



## Violence against persons with visual impairment in the Accra Metropolis

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### ABSTRACT

Persons with disabilities are at a heightened risk of violence and suffer mental health challenges as victims of violence. Although there have been some studies on violence against PWDs, persons with visual impairments experiences of violence have not been fully explored in the Ghanaian context. Adopting an interpretive phenomenological design, this study, which was part of a larger study, aimed to find out a) the types of violence persons with visual impairments experience and b) reasons why persons with visual impairment experience violence. Ten participants were purposively sampled for the study. The data was collected using in-depth interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis and from the perspective of the CDT. The study participants reportedly suffered verbal, physical, sexual, emotional, and structural violence. The study recommends, among others, that the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development embark on sensitization campaigns on disability issues to help alter negative perceptions that some people have about persons with visual impairment.

*Keywords: Violence, abuse, persons with visual impairments, disability, persons with disabilities*

### INTRODUCTION

Disability issues have attained worldwide attention mainly because of the prevalence and discrimination suffered by Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), thus attracting people to advocate for PWDs inclusion in the development of any country (Singal et al. 2015). According to the World Bank (2019), 15% of the world's populace, constituting approximately a billion persons live with a disability. About 80% of this population is most likely to be amongst the poorest, most marginalized, and socially excluded groups (World Health Organization, 2011; World Bank, 2019). The reason is that PWDs often than not suffer adverse socioeconomic effects such as poor health outcomes, inadequate employment, lower educational levels, and high rates of poverty (World Bank, 2022). Furthermore, In Sub-Saharan Africa particularly Ghana, PWDs experience higher unemployment rates (Naami, Hayashi, & Liese, 2012), face discrimination, negative perceptions of their capabilities, and exclusion of those who get employed (Naami, 2015).

Also, PWDs who secure employment are often underpaid or underemployed thereby reducing their earning power and heightening their vulnerability (Opoku et al., 2017).

Compounding the vulnerability and challenges of PWDs is their subjection to and experiences of violence. In a global report on disability, violence was adjudged one of the leading causes of

morbidity amongst PWDs (Khalifeh et al., 2013). It is therefore not surprising some studies found PWDs highly susceptible to violence more than persons without disabilities (Emerson & Roulstone, 2014; Hahn et al., 2014; Harrell, 2017; Khalifeh et al., 2013). Consequently, PWDs have been reported to experience mental health complications amongst other difficulties as victims of violence (Khalifeh et al., 2013). Usually, the discussion of violence against PWDs has been gender-based with women across age groups particularly reported to experience greater levels of violence (Deepak et al., 2014). The situation is much worse for persons with visual impairment due to the peculiarity of their condition (Harrell, 2017). For instance, persons with visual impairment unique condition make it more difficult for them to see or anticipate possible dangerous situations, fight back, or walk away from potential perpetrators (Milberger et al., 2003). As a result, they are often susceptible to violence and stand a greater risk of psychological and behavioral problems as victims of violence (Krug et al., 2002). A perpetrator may, therefore, capitalize on persons with visual impairments' inability to see and take undue advantage because of their vulnerability. Subsequently, those exposed to violence and exploitation live a life filled with indelible scars and even have possible mental health issues (Azumah et al., 2019).

In Ghana, persons with visual impairment experience homelessness, unemployment, poverty, aggravated health conditions, injury, discrimination, and stigmatization as victims of violence (Azumah et al., 2019; Opoku et al., 2016). Also, women with visual impairment are reported to be highly susceptible to violence and face its different forms (Azumah et al., 2019; Opoku et al., 2016). These study findings reveal the distressing situation of persons with visual impairment which

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requires a thorough interrogation particularly because persons with visual impairment outnumber the other groups of disabilities with a population of 295,720 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). Although there have been some studies on violence against PWDs, persons with visual impairment experiences of violence have not been fully explored, hence, the dearth of literature, especially in the Ghanaian context. This study, therefore, contributes to the literature on the discussion of the types of violence perpetrated against persons with visual impairment in the Accra Metropolis and the reasons behind such acts.

## METHODS

A qualitative approach specifically, a phenomenological design was adopted for this study. According to Polit & Beck (2010) the goal of most qualitative studies is not to generalize information, but instead, they are aimed at providing “a rich, contextualized understanding of some aspect of human experience through the intensive study of particular cases” (p. 1451). Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2021), also argue that interpretative phenomenological design as a qualitative approach helps examine the sense people make out of their lived experiences. The study, therefore, found interpretive phenomenological design as the best approach to unravel participants’ experiences of the various forms of violence from their own narratives. By adopting this approach participants had the privilege to describe the issue of interest (Vagle, 2018) and as experts on their lived experiences (Creswell, 2014). Five males and five females between 24 to 60 years old and had experienced any form of violence were purposively recruited from the Ghana Blind Union (mother association for the visually impaired) for the study. Beyond being an association, the Ghana Blind Union (GBU) is considered a “home” or “family” by its members who identify themselves with one another and are unified by their similar conditions although stayed at different places. The GBU, therefore, served as an ideal source for potential participants for this study.

The study adopted in-depth interviews using open-ended questions as a data collection tool. An interview guide based on the study’s objectives, designed in English and the Twi language was employed for the interviews. The Twi language is one of the most common and widely spoken dialects in Ghana. Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with five participants at a place and time convenient for both participants and the researcher. The other five already scheduled interviews were conducted via phone calls due to the Government restrictions on movement because of the COVID-19 pandemic during the time of data collection. In all, five interviews were conducted in the Twi language and five were conducted in the English language. Each interview lasted for an average period of fifty minutes. The data obtained were analyzed thematically using Braun & Clarke’s (2008) six steps of thematic analysis and from the perspective of Critical Disability Theory (CDT). The study was guided by some ethical principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and acknowledgment of other scholarly works cited. Furthermore, ethical approval was sought from the Ethics Committee for Humanities at the University of Ghana before data was collected.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The CDT emanated from the works of scholars who made up the Frankfurt School which was a social, political, and

philosophical movement of thought made up of Western philosophers and Marxist social researchers who worked in Frankfurt, Germany in the early 1930s (Corradetti, 2017). CDT aims to explain oppression and the transformation of society by the maximization of human freedom and ending human domination (Hosking, 2008). It also focuses on the promotion of the liberation of persons living with disabilities from domination by other groups or society at large. According to Hosking (2008), the CDT highlights seven elements. These are multidimensionality, rights, voices of disability, language, transformative politics, valuing diversity, and the social model of disability.

**Multidimensionality:** Under this element, PWDs are viewed to sometimes constitute a diverse or variable population within the social structure (Hosking, 2008). So, addressing issues of PWDs should consider some key different indicators existing among them and how they play out in their unique experience of the problem.

**Rights:** In projecting the total liberation of PWDs from the social ills they face, CDT emphasizes the recognition and respect of their rights (Hosking, 2008). The theory, therefore, advocates for fair treatment for PWDs.

**Voice of persons with disabilities:** CDT emphasizes the need to listen to PWDs. In doing so, their perspective regarding their experiences especially on how they are treated can be heard or understood from their point of view (Hosking, 2008).

**Language:** CDT reveals how language is used to conceptualize disability (Hosking, 2008). CDT emphasizes how words or expressions are used to portray disability. It directs attention to a rethink of words and expressions used to represent PWD or disability issues that disadvantage those with impairments.

**Transformative politics:** According to Hosking, (2008), CDT emphasizes the right use of power by identifying those hidden motivators underpinning social attitudes towards disability issues.

**Valuing diversity:** Valuing diversity simply implies recognizing the differences existing among PWDs. Hosking (2008) emphasizes the need not to regard differences as irrelevant in disability issues. The CDT considers equality within the scope of diversity.

**Social Model of Disability:** According to the Social Disability Model, society rather than the impairment is responsible for “disabling” people (Sullivan, 2011). This model, therefore, relocates the issue of disability from peoples’ impairment to the societal barriers and attitudes that inhibit them from functioning to their full potential (Shakespeare, 2010).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion of the study. The findings presented were grounded on the objectives of the study which were: 1) To find out the types of violence persons with visual impairments experience and 2) To find out reasons why persons with visual impairments experience violence. The themes under objective one were verbal violence, physical violence, sexual violence, structural violence, and emotional/psychological violence. Also, under objective 2) the themes that emerged were disability, frustration from an intimate partner, and the transfer of anger.

**Objective one: Types of violence experienced by persons with visual impairment**

Peculiar to participants' narratives was their experience of the different forms of violence consisting of verbal, physical, sexual, emotional, and structural violence both in and outside their homes.

#### **Verbal violence**

This study considered verbal violence to constitute any derogatory utterance that degrades and humiliates a targeted person. Participants were subjected to verbal violence which often took the forms of derogatory expressions and labels by close relations, partners, and other persons outside their homes. Some of the derogatory expressions used against the visually impaired in their interaction with others included “wonsu wo ho”, “allo blind man”, and “ayarefo” which literally meant “you are not concerned about your pitiful condition”, “fake blind man” and “sick persons” respectively. An instance cited by a participant was:

*I suffered verbal abuse from her. For instance, she used to say she blamed herself for allowing a disabled person (a taboo) into her house. Also, she passed unfair comments that are not supposed to be used on a person with a disability. For example, she used to say, “You are not concerned about your pitiful situation” and even called me “allo blind man” (Larry, a male participant).*

Such expressions popularly used for PWDs create the image of incapacity and dependency. It is worth noting that in the Ghanaian context, such expressions are found to be very devaluing or demeaning and often used for someone or something of no or less regard. The use of such derogatory expressions for the visually impaired therefore suggested that perpetrators did not place value on them or disregarded them. As the element of language under the CDT rightly emphasizes, language is used to conceptualize disability (Hosking, 2008). Consequently, words and expressions used to portray PWDs have a direct effect on how people perceive and relate to them accordingly. As such the CDT emphasizes the rethink of words and expressions that disadvantages those with disability (Hosking, 2008).

It is also worth noting that in Ghana, a person with a disability could be perceived to have incurred the wrath of the gods for offending them or for the wrongdoings of his or her relatives (Naami, 2014; Slikker, 2009). This perception or belief of disability causality is usually accompanied by negative actions and attitudes toward PWDs. For instance, some persons may disassociate themselves from PWDs for fear of also incurring the wrath of the gods, while others may be hostile to them. From such a background it is not surprising that participants recounted the several maltreatments amongst which was verbal violence they often faced both in and outside of their homes due to how they were perceived. For instance, some of the female participants reported being insulted by their in-laws for marrying their respective sons, while others reported suffering insults among the different forms of maltreatment they were subjected to by their partner, relations, or an outsider. It is for this reason that the language element of the CDT emphasizes the need to alter the negative expressions or notions that have the potential to induce negative reactions toward PWDs.

#### **Physical violence**

In tandem with Al-Matalka's (2012) earlier study findings, persons with visual impairments experience physical violence manifested in the forms of beatings, hitting, and slapping which

was usually perpetrated by their close relations or partners in their households as in the case of the participants in Astbury & Walji's (2014) study. Some of the participants reportedly suffered physical violence for failing to satisfactorily complete their assigned chores at home or an errand they were made to run. Joy made evident of this situation by saying:

*I experienced a lot of violence from my biological father. At times he hit my head with a knife while instructing me to go on an errand or complete chores. He even poured water on me when I was sleeping or lying down. There are some of the things he asked me to do that I could do, but I had to suffer for those I couldn't. That is usually when he will be hitting my head with the knife asking me to go back to my mum. (Joy, a female participant)*

According to some female participants who were married, their experience of physical violence mostly manifested in the form of confrontations from their partners. Such situations at times aggravated into hot marital arguments sometimes accompanied by strikes of fist rendering them physically assaulted by their partners. May suffered a similar fate saying:

*He started beating and treating me anyhow as I began to lose my sight. When I got to know he had rented a room for another woman, I didn't take it easy on him. He beat me when I confronted him so I said he would have to kill me then. So yes, the beating was constant till I got fed up and left the marriage. (May, a female participant)*

The experiences of physical violence in the marital lives of some of the female participants are congruent with Khalifeh et al. (2013) and Daruwalla et al. (2013) study findings which found PWDs to be victims of domestic and non-domestic violence. Furthermore, the study participants suffered physical violence in the form of avoidable accidents due to negligence on the part of their caregivers or partners. Some of these avoidable accidents included getting hit by objects such as coal pots with fire, tables, and buckets intentionally placed on their pathways where they could hardly detect or escape as in the case of Happy. She said:

*One evening, I was sitting at the entrance to my bathroom when my cousin wanted to use my bathroom. Instead of asking me to give her way to the bathroom, she pushed me together with the bucket of water and asked me whether I did not see her. Sometimes too they pretend and intentionally put items on my way only for me to get hit. For instance, they could put a coal pot with fire on my way only for me to fall inside. (Happy, a female participant)*

#### **Sexual violence**

Generally, it is very difficult for persons with visual impairment to anticipate possible dangerous and risky situations or adequately guard themselves in times of danger. As such perpetrators of violence capitalize on their victims' (visually impaired) vulnerability and take undue advantage of them. Reported incidents of sexual violence by the study participants usually took the forms of sexual harassment, defilement, and attempted rape. Although either of the aforementioned forms of sexual violence is in direct contravention of Section 101 (2) and Section 103 of the Criminal and Other Offences Act, 1960 (Act 29) of Ghana, some participants were subjected to them. For instance, Joy recounted how she was defiled at age eight by her father's brother. She recounted:

*He came telling me how beautiful I was and took advantage of me even when I pleaded with him not to. He was the first male to*

*sleep with me. He forced me to sleep with him (Joy, a female participant).*

Peace also reported experiencing several episodes of sexual harassment from her former husband who just wanted her for his sexual gratification. She commented:

*I left him to go and stay in the kiosk. It is even a friend who helped me get the money to go and rent a kiosk. So, when I was in the kiosk too, he followed me saying that he wanted to have sex with me. He was sexually harassing me. (Peace, a female participant)*

The reported forms of sexual violence by the female participants were congruent with other studies (Milberger et al., 2003; Astbury & Walji 2014; Opoku et al., 2016; Azumah et al., 2019) which made similar assertions. Contrary to the United Nations (2015) report and Dembo, Mitra & Mckee (2018) study, the experience of sexual violence was not limited to females with a visual impairment only. For instance, in one of the narratives, Fame a male participant who doubled as a student in the Senior High School narrowly escaped getting raped by a close friend who was his senior. Thus, under the disguise of assisting the visually impaired student (Fame), the said male senior reportedly coerced him into engaging in sexual intercourse against his will. Under the pretense of giving assistance or being nice, the perpetrators of sexual violence usually took advantage of their victims just to gratify their sexual desires. Fame said:

*I encountered sexual harassment from a friend I trusted. I visited him at Akropong and he asked me whether I had had sex before. So, he started by asking if I would be happy having sex with him and I asked him how two males could have sex. He told me two males having sexual conduct is not anything, but I told him I could not do that. So, in the process, he decided to use a band to cover my mouth, and the neighbors nearby came to my rescue. He was arrested and taken to Akropong Police Station. (Fame, a male participant)*

Clearly, the perpetrators were taking undue advantage of their victim's vulnerabilities just to satisfy their sexual desires. These crimes committed by the perpetrators contravened Article 16 of UNCRPD and Section 4 of the Disability Act 715 of Ghana. Every human being by nature possesses inherent rights worthy of respect regardless of his/her condition. Based on such a premise, the Right element under the CDT emphasizes the fair treatment of people with disabilities. Thus, in projecting the total liberation of people with disabilities from the social ills they face, CDT emphasizes the recognition and respect of their rights (Hosking, 2008).

### **Structural violence**

For this study, structural violence is a subtle and invisible form of violence that is equally harmful. The study found that the participants were subjected to what Neille & Penn (2017) study described as structural violence. Specifically, they encountered some structural barriers that limited their access to resources and opportunities, promoted inequality, and constrained their efforts, especially in their communities. For instance, participants' experience of structural violence was illuminated mostly in their denial to access transportation services as in the case of those reported in Neille & Penn's (2017) study conducted in South Africa. Thus, commercial drivers and their respective conductors often denied them access to their vehicles although doing so contravened Article 29 of the Disability Act 715 of Ghana. This meant that participants had to consider alternative transport

services such as opting for a taxi or Uber which usually came at a higher cost as affirmed in Naami's (2019) study. In instances where PWDs were fortunate to be granted access too, they often were subjected to an unusual and embarrassing query of having their fares before being granted access to the vehicle. Larry explains his experiences in that regard, he said:

*There was once a time when it was raining, and I needed to take public transport to the house. Everyone was struggling for one. I managed to get into the bus and the conductor asked me to get down. So, I asked him why I should get down when it was heavily raining. He had to struggle with me to get me out of their vehicle. The struggle resulted in one of the vehicle's mirrors cracking and rendering me injured. So, in this country of ours, once you have a disability you are disadvantaged (Larry a male participant).*

It is imperative to note that participants suffered structural violence mainly because of how they were perceived. Often than not, it is a usual occurrence to find some persons with visual impairment begging for alms on the streets of Accra, Ghana (Naami, 2014; Kassah, 2008). As a result, they are usually registered in some people's minds as objects of pity since the majority are seen to fall on the benevolence of others for their daily livelihood. This perception of persons with visual impairment partly contributed to the negative attitudes of their society towards them. Some participants also experienced some structural violence which manifested in the form of being denied marital opportunities. For instance, some participants mentioned coming from societies that hardly endorsed marriages involving persons with visual impairments because they were seen as a burden or unworthy of such an honor. It is for this reason that most of the female participants (although married at the time of the interview) affirmed to be denied initially. In the quote below Peace expresses her bitter experience of being denied marrying the man of her dreams by her potential in-laws. She lamented:

*His family members didn't allow the marriage to come on because they were complaining that I was blind, how could a young man like him come for me while there are plenty of women around? (Peace, a female participant)*

Those who finally got married too were thought of as not deserving of ordinance marriage which was seen to require more money to carry out. As such, they were seen as unworthy of such an honor (getting married under ordinance) simply because they had a disability as in the case of Peace.

*Some people were saying that because of my blindness, I didn't have to be married under the Ordinance and that I deserved a traditional marriage only. So, I asked the person why, am I not a human being. Why is he talking to me like this? I am a human being and I equally deserve to be married under the Ordinance. (Peace, a female participant)*

Also, some reported suffering unfruitful relationships with their in-laws, and in extreme cases, their relations just because their marriages were not approved by them. Akin to this situation were the findings of Hunt et al., 2018 and Kassah et al., 2014.

In relating these reported acts of structural violence to the social model of disability as an element of the CDT, the issue of disability ought to be relocated from the participants' impairment to the societal barriers and negative attitudes (Hosking, 2008). Thus, societal barriers and negative attitudes limit the capacity of PWDs including the visually impaired to function to their full potential (Shakespeare, 2010). Again, it remained an indication

of the marginalization and relegation often faced by the visually impaired as members of society. Thus, persons with visual impairment are often restricted by societal structures which take little or no account of them leading to their oppression, marginalization, and exclusion from participation in mainstream social activities. The social model of disability element of the CDT, therefore, calls for a “barrier-free” environment devoid of marginalization and discrimination of PWDs if they are to be liberated. The social model of disability of the CDT further concludes that “Disability” is socially created and not a consequence of impairment or a deficit in the body (Sullivan, 2011). Consequently, PWDs, in general, are mostly disadvantaged due to the failure of the social arrangements of society to meet their needs (Hosking, 2008). The CDT, therefore, emphasizes the need for social change while dismantling societal barriers (Hosking, 2008)

### **Emotional/Psychological violence**

It is worth noting that, participants’ experiences of the different forms of violence did not happen in isolation. Each of the episodes of their experiences of violence was accompanied by some form of emotional/psychological effects. Evidence of participants’ experience of emotional violence was some indicators which included the rise and fall in their tone, constant breaking of their voices, and their constant sobbing during the interview sessions as they recalled their ordeals. Whereas this was the case for some, others had sad looks on their faces while recounting their sufferings during the interviews. Regular exposure to the different forms of violence coupled with the constant maltreatment of participants registered in them some pain and agony they hardly escaped. Like the study findings of Scherer, Snyder & Fisher (2016) where students with disabilities reported an emotional deficit, participants also exhibited a high sense of emotional “bankruptcy” having been subjected to different forms of violence. In addition to experiencing those acts of violence, the study participants were vulnerable to lots of maltreatment in their households which led them to emotionally deteriorate as emphasized by Beusenbergh & Orley (1994) cited in Astbury & Walji (2014). An example was the situation where Happy had her cooked meals mixed with fecal matter and urine by her mother. She said:

*My biological mother could move from Ashaiman to urinate in a cup and put it in a fridge for me to drink. One time someone dashed me corn dough which I bagged in smaller pieces. Naturally, I like to give, so I put some into a bucket and took it to an old woman only to realize fecal matter had been added to it when I got there. I also prepared groundnut soup only for it to be filled with urine. I confronted her but she said nothing. Sometimes she urinates then... hmmm it is not easy oo. She could clean her genitalia with my towel and soak it in urine thereafter. So, people tell me to soak it in soapy water and wash it. To worsen matters, she spread medicine on our bed and as a result, we couldn't sleep because we felt so itchy. My son had soreness all around his buttocks and sexual organs to the extent that whenever he scratched them, blood oozed out of them hmmm. If I had known that I would be interviewed, I would have taken pictures for evidence's sake. (Happy, a female participant).*

The intensity of the regular maltreatment faced by the study participants made them feel less of a human being to the extent that Happy considered suicide attempts as an option at a point in her life. She recounted:

*I was 27 years before I was able to locate my parents. I have been suffering since my childhood and even more now that am blind. I sometimes find a place to sit and whiles crying I begin to ask myself why am suffering like this. When I think about the violence I experience, the only option that comes to mind is committing suicide. Then later the thought of my son comes to mind. So, I just cry but stop when my son tells me to (Happy, a female participant).*

According to Shah, Tsitsou & Woodin (2016), such a situation makes the participants feel worthless and have low self-esteem.

Participants’ experiences of the various reported forms of violence were a direct infringement on their rights in various ways. First, it was in direct contravention of Sections 15 and 16 of the UNCRPD (2006) which Ghana is a signatory. Secondly, it contravenes Sections 4 (1) and 29 of the Disability Act 715 of Ghana. The element of Rights in the CDT, therefore, emphasizes the fair treatment of the visually impaired on the premise that they possess inherent rights and are worthy of respect regardless of their impairment. To help achieve this, the element of transformative politics in the CDT adds that, there is a need for more robust political control of social institutions sanctioned to handle issues related to disability (Hosking, 2008). Thus, persons with visual impairment’s continuous experience of violence is a clear indication of weak policies or low commitment aimed at adequately addressing such preventable situations. The need for politically motivated policies is of the essence to help liberate PWDs particularly those with a visual impairment from experiencing violence. Also, the transformative politics element of the CDT calls for a more robust system spearheaded by the political will and drives to address disability issues (Hosking, 2008).

Aside from these, it is important to give weight to the voice of PWDs in all matters concerning them. Congruent with the element of “voice” of the CDT, this is a key way to understand their issues from their own perspective and assist them accordingly. It is for this reason that this study employed a suitable methodological approach as well as a data collection tool that provided the study participants with the chance to share their experiences of violence from their own perspectives. Their issues of concern have therefore been presented explicitly as they reported and subsequently fed into the proposed recommendations to help mitigate them. Also, the study participants stood the chance of going through some emotional relief or healing having been offered the opportunity to share the experiences they might have never had the chance to. In the end, the element of the voice of the CDT relates to the study in the sense that the accounts of persons with visual impairment are of high necessity in finding solutions to their woes.

### **Objective two: The reasons why persons with visual impairment experience violence**

#### **Disability**

Prior to the acquisition of their disability, some participants who were not born blind reported going about their normal daily activities with ease without any assistance. However, having acquired the disability meant that they had to depend on their caregivers for regular assistance to carry out their normal daily activities. It also meant that they had to depend on their caregivers for their regular source of livelihood since most of them were not as gainfully employed as they used to be before acquiring the disability. Participants’ state of dependency

coupled with the held negative perceptions about disability was cited as the main reasons behind their subjection to the reported forms of violence by their perpetrators. Hope, one of the participants lamented:

*Yeah because of my disability, they realized that I have now become blind so how were they going to live with me? It is because they thought I am now dependent and can't do anything to help them. Because when I had my sight, nothing like that was happening to me. (Hope, a male participant)*

### **Economic dependency**

Many of the participants were mostly unemployed and as a result, found it very difficult to satisfactorily meet their respective daily needs. Thus, they were admittedly in a state of financial difficulties which rendered them poor. This is evident and congruent with WHO's (2011) report which emphasized that PWDs usually experience poverty which is characterized by higher rates of deprivation including poor housing, food insecurity, inadequate access to health care, and lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Poverty, therefore, made it difficult for many of the participants to attain competitive educational heights due to the high expenses involved in acquiring higher (tertiary) education. Due to poverty, participants' caregivers were unable to secure their higher education. Participants' inability to attain higher educational status presupposes their difficulty in having the requisite skills required of them to become competitive in the job market. It also suggests that they were unable to take on employment positions that pay a higher income. As a result, most of them were likely to be in low-paying jobs rendering them economically dependent. Being in such a situation further suggested that most of the participants were not in the capacity to perform their complementary role of supporting their families, especially in the case of those who were married. As such some had to fall on either their relatives or partners for their source of livelihood. Having to bear the responsibility of caring for the visually impaired therefore required that caregivers were financially equipped to carry out such a role efficiently. Unfortunately, the partners of some women participants reportedly failed to meet this expectation and as a result, carried out their frustration on their wives. Thus, such partners reportedly vented their anger and frustration on their wives (most female participants) once they returned home without money to cater for the house. Such frustration was even more intense when they returned home to realize their wives (women with visual impairment) failed to cook even without being left with money. As a result, they were subjected to constant verbal and physical violence at home. Peace indicated:

*That time too I couldn't cook because I had no money, nor did, he give me some. But when he returned from work, however, he expected me to have cooked. If I say there is no food because he didn't give me money, then he will start beating me. (Peace, a female participant)*

The female participants also risk being sexually violated if they fail to gratify their partner's sexual desires simply because they were not in the mood or were not ready to do so. According to the female participants they suffered from their partners' frustration since they were seen to have failed in playing their complementary roles as supportive wives as they used to be without their disabilities. Love said:

*The cause for the violent act was that if he wanted to have sex with me, I did not give him the chance. It is just this; there is no other reason. (Love, female participant)*

### **Transfer of anger**

The study findings further revealed that participants sometimes were subjected to violence by their caregivers out of anger. For instance, Happy spoke of how her mother capitalized on her condition to mistreat her for failing to meet her monetary demands. According to Happy, her mother was making regular monetary demands prior to her disability and surprisingly she was doing the same even after her disability acquisition. Happy narrated:

*I used to get money because I was selling banku with tilapia and I also sold fried yam. So, my mother felt I should get her more money than what I was giving her, but I couldn't also give her all my capital. So, when I fell sick and people came to visit me and gave me money, she wanted me to give her all the money to spend. When I was working too, let's say if I gave her Gh¢50.00, she wanted me to give her Gh¢100.00 which I couldn't. So, to pay me back, she decided to maltreat me when I acquired the disability. (Happy, female participant)*

According to Hosking (2008), there are different levels of maltreatment likely to be experienced by PWDs as a unified group or as dispersed persons having a disability. For instance, discussions on addressing violence against PWDs should not be oblivious to the distinct experiences existing amongst and within persons of different types of disabilities. In the case of the study participants, it is important to note that, there existed variations in why and how the study participants experienced the reported different forms of violence. The multidimensionality element of the CDT, therefore, explains how those variations intersect to shape the experiences of the participants (Hosking, 2008). It further emphasizes the importance of paying a holistic view to the difference in the circumstances under which both male and female participants experienced violence when the objective is to liberate them from all the reported forms of violence they are subjected to.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

The aim of this study was to find out the various forms of violence perpetrated against persons with visual impairment and the reasons why they experience such violence. From the study findings, it was revealed that the study participants suffered verbal, physical, sexual, structural, and emotional violence by their close relations, partners, and some community members at large as well as derogatory labeling and stereotyping. Based on these findings it is recommended that the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development encourages persons with visual impairments within its jurisdiction to report any case of harassment, abuse, and maltreatment to assist them in seeking justice. Considering the best interest of the victims, the Department must prioritize such reported cases and expedite the processes of handling them.

Furthermore, the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development should embark on sensitization campaigns specifically on disability issues. The sensitization campaigns must first aim at altering the negative perceptions/attitudes held about those with disabilities. Secondly, sensitization campaigns should deliberately educate people to support persons with visual impairment, respect their rights, and treat them with maximum care rather than violating them.

Though PWDs are entitled to 3% of the District Common Fund aimed at assisting them, the fund is inadequate to support all PWDs within the District or municipality in their respective regions of Ghana. Also, the participants reportedly were considered burdensome by their caregivers for bearing the extra responsibility of catering for them which they considered economically demanding. It is therefore recommended that the Government expand the District Common Fund in that regard. Thereafter, other philanthropic organizations may collaborate with the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development to create more employment avenues for persons with visual impairment. They could do this by organizing more vocational training sessions to equip persons with visual impairment with vocational and employable skills to create jobs of their own and be economically independent. Also, benevolent cooperate bodies may provide interested persons with visual impairment with start-up capital to begin their venture after they have acquired the necessary skills. Follow-ups could be made to ensure the proper or judicious use of such funds.

Furthermore, it is evident from the study findings that participants' rights were not respected for which reason they were subjected to different forms of violence. It is therefore recommended that existing policies and laws that seek to protect the rights of persons with visual impairment be enforced. For instance, this study found that drivers and their conductors usually denied persons with visual impairment the opportunity to access public transport. Also, the study participants were mistaken for begging for alms when they needed assistance with a direction to a place or crossing the roads. For these reasons, it is recommended that Section 29 and 30 of Disability Act 715 (2006) which emphasizes on reserved seats for PWDs is enforced to make transportation services more reliable and easily accessible for persons with visual impairment.

Also, the study findings revealed that the mother association which the study participants identified themselves with served as a support group and provided an enabling environment where they could share their experiences and receive emotional relief and comfort. In that light, it is recommended that the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development in the Municipal and District Assemblies advocate for the association to be adequately resourced to help more visually impaired who have experienced violence amongst other mistreatments. It is believed that through active and persistent advocacy, the Department of Social Welfare and Community Development could garner assistance from corporate bodies and non-governmental organizations.

Finally, the study was carried out focusing on persons with visual impairment experience of violence in the Accra Metropolis. Since the study findings cannot be transferred to persons with other disabilities, it is recommended that future studies investigate violence perpetrated against persons with other forms of disability. This will help bring out the unique experiences of individuals living with different forms of disability, and further aid in the provision of valuable interventions that are based on evidence and tailored to suit each form of disability.

Then again, other studies could investigate intimate partner violence amongst persons with visual impairment since most of the married participants reported being violated by their partners.

## CONCLUSION

The global community admits that every human being possesses inherent rights and dignity regardless of their state of being or physical condition and as such must be accorded the needed respect and love. Unfortunately, this is not the case for most persons with visual impairment as evidenced in this study and reported in some disability studies. Thus, most PWDs for no fault of theirs incur inhumane treatment borne out of negative beliefs and stereotypic ideas about disability conditions. The question then is, should PWDs continue to suffer this fate for no fault of theirs? "While we all are disabilities in the making", would we want to suffer a similar fate as reported in the case of the study participants? Would the world be a haven for us in that regard? Though participants cited the negative belief perpetrators held about their condition as partly the reason for their experience of violence, it was rather obvious that their experience of violence was largely due to the insensitivity of the perpetrators who delighted in taking advantage of the vulnerability of their victims. Regardless of the reason, subjecting a fellow human being to violence is not justifiable, and tolerable. So, the state of a person with visual impairment should not be made a recipe for violence justifiable by the negative stereotypic beliefs held by perpetrators. Therefore, there is a need for concerted efforts to create a tolerable and disability-friendly environment for all.

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