

Is Justice Elusive to Victims of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence?

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Course Number: Course Name

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Assignment Due Date

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Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to detrimental acts inflicted on an individual based on their gender. Sexual violence infringes a person's sexual rights by coercing them to indulge in a sexual act without their consent (Djamba & Kimuna, 2015). Both gender-based and sexual acts of violence are momentous violations of an individual's human rights. Therefore, to ensure that justice is served to the victims, punitive measures must be taken against GBV perpetrators. Contrarily, this does not always happen. Most GBV perpetrators are often not punished for their crimes (Ades, 2020). Nonetheless, this archaic system is slowly fading away, and the criminals are being punished. This ensures that the victims enjoy justice in the long run. The elusiveness of justice to the victims of GBV and sexual violence will be discussed in this paper.

A United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) report indicates that at least one in three women worldwide are exploited sexually at some point in their life (Hester, 2017). GBV takes many forms, including sexual violence, child marriages, and partner violence (Periyakoil et al., 2020). In most cases, they are always levied upon the female gender, thus making them more prone and vulnerable to these acts of injustice. Access to justice for these victims was difficult during the pre-modern era. This is because the crimes were conducted within the remote parts of society, especially in the traditional African community where some were considered legal. Therefore, there was never a rescue for young girls and women who were victims. Some would be forced to flee their homes or even become suicidal and ultimately take their own lives. This is slowly fading in the present era. Justice is readily available to victims, leading to a significant reduction of GBV cases.

Governments, international agencies, and private organizations worldwide have stepped up to ensure that justice is served to GBV victims. This aligns with the opinion of Mahtani (2020),

which stated that governments must step up and take necessary measures to prevent GBV, especially during this COVID-19 pandemic. As mentioned earlier, the government plays a significant role in fighting GBV and provides justice to the vice's victims. For instance, in Africa, governments have set laws that prohibit GBV and sexual violations. According to Djamba and Kimuna (2015), the governments have done away with some traditional practices executed in the conventional society, such as FGM and child marriages. In addition to these, the existing court systems handle GBV cases with the seriousness they deserve. This ensures that GBV victims get justice while the perpetrators face the law. This is indeed a great move since it has brought sanity and reduced the number of GBV cases.

Nevertheless, loops still exist. Some perpetrators may carry out these heinous acts and get away with the offenses. Necessary punitive measures need to be enacted to curb these cases. The relevant authorities should set up report desks and telephone lines dedicated to GBV victims. This shall be a significant advancement in the fight against GBV and the provision of justice to GBV victims.

Although justice is available to GBV victims, it is not fully functional since some cases still go unreported. It is a good move for governments in countries where GBV has taken root, such as in the African continent, to implement the previously mentioned steps. This will help mitigate the consequences of the vice. Nevertheless, further steps need to be taken to ensure the vice is completely done away with and all perpetrators are brought to book to account for their crimes. Victims must be encouraged to report GBV cases. Relevant authorities should offer protection to victims who report GBV cases. This will encourage more victims who fear for their safety to report any forms of GBV inflicted on them. This will also deter would-be perpetrators from committing crimes.

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