

**Experiences and Opinions of Economically Active Women on  
Violence Against Women: The Case of Selected Areas of Work  
in Maseru**

*Tiisetiso Makatjane  
Department of Statistics and Demography  
National University of Lesotho  
P.O.Roma 180  
Lesotho*

*and*

*Thato Mohasoa  
Central Bank of Lesotho  
Moshoeshoe Rd  
P.O.B ox 1184  
Maseru 100  
Lesotho*

**Abstract**

*The study investigated experiences and opinions of economically active women in the urban area of Maseru district. One hundred and eight women were interviewed about their violence experiences as well as their opinions on ways of eliminating violence against women. Three forms of violence against women namely physical hum, forced sex and prejudiced against women were investigated. Around 60 percent of the respondents reported that they had experienced physical violence and opined that women are prejudiced in the society at large. At a lower level was the prevalence of forced sex at 30 percent. Generally respondents are agreed that laws against perpetrators of violence against women should be intensified by heavy penalties as well as making sure that perpetrators are brought before the courts of law while promoting the rights of women or empowering them was the second most mentioned measure of eliminating violence against women.*

## **Introduction**

Violence affects the lives of millions of women world-wide, in all socio-economic and educational classes. It cuts across cultural and religions barriers, impeding the rights of women to participate fully in society. Violence against women constitutes a violation of basic human rights and is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace (United Nations, 1996). Studies in 10 countries have found that between 17 per cent and 38 per cent of women have suffered physical assaults by a partner (United Nations, 1996).

There are three areas of concern where women are particularly vulnerable; in the family (domestic violence, traditional practices, etc.), in the community (rape, sexual assault, commercialised violence, trafficking in women, labour exploitation, female migrant workers, etc. ), and violence perpetuated by the state (women in detention, refugee camps, and situations of armed conflict).

Violence against women in the families occurs in developed and developing countries alike. It has long been treated as a private matter by neighbours, the community, and governments. According to UN (1995) in the USA, a woman is beaten every 18 minutes. Domestic violence is the leading cause of injury among women of reproductive age in America. In Pakistan, in the 400 cases of domestic violence reported in 1993 in the province of Punjabi, nearly half ended with the death of the wife. Although today in Northern Ireland wife assault is no longer legally permitted, its recognition as a criminal offence appears to have had little impact on the widespread practice and extend to the problem. It continues to affect large numbers of children and women causing persistent physical, emotional and sexual abuse, yet ignored by the authorities (Davies, 1994).

Since the liberation of Kuwait in 1991, nearly 2, 000 women domestic servants, mainly from Sirilanka, Bangladesh, India and the Philippines, have fled the homes of abusive Kuwait employees and sought refuge somewhere else. This mass exodus of maids is the culmination of a standing problem of abuse of Asian women domestic servants. While not all domestic servants in Kuwait suffer at the hands of their employers, a significant and pervasive pattern of rape, physical assault, and mistreatment of Asian maids takes place, largely with impunity. Only a handful of the charges against

abusive employers have been investigated or prosecuted. Rather than investigate or prosecute alleged abusers, Kuwait authorities often detained maids seeking to report crime to the police or simply returned them to their employers. Worse, there have also been credible reports of women domestic servants in police custody that likewise go unpunished (Davies 1994)

Furthermore, women fall victim to traditional practices that violate their human rights. The problem has much to do with the fact that most of these physically and psychologically harmful customs are deeply rooted in the tradition and culture of society. For instance, according to the World Health Organisation, 85 to 115 million girls and women in the world population have undergone some form of female genital mutilation and suffered its health effects. In France, a Malian was convicted after his baby girl died of a female circumcision-related infection, which was performed at home. In Canada, a Nigerian woman was granted asylum since she feared she might be prosecuted in her home country because of her refusal to inflict genital mutilation on her baby daughter. In some countries, weddings are proceeded by the payment of agreed upon dowry by the bride's family. Failure to pay the dowry can lead to violence. In India, an average of five women a day are burned in dowry-related disputes. In Bangladesh, a bride whose dowry was deemed too small was disfigured after her husband threw acid on her face. Early marriage, especially without the consent of the girl, is another form of rights violation. Coupled with multiple pregnancies, it can affect health of women for life (United Nations, 1996).

In many countries, sexual assault by a husband on his wife is not considered to be a crime since women are expected to submit. It is thus to prove that sexual assault has occurred unless she can demonstrate serious injury. Employers abuse their authority to seek sexual favours from their female co-workers or subordinates, sometimes promising promotion or other forms of career advancement or simply creating an untenable and hostile work environment (United Nations, 1996). Women who refuse to give in to such unwanted sexual advances often run the risk of either demotion or dismissal.

Many women are forced into prostitution, either by their parents, husbands or boyfriends, or as a result of economic and social conditions. Once they are caught up in the system there is

practically no way out, and they find themselves in a very vulnerable situation. Since prostitution is illegal in many countries, it is difficult for prostitutes to come forward and ask for protection if they become victims of rape or want to escape from brothels (United Nations, 1996).

On the state level, focus is on violence against women as perpetuated and condoned by the departments of government. This is violence by the very people who are supposed to protect women, such as the members of the law enforcement and criminal justice system. In prisons, women often suffer physical, verbal and sexual abuse. Thousands of women held in custody are routinely raped in police detention centres world-wide.

In the case of Lesotho, literature is not sufficient enough on these issues. Most literature supports the idea of the status of female headed households as being worse off, socially and economically (Lebona, 1997; Mтуру, Makatjane and Molise, 1999; Tuoane, Makatjane and Mapetla, 2001; Makatjane, 1990). Along the same lines, Letuka et. al., (1998) submit that, "The disadvantages that women suffer because of the patrilocal nature of marriage in Lesotho need to be ameliorated. The fact that women mostly access land in the locality of their husband's families, make them particularly vulnerable when the marriage breaks down and the couple separates". Specifically on violence against women, one is aware of only two studies that have addressed violence against women. Mohapi (1994) used hospital data on casualty admissions to estimate prevalence of violence against women, while Lesotho Save Motherhood Initiative did collect data on violence against women (Ministry of Health, 1995). These studies have addressed one aspect of violence against women namely physical violence. However, it is important to also establish what the opinions of women are towards violence in general as well as establishing their views with respect to means of eliminating violence against women. Given the discussion presented earlier, economically active women are more vulnerable to violence as it affects them both at home and at work hence the choice to study violence against economically active women.

Based on the three levels of looking at violence, violence against women can be defined as "any act of verbal or physical force, or life-threatening deprivation, directed at an individual woman or girl, that causes physical or psychological harm,

humiliation or arbitrary deprivation of the liberty and that perpetuates female subordination”(UN cited in Mohapi, 1994). As already stated, violence against women can be looked at on three main levels: family, community and state perpetuated violence. The present study will go beyond what earlier studies on Lesotho have done by investigating experiences and opinions of economically active women about physical violence, forced sex and culturally based violence in terms of whether it is in their opinion that women are prejudiced. The study goes further and looks at the means of eliminating violence against women as suggested by economically active women. This study shall, however, not consider the state perpetuated violence.

### **Objectives of the study**

Knowledge is not adequate about the experiences of the economically active women on violence (as conceptualised here) particularly in areas of tradition and culture, and at their employment environment. However, the preceding deliberation suggests that, in fact, women are vulnerable to violence even though in most cases, violence such as sexual harassment at work and spousal abuse have often gone unreported.

It thus becomes important to conduct this study to provide empirical information based on collected data as regards violence against women. The study seeks to establish whether, as a matter of fact, women do experience social discrimination, spousal abuse, sexual harassment, etc., and their intensity. It shall put emphasis on how, according to the respondents, women are generally abused. This study is further viewed as pertinent to the authorities in Lesotho, to try and eradicate those factors that economically active women regard as impediments to their participation in economic activity and personal development. Importantly, therefore, this study shall serve as a basis for public policy particularly when it comes to the protection of the rights of women. The authors are of the opinion that in order for the state to be able to have effective non-discriminatory laws, particularly those that protect women, concerns of women should be documented hence the present study.

## **Data and Method of Analysis**

### ***Sampling***

Maseru urban area was purposefully chosen as the study area. Two reasons governed the choice of the study area. Maseru urban was convenient being nearer to the working place of the researchers. Secondly, Maseru urban would provide a conducive environment for getting information from economically active women from all walks of life. Moreover, Maseru urban happens to be the capital of Lesotho as well as the place where decision makers are not only concentrated but that law implementing structures are located.

Three ministries namely Ministry of Youth and Women's Affairs, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Health and Social Welfare were selected for the study. These ministries were chosen on the understanding that they deal with women's issues more than the rest of the other ministries as it was not possible to go to all the ministries due to limited resources for the study. Outside government departments, Lesotho High Lands Water Authority, the National University of Lesotho, Lesotho Telecommunications and Maloti Mountain Brewery were selected to represent parastatals. For the private sector, Chinese Manufacturing Factories at Ha Thetsane and manufacturing firms at Masianokeng were selected. These private places were chosen for their high concentration of women in their workforce. Self-employed women in Maseru urban were also included in the sample.

A sample size of 150 respondents was the target for the study. The sample size was composed of 50 respondents from the three categories for the study namely government, parastatals and private organisations. An attempt was made to distribute questionnaires such that for each of the three categories, 10 questionnaires were to be filled by senior management of the institution, 20 by middle management and 25 by low level employees. This distribution was based on the assumption that employees get fewer as one approaches the top management of the organisation.

### **Data Collection**

Fifty questionnaires were distributed to each of the three categories identified for the study namely government ministries, parastatals and private organisations. Other than socio-demographic

characteristics of the respondents, the questionnaires solicited information regarding respondents' violence experience in terms of whether they had actually been beaten or physically hurt, had been forced into sex or in their opinion women are prejudiced. The intensity of the violence as well as opinions regarding elimination of violence against women were solicited from respondents.

### **Method of Analysis**

The study is descriptive. As such mainly univariate method of analysis is used. Frequency tables have mainly been used when looking at both the characteristics of the study population and the opinions of women by their different socio-demographic characteristics. Bivariate analysis is used for comparing violence experiences as well as ways of eliminating violence by socio-demographic variables of respondents.

### **Response rate**

Out of the 150 distributed questionnaires only 104 were returned giving a response rate of 69 percent. At an institutional level, for government ministries the response rate was 76 percent, 70 percent for parastatals and 60 percent for private organisations. It is noteworthy that women in private institutions are very mobile hence the low response rate relative to other institutions. With respect to the hierarchy within institutions, 17 percent of the respondents did not indicate their rank, but for those who did the estimated response rates are 52, 82 and 33 percent for , low, middle and high positions within their organisations respectively. Top management personnel is relatively busy hence the low response rate. The relatively low average response rate notwithstanding, the sample is still large enough to provide useful insights into women's violence experiences and their opinions as to how violence can be eliminated.

### **Characteristics of the study of population**

The characteristics of the study population will provide better understanding and interpretation of the results. Characteristics make it easy to understand and interpret the differing attitudes of the

economically-active population on violence. Characteristics of the study population are presented in Table 1.

### **Rural-Urban Residence**

According to Table 1, over 60 per cent of women reside in the urban areas while around 37 per cent reside in the rural areas. Concentration of women in urban areas should be expected since employment is concentrated in the urban sector. Moreover, all the places in the sample are located in the urban area.

### **Age**

In terms of age, most of the respondents were found to be between ages 25 and 39, constituting over 60 per cent of the total respondents. There were few women aged between 14 and 19, and those aged 40+ (see Table 1). Understandably women aged less than 25 years are still at school hence their small representation. The low percentage of women aged 40+ is a result of the relationship between education and employment. That is, since the target population was that of employed women, it is to be expected that women aged 40+ should be few since the proportion of educated women aged 40+ is small compared to younger generations.

### **Marital Status**

The majority of the respondents reported that they have never been married, 39 per cent. They are immediately followed, at 32 per cent, by those who are currently married. A considerable number of respondents have reported to be either separated or divorced while around 13 per cent reported to be either widowed or cohabiting.

### **Educational Attainment**

Lesotho is known for its literate female population and the figures in Table 1 portray just that. None of the respondents reported to be without at least basic education. This is to be expected since the target population was employed women. A high number of women reported that they have either post-matric or graduate qualifications, with a significant number holding post-graduate qualifications. Very few of them have primary education, at 11 per cent.



## Type of Employment

Most of the respondents were found to be in low echelons of their employment, at 38 per cent. This category embraces posts such as cleaners, tea-makers, assistants, secretaries, and clerks. Around the same number of women were found to be in middle categories such as those in middle management : supervisors, assistant personnel officers, and teachers. A very small number of women were found to be in high employment status such as deputy principal secretary, directors, lectures, accountants, and lawyers. All these are portrayed in Table 1. Notably, 17 per cent of respondents could not specify their job titles.

## The Employer

The majority of women have been found to be employed by the government of Lesotho. This is not surprising because in Lesotho, government is the major employment agency. The parastatal employment follows at 34 per cent. There are organisations created by government to, among other things, create employment. There is a very low existence of the private sector in Lesotho such that it no wonder that private employment is lowest at 29 per cent (Table 1).

**Table 1: Percentage distribution of the characteristics of the Study Population**

Characteristic	Percentage	Number
<b>Rural Urban Residence</b>		
Rural	36.5	38
Urban	60.6	63
No response	2.9	3
<b>Age</b>		
< 25	9.6	10
25-29	25.0	26
30-34	24.0	25
35-39	14.4	15
40+	16.3	18
No response	9.6	10
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Never married	39.4	41

Currently married	31.7	33
Separated/Divorced	15.4	16
Widowed	7.7	8
Cohabiting	5.8	6

**Educational Attainment**

Primary	11.5	12
Secondary and COSC	16.3	17
Post COSC	29.8	31
Degree	25.0	26
Post degree	17.3	18

**Type of employment**

Low	37.5	39
Middle	35.6	37
High	9.6	10
No response	17.3	18

**Employer**

Government	36.5	38
Parastatal	33.7	35
Private	28.8	30
No response	1.0	1

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**Results**

In trying to address the broad definition of violence against women defined in the introduction, three different methods were used to assess violence experience among economically active Basotho women. Women were asked whether they had been beaten or otherwise physically hurt, whether they had been forced into sex and whether they think that women are prejudiced. Responses to these questions do indicated that there are high incidences of violence experienced by women respondents. Close to two thirds (62 percent) of the respondents reported that they had experienced violence. A third (30 percent) of the respondents reported that they had been forced into sex while about two thirds (58 percent) were of the opinion that women are prejudiced in the society at large.

**Table 2: Violence Experiences among Economically Active Basotho Women**

Type of Violence			No
	Yes(%)	No(%)	
	response(%)		
Are women Prejudiced?	58	37	6
Ever experienced forced Sex?	30	63	8
Ever Experienced violence	62	38	1

Asked about the frequency of violence, 17 percent of the respondents reported that they are subjected to violence at least once a year. Around 7 percent of the respondents reported that they are subjected to violence at least once a month, 3 or more times in a year and less than once a year. Alcohol consumption and jealousy were mentioned as the major causes of violence. Although small percentage wise (10 percent), some respondents did indicate that they are subjected to violence even when they are pregnant.

Asked who perpetrators of violence were, ever married women reported that husbands are perpetrators of violence mentioned by half of all the women who reported that they had ever experienced violence. At a lower tempo is a frequency of male friends physically hurting women. Fathers of respondents have also contributed, in one way or another, in inflicting pain on the respondents. But overall, all other potential perpetrators such as mothers, neighbours, the in laws, have contributed very little.

As regards those who reported to having been forced to have sex, major perpetrators were supervisors at work and male friends at 10 per cent and 4 per cent respectively. Other categories of people such as relatives, prominent personalities, colleagues etc. have assumed a low frequency, e. g 2 per cent. It is notable that some respondents have also indicated that their husbands and partners have attempted to force them to have sex. This becomes a revelation in that husbands are never assumed to force their wives into sex. It is noteworthy though that around 30 per cent of the respondents reported that they were no longer subjected to forced sex, either by the husband, partner, relative of superior at work. However, about 43 per cent of the respondents are still subjected to forced sex. For those who are still subjected to this violence, 12 per cent decided

not to tell anybody about their experiences while 11 per cent did report the matter. Those who reported mostly told their husbands. Other reported the matter to either friends, relatives etc., as the case may have been.

Generally, women do not report cases of abusive sexual attempts on them. A high proportion of those who did not report the matter did not advance any reasons other than reporting that they felt embarrassed to expose their situation to other people (public officials or relatives). Some of them put the blame on themselves or are scared to face the results of their reporting. On the other hand, some are threatened into not reporting these cases by the perpetrator. Women might be justified for not reporting abusive sexual attempts given that only a small proportion (4 percent) of those who reported got some help in the form of reporting the matter to the police or being taken to the hospital. More importantly, once the matter has been reported to the police it becomes a state case and nothing the abused woman or relatives can do to facilitate that the perpetrators is punished but rather the perpetrator can get legal advice to prove that he is not guilty.

Supporting why they feel they are prejudiced, most women argued that they are being taken as second-class citizens, denied rights which are afforded men. In elaboration on this point, most women cited issues such as being denied the authority to take responsibility of guaranteeing their own financial transactions. Some women indicated that they are not allowed to own land especially after their husbands have passed away. They can only act as care-takers until their sons are old enough to assume proprietorship of such. Furthermore, women feel that because of their physical weakness, men tend to take advantage of them, particularly sexually. Whether superior or equals, respondents argued that in all cases, males invariably offer favours of some kind as a way of advancing their sexual attempts. This point needs no further elaboration as it has already been indicated that even relatives, husbands and friends make sexual advances to women. Respondents further reported that they are not afforded an opportunity to own property, even though they work very hard to own it. They are consistently compelled to rely on their husbands, as guarantors, in order to secure property.

Nonetheless, there were a minority of respondents, about 3 per cent, who argued that women are to blame for the kind of discrimination

they encounter. They argued that if women could assume their role as subordinates to men, as tradition in a way dictates, most of these problems would not be encountered. They contented that women did not respect their husbands and men in general. They opined that alcohol consumption by women, among other things, was an enough attracting factor for men to take advantage of them. In general, according to them, the women's place is in the house.

Differences in violence prevalence were also investigated and Table 3 presents the differences in violence prevalence by socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Small sample size as reflected by the number of respondents notwithstanding, generally speaking at least half of the respondents reported that they had been beaten or physically hurt. Chi-square test for the different characteristics did not show any significant difference among respondents with respect to experiencing violence in terms of being beaten or physically being hurt.

With respect to violence in the form of forced sex, on the average at least in every 10 women 2 have experienced forced sex except for urban women where 16 women out of 100 reported that they had experienced forced sex. Prevalence of forced sex is relatively lower compared with being beaten or being physically hurt. Chi-square tests suggest that there is a significant relationship between experiencing forced sex and rural urban residence and the odds that rural women are likely to experienced forced sex are 8.13 times that of urban women.

Regarding prejudice, at least a third of the women are of the opinion that Basotho women are prejudiced. Relative to the other forms of violence, prevalence in prejudice is in between forced sex and being beaten or physically hurt. Chi-square tests suggest a significant relationship between prejudice prevalence and rural urban residence and employer.

**Table 3: Differences in violence experiences by selected characteristics of respondents**

<b>Prevalence(%) in Characteristic</b>	<b>Violence</b>	<b>Forced sex</b>	<b>Prejudice</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>Education</b>				
Primary	58	42	100	12
Secondary & COSC	71	24	71	17
Post COSC	68	39	42	31
Degree	54	23	50	26
Post Degree	59	33	56	18
<b>Employer</b>				
Government	66	37	71	38
Parastatal	60	34	37	35
Private	59	20	63	30
<b>Marital Status</b>				
Never married	59	24	49	41
Currently married	53	27	70	33
Separated/divorced	63	38	63	16
Widowed	88	75	50	8
Cohabiting	100	33	50	6
<b>Rank</b>				
No response	53	28	39	18
Low	64	26	67	39
Middle	68	43	62	37
High	50	20	40	10
<b>Residence</b>				
Rural	71	61	73	38
Urban	56	16	51	63
<b>Age</b>				
<25	30	50	70	10
25-29	73	15	54	26
30-34	52	32	52	25
35-39	73	27	60	15
40-44	71	34	67	18

### **Elimination of Violence: Opinions**

Most respondents felt that in order to eliminate violence against women, the authorities should intensify laws that protect women against abuse. This was reported by 42 per cent of respondents. According to these respondents, this should be done by way of passing severe sentences to the perpetrators of violence against women. Some of the respondents, 10 percent, argued that prejudice against women was a result of the characteristics of customary law and should be abolished. According to these respondents, this could be a positive step towards empowering women, particularly those in employment.

Another proportion of women felt that the authorities could not do anything to eliminate violence against women. The outcry is that even government agencies themselves are corrupt enough not to look into women's problems. This was argued by about 2 per cent. They further argued that violence against women, in any form, is not a recent problem but dates back very many years. If government is willing to address violence against women, it has to begin by proposing that a new legislation be adopted that gives women a special protection, in a holistic way, and not piecemeal and such laws have to be effectively implemented.

The most frequently mentioned forms of eliminating violence against women is the intensification of laws against perpetrators of violence against women followed by empowering women or promoting their rights. Intensification of laws is seen as the most important form of eliminating violence against women irrespective of the socio-demographic characteristics of the woman. There are, however, a few exceptions whereby other than intensifying laws against perpetrators of violence against women, promoting the rights of women as a measure is mentioned by about 2 in 10 women. These exceptions are women whose work positions are high, women residing in urban areas and highly educated women.

**Table 4: Suggested measures for elimination of violence against women by characteristics of the respondents (only the most frequently mentioned measures are presented)**

<b>Measure</b>			
<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Intensify law</b>	<b>Promote rights of women</b>	<b>Empower women</b>
<b>Residence</b>			
Rural	53	13	3
Urban	37	19	11
<b>Rank</b>			
Low	41	11	3
Middle	46	13	14
High	30	30	20
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Never married	42	27	5
Currently married	36	12	9
Separated/divorced	69	6	0
Widowed	25	0	25
Cohabiting	33	17	33
<b>Employer</b>			
Government	42	21	5
Parastatal	37	17	17
Private	48	10	3
<b>Education</b>			
Primary			
Secondary and COSC	53	6	0
Post COSC	39	16	7
Degree	35	23	8
Post degree	28	22	28
<b>Age</b>			
< 25	50	30	0
25-29	42	27	8
30-34	36	12	12
35-39	73	7	0
40+	28	0	17



## **Discussion**

In summary the results of the study suggest that women experience violence irrespective of their place of residence. The women who experience violence more are those residing in the rural sector, even though the urban women are still considerably affected. Furthermore, violence affects women across all age groups. It is particularly highly experienced by women in the middle ages such as 24-35. Violence is also experienced by women of any marital status. It is especially prevalent in women who are widowed and those cohabiting. Moreover, violence affects women of all educational levels but experienced more by those who have low educational qualifications, such as Junior Certificate or lower. As far as type of employment is concerned, violence, in any form, affects women in middle employment more than others, and are immediately followed by those in low employment. It affects those in high employment status less. In terms of the employer, women are almost equally affected by violent behaviour. The observations made do not reveal striking differences in terms of respondents, employed by government, in parastatals, or in the private sector, in the incidence of violence.

Women in the rural areas feel much more prejudiced than those residing in urban areas. This could be attributable to the fact that custom and tradition are deeply-entrenched in the rural areas. Also, women in younger and older ages are the ones who predominately contended that they are prejudiced. With respect to marriage, the married women and those either separated or divorced constitute the highest proportion for feeling that they are prejudiced. But even for the other marital status categories, there is a considerable proportion of women who feel the prejudice. In regard to education, a high proportion of women with JC or below qualifications feel prejudiced, with a small proportion observed from women with high educational qualifications. Regarding the type of employment, the majority of women who feel prejudiced are those in both the low and middle employment. However, a sizeable proportion of those in high employment status still feel discriminated. Furthermore, civil servants feel prejudiced than other respondents. This may be attributable to the

conservative civil service regulations such as those governing entitlement to pensions by married women. They are immediately

followed by those in the private sector. With them, it could be due to the unabated manner in which they get treated in factories for those employed, and the social and verbal abuse experienced by street vendors while executing their business.

The majority of respondents feel that there is a need to eliminate violence against women. They suggested means which authorities should adopt towards the elimination of violence. The majority of women, particularly those residing in rural areas, suggested that there should be an intensification of laws. This is to effect that perpetrators must be severely punished. In terms of age, most common suggestions were that there should be an intensification of laws and promotion of rights while empowerment of women was given a low priority. Opinions differed markedly in terms of marital status as regards how violence should be eliminated. However, divorced or separated women are very emphatic empowerment of women. With respect to education some women, particularly those with low educational qualifications have also suggested the abolition of customary law. In general, the suggestions seem to be uniform for all socio-demographic variables, including type of employment and the employer.

As it has been highlighted in the preceding sections of this paper, violence on women can occur both at the domestic and community levels. At the domestic level it embraces spousal abuse and unhealthy traditional practices, while at the community level it entails sexual assault, commercialised violence and trafficking in women. Statistics has shown that on a global scale, women are victims of violence, in any form such as spousal abuse, mistreatment at work without impunity and tradition related practices. Sexual assault is not taken as a crime in many countries of the world since women are expected to be submissive to it. Furthermore, employers seek sexual favours from the female co-workers and subordinates. They do this by sometimes promising promotion or other forms of career advancement or simply creating an untenable and hostile environment for women.

The purpose of this study was to establish the experiences of economically active women towards violence at home, at work, and as influenced by tradition and culture. It aimed at investigating the factors

which working women regard as impediments to their effective participation in economic activity and personal development.

It has been found that in general working women in Lesotho are physically assaulted at least once a month. The perpetrators of this violence have either been men as a whole or husbands. The main cause of violence has been found to be alcohol consumption. Violence has occurred to women even during their pregnancy sometimes causing foetal and maternal mortality. Women in Lesotho are further denied rights that are otherwise afforded men such as ownership of property.

Cases of abuse and physical mistreatment by recruiters and employers of Basotho women, particularly those working in domestic service and manufacturing firms, have been reported. Women and girls have special needs that reflect their gender. In particular, they need protection against sexual and physical abuse. They are further desperate for protection against exploitation and sexual discrimination in the course of the delivery of goods and services. If women are unable to feed, cloth and shelter themselves and their children, they will be more vulnerable to manipulation and to physical and sexual abuse in order to obtain such necessities.

There has been increasing recognition that there must be programmes for women to accommodate such changes in family structure and address the various needs of working women. These should point to planning requirements and the need for a great deal of commonness in establishing programmes and enforcing priorities that support working women's safety and well-being. They should seek to bring about attitudinal changes in relation to violence especially when it is an obstacle, to improve or initiate services that address psychological as well as health needs, and overall, to create awareness and sensitivity to the special needs and concerns of women who have been subjected to violence. This is against the background that the majority of the reported cases of violence, in any form, involved female victims and male perpetrators.

Women should be assisted in claiming their rights and assuming their share of power. Women's equitable participation in all walks of life is no longer only their legitimate right but a social and political necessity in the process towards a more balanced, humane and sustainable future. We live in a time when women and their

contribution really do matter in the building of a better future for the whole of humanity.

As a source of important information, this study represents a major reference document. By reviewing the economic and social landscape, both globally and in Lesotho, it poses fundamental questions about socialisation and gender-sensitivity for the future. The authors hope this study will contribute to a knowledgeable and far-ranging debate and attitudes about policies and to a clearer understanding of how we can build a better and fairer country for the future.

### **Recommendations**

- (1) Collection and compilation of information on the conditions that women workforce, including the incidence of exploitation and violence, is crucial for improving the efficiency of existing provisions and for enhancing women protection, on the part of government.
- (2) A more affective and closer interaction in terms of judicial, law enforcement or police cooperation is needed to make the prevention and the suppression of violence on women more effective. This is particularly important given that women can get the deadly disease HIV/AIDS through acts of violence such as forced sex.
- (3) There is a need to put in place programmes that can help to improve the poor socio-economic well being of female headed households since poverty is a factor that greatly contributes to the vulnerability that exposes females to all sorts of violence

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