely important, and 100% of judicial officers agree for the need to identify their gender biases when adjudicating cases. It was found, however, that 60% believed that women should generally be given custody of their children and 67% believed that men's primary role was to provide financial support to the family. Reflecting deep seated stereotypes regarding the proper role of men and women.

Interestingly, 14% believed that women who dressed in skimpy clothes were more likely to be sexually assaulted; 67% believing, women in abusive relationships, should simply leave the abusive partner; 33% believing that sexual assault victim's previous sexual history with the accused is an important factor in determining whether accused believed the victim was consenting. With regards to being gay, 80% said they did not have a problem, but 40% would be uncomfortable with their son or daughter being gay, 32% believe gay people should practice their gay identity in private and 67% think homosexuality is against God's law.

When the data is looked at for women empowerment and men being beaten, 33% think the empowerment of women has led to men being marginalised while 13% think less of men who are beaten by their partners. Suggesting that gender analysis and adjudication is an important aspect in the delivery of justice. The protocols call for the following:

Identify whether there is an unequal power relationship at play, and if any person involved is facing a situation of vulnerability or of formal, material, and/or structural inequality.

Apply strict scrutiny if suspect classes, such as sex, gender and/or sexual preference or orientation, are implicated.

Pay particular attention to cases in which two suspect classes overlap – such as sex and socioeconomic position – and that occur in contexts such as poverty, homelessness and migration.

Read and interpret the facts without discriminatory stereotypes, and take into account any contextual inequality already identified.

Question the supposed neutrality of laws or norms and evaluate disparate impacts that facially neutral laws may impose.

Determine whether stereotypes are reinforced or relied upon in the law, norm or behaviour of authorities, and make sure to combat those stereotypes in the judicial decision.

Establish the proper legal framework by applying the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

as identified in domestic law, the terms of international human rights treaties, general observations

from UN treaty-monitoring bodies, including General Recommendations, or Merit Reports from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

Provide holistic and comprehensive remedies to 1) adequately address all of the different types of harm caused by unequal power relations as well as vulnerabilities and inequalities, which are the result of sex, gender, sexual orientation, race, age, socio-economic position or other social status; and 2) support the ability of the affected individual to achieve her/his life's project or purpose¹.

While 73.3% of judicial officers who answered the survey were female magistrates. The combined effects of gender biases and the ideals of paragraph (e) of the preamble and section 3,6(1) and 16 of the constitution which guarantees rights of equality and protection under the law remains in legal tension. Laverne “antichrist” Longsworth case makes an interesting point who on July 15th, 2010 got into an argument with her common law husband and set him on fire.

The news interviewed Ms. Longsworth and she said,

...“I noh know weh happen. Tuesday I get up and I gone work and I deh out deh so my face just get swell up. I gone dah hospital Thursday and dis dah di outcome ah mi face right now. Nobody no throw nothing pan me as weh dehn seh dat somebody throw acid pan me. Nobody no do me nothing. He always thief mi things and I always have to go pay back fi get back mi things dehn. Sometimes dah problems when I go fi get back mi things dehn from people cause dehn halla he neva lef it deh. Dehn would ah lie or when I do get it back if I get back my phone, I noh get back di chip. Every time I have to pay fi get my thing dehn. Many times dah night I would ah di sleep and have to get up fi look fi something cause he ker it. One and two time we mi fight and so wah

¹ [Justice through a gender lens](#)

time he mi beat mi bad inna mi face fi five dollars. I wah neva forget dat because mi son mi deh da jail. Three weeks mi eye mi shet down weh ih beat mi fi mi five dollars²."

Alluding to the incident the night of throwing kerosene on her common law husband David

White she said:

"Ih no beat me, ih only haul di knife after me and dah he bring di gas inna di room because he always do it. I sorry fi weh happen because dah me wa take di licking now."

When ask if she should have a lesser charge, she said:

"Definitely. I noh want get charged wid murder; I no mind get charge fi di manslaughter. At least I could get bail and deh out yah fi help my pickni dem. But if I go to jail who will help dehn? Right now my son fi get bail Friday, I noh even know if dehn wah give ah bail. Me dah ma and pa fi my three pickni dehn."

The public got into the case and made their comments accordingly regarding David White mother efforts and the victim motive:

Just because Miss Thompson is persistent is not a good enough reason to let her have her way. Despite the death of her abusive son, someone still managed to beat up Lavern after his family threatened her. Dickey, help a sister out.

Lavern did the right thing when she set the !@#\$%^ on fire, she sure got my vote. C'mon Lavern, the bloody marks on your face clearly indicates that someone battered you, violently. Amnesia? Seek justice. I hope that she will be charged with a lesser charge if any at all, her no good man abused her, and now the court system is replaced by her no-good man. The mother of David White need to back off, because her son was just like her, soul-less.

This is what happen when domestic violence get out of control. This man bring in the knife and the gasoline to intimidate this woman but that day he was the one to get his last deserts! I bet he neva think she would turn the tables on him. This is self defense and any time she would have gotten should be listed as time served for all the @\$\$ licking she tek from that now dead scum of the earth

In 2014, the battered woman's syndrome argument was used at the Belize Court of Appeals, that resulted in her charges being reduced to manslaughter after being sentence to life in prison. The evidence presented in the form of affidavits from two experts, Doctor Gillian Mezey, a British based forensic psychiatrist concluded that Longsworth possessed a history and

² [Lavern Antichrist Longsworth](#)

behaviour consistent with Battered Women Syndrome and that at the time of the offense, that condition would have affected her perception, judgment, emotional and behavioural control. Doctor Amy Jex, a local psychologist reaffirmed those views³. Ms. Longsworth sentence was reduced to 8 years in prison. Having served 4 years already, she was given four and a half years more⁴. The death penalty project supported Ms. Longsworth rights for a better defence.

The Death Penalty Project notes the following:

Lavern's case was the first instance of a court in Belize accepting Battered Woman Syndrome as part of a defence to murder. It established a legal precedent that has since allowed other women in similar situations to challenge their murder convictions⁵.

While Ms. Longsworth trauma was acknowledged in court, her case showed its insidious nature and the difficulties of giving life to the right to equality before the law. LGBT Belizeans are not acknowledged in any law since 1981. Despite the final decision on section 53 on December 2019 and Justice Samuel words below:

Including sexual orientation gives the word sex in ss. 3 and 16 of the Constitution a purposive and generous meaning for protecting human rights. Accordingly, we hold that s. 53 of the Criminal Code is a law which discriminates based on sex, which includes sexual orientation and is discriminatory against the respondent Orozco, a homosexual. The section is inconsistent with ss. 3 and 16 of the constitution and is void to that extent⁶.

While the Belize Court of Appeals reaffirmed the decision of section 53 by the Chief Justice about constitutional violations, based on dignity (ss3), right to equality before the law (ss6), privacy 14, freedom of expression (ss12) and non-discrimination (ss16). It is noteworthy that the Court has no enforcement mechanism that ensures that parliament enact its ruling. While it may have acknowledged for the first time in Belizean law that sex includes sexual orientation, and

³ [Murder conviction reduced](#)

⁴ [Court of Appeals quashed decision](#)

⁵ [Death Penalty Project](#)

⁶ [Belize Constitutional Challenge](#)

that L.G.B.T Belizeans have a right to equality before the law, there is no time stamp on applying the ruling to new legislation or work to revise old ones. The result is systemic impasse, as the attorney general office depends on cabinet for instructions, no instructions, means no action. This impasse showed when the Equal Opportunities Bill was finally tabled in cabinet, but not to parliament, it offered and example of secular vs theological clash in our governance, arguably, demonstrating bigotry in our governance. The news coverage from former PM Barrow highlights the point.

"By and large, Cabinet felt that this is a good bill, this is a necessary bill, it's an overdue bill and Cabinet was very upset at having to make the decision not to proceed with it. Why did that decision come? The churches, principally, and I am not talking about the Evangelical Churches, We always knew what their position would be and I think we were prepared to contest that on the basis to clear up the misconception that they obviously had. It was never any question of trying to rush through the bill on the same day to do the three sittings at once. And so we felt that since there would be time for people to make their views known at a House Committee meeting, we were handling it the proper way, but Monday night, before the Tuesday Cabinet meeting, Bishop Philip Wright from the mainstream churches, from the Belize Council of Churches messaged me to say that they could not, the Council of Churches could not support the bill as it now stands. That's game set and match. We're not going to go against all the churches, the Evangelicals plus the Belize Council of Churches".

Additionally, the church reaction about the E.O.B was premised on bigotry and entitlement, the former chair for the National AIDS Commission points out the following in a channel five interview in 2020 the following:

The issue for the evangelicals must be and they told us what the problem is. There is one single problem. In the consultations in January, we were told. It was recorded. We have the recording. They recorded it, brought their recording in our consultations in Belmopan which were wonderful at the end of the day. Because they said, they said it to me 'if you remove anything that has to do with gender, anything that has to do with sexual orientation, anything that has to do with LGBT. If you remove those sections, we will endorse the bill'.

While bigotry shapes the advancement of protections in our parliamentary system of governance, that bigotry trickles down to frontline duty bearers in the delivery of justice. A

⁷ [PM Barrow Explains EOB Decision](#)

process that discourages formal state support of victims of violence who are LGBT Belizeans in preventive or curative action that impairs confidence in the system and amplifies trauma. There is no hate crime legislation, based on femicide, sexual orientation or gender identity, thus, no legal obligation to investigate or consider in sentencing.

One example of unequal treatment when reacting to gender base violence is the Garcia vs Middleton case. In 2016, Jason Garcia pleaded guilty to common assault, the problem with this case is that it was not handled under the domestic violence act, but under the criminal code. Despite section 6 speaking to equality before the law and section 16 speaking to non-discrimination. The Court in its infinite wisdom saw no value in applying these rights to the treatment of the case. Judicially, it was not given that function. The case highlights unequal treatment under the law in the following way:

Jason Garcia pleaded guilty to common assault and damage to property yesterday in the Magistrate's Court. Garcia was charged for beating his male friend, Maurice Middleton, and setting his laptop, valued at \$600, on fire.

According to Middleton, Garcia punched him in the back of his head and stomped on his stomach before leaving and sending a text to end the relationship. Garcia was charged \$300 for common assault, and \$600 in compensation for the burnt laptop⁸.

Additionally, femicide is not a term used in our criminal code, there is no hate crime legislation, even when crimes between same sex couple is reported, legal gaps remain, the factors that amplified vulnerability is ignored and services available are limited in scope. The uniqueness of same sex gender base violence cases is reflected in the case of Pamela Perez murder in 2012 amplifies the point of legal inequity under the law,

A Santa Elena woman is in police custody for the murder of her partner, Pamela Perez, a Honduran national who was once married and is the mother of three children. The murder happened on Saturday night at a bar owned by Rosalia Castillo where she allegedly stabbed Perez in a fit of jealousy. Police are considering

⁸ [Man Guilty of Trashing Laptop of male friend](#)

the murder a crime of passion. If it is, then it will be among the first such cases involving female same-sex partners⁹.

Confusing report came out that it was Castillo was the victim, the news report pointed out the following,

Friends of Castillo have said her partner was abusing her. But police found that there was no suggestion of Castillo being a victim of abuse - in fact there were statements which portrayed her as the aggressor.

Those familiar with the couple say they had a long history of violent arguments - and they'd had an argument that day - with Castillo allegedly accusing the deceased of owing her money.

Police say when they visited Castillo's house on the morning after the murder, they found her with scratches to her cheeks, an apparent cut wound to the right hand and bruises on both arms¹⁰.

As the case was tracked to 2016, the Court of appeals dismissed the case submission which upheld the manslaughter charges against Rosalia Castillo in 2016¹¹. What is interesting is that the news misnamed the victim in this case. An oversight, maybe, but telling! She left behind children, but the perpetrators actions demonstrate that violence is about a display of power to injure. Replace Rosalia Castillo, with a man and the effect is the same. The grief generated remains unseen, the trauma of the family loss remains undocumented and this case, simply becomes a single data point in the state crime observatory report.

When respect for the rule of all is merged with the judicial system lack of understanding of trauma, as a mitigating circumstance, amplification of mistreatment towards the victims is sustained in the system. The case of Ms. Longsworth took a foreign Death Penalty Project to restore some of her rights which state services ignored in the adjudication decision in the Belize Supreme Court. The interplay of factors within our social infrastructure of violence,

⁹ [Pamela Vasquez](#)

¹⁰ [Lily Charged](#)

¹¹ [Court of Appeals uphold manslaughter conviction](#)

generational violence, the inadequate response of the state and victim's trauma play a critical role in promoting and sustaining gender-based violence cycles.

Ms. Longsworth trauma shows up when she said, ““Ih no beat me, ih only haul di knife...” a comment which seems to minimise the effect of a potentially violence moment on the psychology of their woman. The case highlighted that it was the first to used battered woman's syndrome. But what is BWS?

BWS has been identified as a subcategory of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).⁸ Although not all battered women meet all the DSM-IV-TR criteria for PTSD, enough do; thus, a form of trauma treatment is most helpful¹².

With battered woman syndrome, a woman may develop a learned helplessness that causes her to believe she deserves the abuse and that she can't get away from it. In many cases, its why women don't report their abuse to police or avoid telling friends and family what's really going on.¹³

We do not really discuss psychological trauma in our system nor define interventions for perpetrators and victim alike. Generally, it is damage caused to a person, because of one or more distressing events which caused overwhelming amounts of stress that exceeded the person's ability to cope or integrate the emotions involved, eventually leading to serious, long-term negative consequences¹⁴. While A trauma trigger is a psychological stimulus that prompts recall of a previous traumatic experience. The stimulus itself need not be frightening or traumatic and may be only indirectly or superficially reminiscent of an earlier traumatic incident, such as a scent or a piece of clothing. Triggers can be subtle and difficult to anticipate. A trauma trigger may also be called a trauma stimulus, a trauma stressor, or a trauma

¹² [Battered Woman Syndrome](#)

¹³ [BWS](#)

¹⁴ [Psychological Trauma](#)

reminder¹⁵. Missing in the conversation as well, is that women are not homogeneous in their needs and economic position. They are attacked directly and indirectly through their children.

The point is made when that Sheline Martinez, homeless and pregnant, was stabbed and killed in Dangriga, Stann Creek in 2010. The police reported the following:

On the steps, we found a young lady apparently dead now. Initial investigation shows she had some stab wounds to her body and to her head. She usually sleeps by the bus stop on George Price Avenue and apparently somebody went and attacked her there drag her to a unfinished construction underway and eventually she made her way somewhere to the steps where she was found. It is believed that she has also been raped because of some items that were found on the scene after we processed the scene, so we believe she was raped. As well information revealed that she was six to seven months pregnant¹⁶.

The commentary from the public was brutal , one person said,

Only a mad animal could commit this crime — and the perpetrator should be treated the same way. The good people of Dangriga should race the police to see who gets to the criminal first!

Another person commented,

Did this woman choose to live in the streets or did she have mental problems which were not being addressed which also left her vulnerable to predators? No one should die this way but she is in a better place. R.I.P.

A third person commented,

100% correct. How would this woman knowing she is pregnant choose to live in the street? Clearly she was either mentally disturbed or she was an addict and in both situations was vulnerable to these animals. It is sad to say but the level of crime against women and children in our society tells a hell of lot about Belize. I don't want to be hard on anyone but all the people around this girl failed her. I am sure you have your side of the story but if no other time to protect a woman was when she was carrying another life. NO ONE CHOOSES TO LIVE IN THE STREET, what utter nonsense.

The social infrastructure of violence includes, victim shaming, family blaming, and outline the limitation of mental health services or mitigation services for children and women. "All the people around her failed her," vs " did this woman choose to live on the streets" are a social system of emotional reactionary points that is after the fact, add the insufficient curative or

¹⁵ [Trauma trigger](#)

¹⁶ [Pregnant and homeless](#)

preventative systems operated by the state or civil society, systemic violence by deficiencies completes the loop of violence sustained by the state and reinforced by the perpetrator. In addition, we speak of women and girls, but not much about children and the impact that violence has on them as they grow into adulthood.

Adulthood and professionalism go hand in hand when discussing symbols of the state systemic biases against persons they deemed inferior to them. The LGBT and homeless individuals come to mine. One case in 2016 highlights systemic biases that shaped the way ordinary citizens are treated. The case of homeless man and woman, the Amandala coverage spoke of,

BELMOPAN, Cayo, Mon. June13, 2016—The unconscionable sexual exploitation of a homeless man and a woman...Reports to our newspaper allege that the persons were bribed with a glass of Coca-Cola to perform explicit, and in some instance's unnatural sexual acts, as a group of persons watched¹⁷.

This was not the first time, this happened, in 2020, again, a man and a mentally challenged woman was recorded allegedly having sex, but the man explained,

*"Me and this young lady mi just di stand by this cement building, you know, and after that me and she just pursued and we tek wahn lee walk eena di building, look 'round. So by coming out, di officer dehn haul up pan me and di young lady and dehn ask we weh we di do deh. We tell dehn we noh di do nothing. So di officer she "What, da wahn man and wahn young lady. Ih look like unu mi di have sex." So I tell di officer, "No mein." So di officer tell me, da sex unu mi di f*cking got so just continue, you know. So me and dis young lady perform like we di have sex but fi be honest, nothing neva really mi di happen. I sih di officer tek out ih phone and start to video we like, yo. One minute when I notice... Yo when we leff di place, I deh spiral pan video, I deh all about me and this young lady, di seh dat I really have this young lady, di chance this young lady because this young lady really cyant help ihself and fi be honest da nothing like that. So I woulda wahn di police dehn listen up and undastand weh I got fi seh to dehn because my lawyer deh right ya with me. That's all I got fi seh boss¹⁸."*

¹⁷ [Perverse video](#)

¹⁸ [Police force man and women to have sex](#)

Interestingly, this case happened during a state of emergency to stop the spread of the COVID 19. We do not often speak about systemic intimidation which amplifies the effect of gender base violence by the hands of the state, but this case offers an example about duty bearers biases and lack of respect for the rule of law and the dignity of citizens. It offers an example of comradery culture which amplifies inequity and inequality in our justice system.

Finally, we look at cases involving men and women, cases that are amplified by symbols of the state, but we have not looked closely at the intersection of sexuality, adulthood and family violence. The case of Emil Escalante highlights that gender base violence is nuance in its experience between victims and perpetrators alike, the victim died in 2020, but the reports of the case as factors that may have aggravated the situation. The officer in the case said,

"This morning sometime around 6:45 a.m., Orange Walk police were called to the cemetery on San Antonio Road in Orange Walk Town where they observed a tomb that was opened along with a casket which was beside the tomb and the human remains of Emil Escalante. The family was informed and I believe the issue was taken up and he was buried back¹⁹.

It was noted that by the police officer,

A death certificate was issued by the attending physician, so we also heard of some information that he was beaten up, but as far as we know no report has been made to the police neither by himself nor by any of his family members.

The conundrum in this case is the victim was dead, there was accusation that he was beaten prior to his death by family members, but the police expected a report. Often, victims of gender-base violence do not make reports. This one was not between a man and woman in a relationship, nor was it a victim in a same sex relationship. What we do know is that his dead body was taken out of the tomb, desecrated and no one will ever know why. What makes a case like this difficult is if witnesses do not come forward, evidence is not given, victim

¹⁹ [Family Grief over broken grave](#)

advocates are non-existent, the police, unfortunately cannot move forward. In simply terms, no complaint, no evidence, no case.

Section 3: Psycho-Social Analysis findings

Fear is an innate, but universal state of being for any person. When ask their perception of reporting to a police officer being a victim of a crime, participants expressed, “fear of officer’s treatment.” For one transwoman revealing her gender identity in court was problematic for her, she said, “they like call you him, as a trans, no need to scandalise yo!” This person added, “I no care! I done know what dah my rights!” She intuitively references officer treatment when she added, “people in the LGBT community animated, some officers no have patience for that.” Suggesting, officers have psychological triggers that amplify their biases when manage cases of gender base violence affecting LGBT individuals. While the person alluded to an insecurity to having her gender revealed in court, she, nonetheless, shirks the revelation of her gender identity. The anxiety generated through public expression by symbols of the state become a security threat and act of public shaming or attack on the dignity of the individual. The experience is never recorded, complaints are never lodged, and evaluations of biases are not address, all impact quality of services for victims that amplify trauma and discourages action to hold the abuser accountable.

Quality of services offered by frontline duty bearers can be shaped by perception. One participant noted that “some police lazy and no want to do their job.” They question is why are

they deemed lazy? Even when a victim of violence calls for help, the view is offered, “when you call 911 they might no come!” Officers, it was noted,” can be condescending!” asking for example,” why you di cry fa, yah no wah press charges on this boy!” Highlighting duty bearers biases and frustration when dealing with victims of gender base violence who are in a state of trauma. One victim pointed out, “the police will not take concern seriously and magistrate was a bitch!” A process that aggravated the victim emotional well-being when she said, “ I reach wah point, I have to kill this asshole or this asshole will kill me!”

Trauma has not been a consideration for the Magistrate Court, in fact, a person bearing the scars of her abuser reflected on her experience trying to get help. She noted,

what I never like, yo have to stand up infront of the magistrate and abuser. There was no victim counselling provided to me. I was crying because I was frighten! The magistrate demanded, ‘yo need fu explain why yo need more than six months’ protection.’

As a result of being unable to articulate her reasoning of fear, only, six months of protection was given. Despite that, she continued, “the person bruk my vehicle, tried to pull me into a van 15 minutes after court!” Trying to press charges, she was asked, “ miss you sure you want to press charges? What you want duh?” Interestingly, after a separate incident, the victim was told, “ if the person no do you nothing, we can’t give a protection order.” The woman shared that even after she left the relationship in 2013, she found out that “in 2018, the person was still” stalking me.” Reflecting, on her experience in Belize’s Family Court, she observed that female magistrates “lack empathy” and are, “more bias than a male magistrate.”

Through the conversation what developed could be framed as a ***cycle of designed institutional actions*** that ignores the trauma of the victim and amplifying the power of the abuser to

intimidate. In simply terms, address a victim trauma in court goes against the training of magistrates which seeks to promote impartially. One woman pointed out,

“When a victim leaves an abuser, it robs the abuser of the power, leading to feelings, “he still feels he can’t live without the victim.” In addition, she shared “women have been socialised to pretend, to put their best foot forward! Female Magistrates have an innate reaction to judge another woman who is a victim of violence. It’s like a competition! Women are waiting to see other women downfall. For example, because my pa has a pawn shop, all is well! But I never get a lot of sympathy from people outside my family. I want made to feel,” you dah wah dumb bitch, George di screw other women. The epitome of being a woman is having a man. He was charming! Nobody loved me like that before! If I walk into a puddle of water, he will take off his socks to clean my foot. This person was planting seeds to isolate, and it started with wah lee knock! Women are socialized to nurture people which nurture to men issue. The abuser manipulates with the hope of change. If the person knocks me, he might not get in trouble outside

This woman’s reflection carries a common threat of an “***institutionalise cycle of psychological violence***” that promotes gender bias, grounded in a lack of awareness about the effect of trauma on the court, victims, and perpetrators of violence. It is a slow burn process that slowly strips away, any sense of personal security, dignity, and security of judgement. When class and nurturing are added as factors of amplification, it works against a woman who is a victim of violence because her emotional needs are secondary concerns in an imaginal state where her nurturing traits are to be leveraged to serve others, especially, her abuser another chance. The consequence of hope is hardened with a psychological infrastructure of reactions from magistrates to police officers who receive reports that the victim will change their mind in holding her abuser accountable for his violent action.

All participants acknowledge financial, emotional, physical and sexual abuse which can be done simultaneously to separately to strip the victim of any sense of independent thought or action. One example of economic abuse was shared, “ a lady had a child when she was 16 years old, a total of 5 or 6 children. In her 40’s the man tek next woman. The lady tried to sell bread, but it

did not work and man never touch lady again. He never hit her, but he did not allow her to work outside the house either."

While there are alternative options such as Court mediation, what is barely explored is our social infrastructure of generational violence. One person pointed out,

mom was strong willed! She would always tell me 'if any man touch yo' dash hot wata pan them or chap dem hand off!" I could remember," mom would bitch lick my dad!" but reported that she had experience sexual abuse. She recalled "I was young 19, it was my first relationship, it was tit for tat! The participant recalls , "Now that I could remember, he no have a good relationship with his mom, he was sent away and was abused there. I noticed he was depressed going through things. Parents neva wanted him. He tried to hang himself.

The abuser level of narcissism showed up when he said," I will stab myself if yo call the police!"

Generational violence exists for the perpetrator as well as the victim. The social infrastructure of violence is amplified by narcissism, a desire to prevent scandal, victims ignoring red flags with abuser providing validation or leveraging the cultured socialisation of nurturing to keep control over the woman.

A transwoman added," When you in love, nobody will beat me, all that go through out the window!" Even when the victims is assertive, "no fucking knock me!" and the abuser says, "was only playing." The play knock acts as a trigger. Suggesting that persons vulnerable to violence carry trauma that draws them to the familiar, conflict base, violent personalities.

Interestingly, participants make the point about the case of Asia, "women tek long to press charges, public and family member was bombarded with social pressure to take the abuser back. Females, especially were bombarding the victim with violence on social media." It was noted that the woman was told," that come with the territory when yo want man with means!"

With females having a 38.98% ²⁰ participation rate in Belize labor force, one can argue that economic entitlement helps to justify violence that occur in personal relationships. It adds to the social infrastructure of psychological justification, that leverages itself for further communal warfare against the victim. In past legislation, the word chattel and female idiots were used to secure social policing practices of women. When inadequate safeguards consideration of the state in available services, gender socialisation practices that encourage women to be nurturers, but then, helps the abuser to weaponised systemic inadequacies, it becomes an incremental process of amplified vulnerability. But when one looks at the level of violence the perpetrator endured as a child, it offers a vicious cycle or prey and predator.

But what about LGBT people in relationships? A transwoman sentiment was, " ah no want no man whey act like you. I want wa man that could protect me. I want a thug! She continued, "Yo to feminine, ah no want yo!" Without even knowing it, becomes part of a communal culture of complicity to conflate femininity with weakness. An example of a woman femininity being weaponised includes such expressed words, " madas Ms. you have dem di fight off you!" This was said by an officer to a victim of violence, even after a high-speed chase to the police station. The perpetrator actually, appeared in front of the officer and said, " how you could do this to me?" to which the officer replied, " You di play behind this man back!" minimizing the concern of the victim. Behaviour that is grounded in misogynist base values that discourages accountability of the behaviour of the perpetrator and promotes male comradery. When the victim looks back she said, " I find love, catch man, I mi believe everything!" she shared her experience of incremental control and said,

²⁰ [Belize Female Labour Survey](#)

He get pushy! I mi can't do what I want. He had one friend he tell everything, but friend end up throw thing in my face! I never see it as bad. Started distancing my self because he would make big scandal.

The psychological encroachment, though incremental, is insidious for its consequence. It gives the abuser permission and acknowledges his power to further control the mind and body of the victim. An older women in the group chimed in and said,

"I 56 and he 63 and he beat me for 38 years of my life. I just left him six months ago. I use to use blenda and bottle and hit him! He had club and grocery shop. His fatha was a jealous san of a bitch. I had nightmares, when I tek out that gun and shot him. I have three children 38, 36, 33 and 26. Husband home! I feel free! I should have fared off better. Over the years I developed anxiety and depression.

The long-term impact of trauma never shows up in any state report, 144 women murdered between 2009 to 2019 shows up. The number of reports file between 2016 to 2018, 6293, shows up. The number of women killed in 2018 13% shows, up, but no analysis about the quality of services given to victims of violence is ever noted in the crime observatory²¹. amounted to over 140 women. The conflict between court impartiality culture and victim truama is made clearer when this woman said,

I Had to look under bed and closet. I cant bathe in the bathroom with shower curtain closed. When yo in the shower naked, the person would come, go ask all kinds of questions. I in the bathroom when I hear door open! Partner said, he was only playing.

Another woman added, "I have racing thoughts" but its not all about control, one participant shared, " I mek nice creole bread fu tea and he come back drunk

While many conversations speak of two people harming each other, we don't speak about the amplification of trauma by the state lack of budget allocation for DNA testing, to provide a cadaver dog to conduct a search for a missing person, the need to do geographic and

²¹ [Gender base violence 2008-2019](#)

perpetrator profiling, the need to have accessible technology to track the victim phone and poor communication to return the legs of the victim to his mom. The victim Gerado Vasquez was 17 years old and gay. He was reported missing on 25th September, 2018. The first leg was found in the Belize River near the Warrie Head Bridge in Teakettle and the second, in the Chia Maya area on the Dream Valley Resort Road in Camalote²². It was noted till October 5th, 2020 that his mom was able to return²³ the legs of her son. What we learnt from this investigation was about the value of victim advocacy in an investigation and use data collected from our human rights observatory was important to support the investigation in profiling the location of the body and finding a suspect; social media helped to fine investigative resources like the cadaver dog and new coverage of the person lead to the discovery that he had killed six people²⁴ before, but amazingly got off on a technicality in court²⁵. had a history of hurting animals and finally accusation of having sex with a pig²⁶.

²² [Body parts](#)

²³ [Severed legs confirmed of Gerado Vasquez](#)

²⁴ 1st, February, 2021 retrieved from <https://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/8428>

²⁵ 1st February 2021 retrieved from <https://amandalabz.com/news/no-case-submission-frees-man-accused-of-deaths-of-family-of-six-in-2006/>

²⁶ 1st February, 2021 retrieved from <https://www.breakingbelizenews.com/2019/08/12/albert-ali-ara-accused-of-having-intercourse-with-a-pig-captured-by-police/>

Section 4: General Recommendations

- Establish protocols that allows the victim to speak, but in a different room of the court.
- Advocate for legislative court advocates or more empathic person in court.
- Promote a rehabilitation and assessment process of abuser's childhood history and adult behaviour.
- Develop a victim advocacy framework that is population specific while assessing the value of restorative justice processes that can help victims and perpetrators alike in the system.
- Develop a data framework for monitoring service quality of the court for improving service accessibility!
- Partner with local or foreign universities in the region to organize research into the psychological history of male abusers as children.
- Organize trauma informed training with new police recruits entering police academy and magistrates.
- Developed a diversity training program to strengthen intervention with new recruits at the police academy that has a trauma informed approach.
- Developed a monitoring and evaluation system to address systemic bias that promotes misogyny and homophobia with frontline duty bearers.
- Conducting capacity assessments of investigators skills in the system.
- Advocate for the development of a civil rights enforcement protection mechanism that defends victims of violence or violation in Court.
- Revise the Domestic Violence Act to ensure it extends the same protections to same sex couples in Belize.
- Examine budget allocations for forensic training and investigation to strengthen evidence collection.

- Partner with CSO's to support documentations of best practices.
- Work to improve evidence collection techniques.

Section 5: Conclusion

While the state has set up a legislative framework for its heterosexual population and ignored extended protection for its LGBTI citizens, it missed fundamental interventions about quality of judicial services which affected the perpetrator, the victim and frontline duty- bearers alike.

With governance tainted by bigoted values, judiciary by gender biases, the victim's traumas and triggers and institutionalised practices combining to re traumatise the victim, reducing gender-based violence will remain a herculean task.

Absent, in national gender-based violence plan of action and protocols is a basic understanding about generational trauma that families experience in the course of time. Absent, is the interventions that include support services, data collection and mitigation actions that are needed to action as a curative or preventative response only helps to isolate the victim.

As a system, the collective reactions, and biases, acts as a loose system of intimidation that impact of the victim psychology which sustains control and prolong the agony of gender-based violence.

The absence of legal protection in the domestic violence act, magistrates believing that being gay is against God's Law, parliament refusal to extend hate crime legislation for LGBT Belizeans

combine to operate as a system of oppression that upholds the values of cisgender male entitlement.

The traditions of socialising female to be nurturers and believing that men sole function is to provide generates a social system of emotional stereotypes that traps women in a cycle of placing their personal safety and needs secondary to abuser, children, and family. Without mitigating the impact of generational violence on men, state systems, victims of generational violence generate a social circle of prey and predator that is transferred to children who are procreated in the relationship.

Absent, is the cycle of violence that generate generational research culture that looks at understanding the impact of violence on children. A system of rehabilitation that engages the abuser and that address the needs of children through out their life cycle until they reach the age of adulthood.

The relationship of misogyny and homophobia cannot be ignored as the perceived weaknesses of women are used to attack effeminate gay men, transwomen, and butch lesbians as a loose mechanism of social oppression. This interplay impacts the quality-of-service delivery in our judiciary as a report of a crime may never reach court as the victims changes their mind.

While an intervention police policy for LGBT and women who experience gender-base violence is possible, a trauma inform approach is possible for new recruits at the Belize training school, but both needs advocacy drivers to set up visible structures of support. The state in these covid 19 times, budget cuts and economic down turns combine to weaken already existing support services.

Section 6: Reference

Justice through a gender lens: Gender Equality protocols for judicial officers

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