



TRANSFORMING HOW SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS REPORTED IN KENYA

Wangu Kanja, a survivor of sexual violence herself, is spearheading a revolution in how sexual violence is documented and reported in Kenya.

The work of the Wangu Kanja Foundation (WKF) has provided survivors with comprehensive support since 2005 and seeks to encourage decision-makers to change the way in which sexual violence is reported and managed on a country-wide level.

Together with Institute for Global Innovation (IGI) researchers at the University of Birmingham, WKF have now developed 'MobApp' and are piloting the scheme across all 47 counties of Kenya. The innovative technological solution helps a network of fellow survivors to support people through the reporting, documenting and tracking of new cases of sexual violence, and helps collate the supporting evidence base to drive even greater change.

TESTIMONIES GOING UNHEARD

Sexual violence is notoriously difficult to investigate and prosecute, especially in low and middle income countries such as Kenya, where an estimated 11 million women have experienced sexual violence, including rape and intimate partner violence during their lifetime.

Survivors of sexual violence in low and middle income countries face overly bureaucratic and poorly-resourced systems, laced with corruption, leading to myriad problems with the stories of survivors usually going unheard. This has significant consequences for access to justice as survivors rarely report rape to the police, fearful of reprisal by the perpetrators; discouraged by improper practices and non-empathetic responses from law enforcement; and the culture of



stigma in which victims seem more likely to be punished than perpetrators. To report a case of sexual violence in Kenya, survivors must have a Post Rape Care form completed and present it to the police. The survivors' testimony plays a very limited role, highlighted by the small box afforded to it on the form.

Dr Heather Flowe, IGI Fellow and researcher in the field of memory and criminal events at the University of Birmingham, outlines the stark reality facing those who do come forward to report.

'When we travelled to Nairobi last summer, we learned from multiple organisations that over 10,000 women sought medical services following sexual violence. Yet, few survivors find justice. In 2017 and 2018, the Wangu Kanja Foundation handled 1,012 cases with only 5 cases resulting in convictions.'

However, through collaboration with partners in Kenya, Dr Flowe is hopeful that outcomes will start to improve. Furthermore, the development of MobApp – a mobile application to support more detailed interviews with survivors of sexual violence – promises to help inform more effective services and greater support for survivors.



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BUILDING ON THE WORK OF WKF

The IGI and the Global Challenges Research Fund supported a number of visits to Kenya, where Dr Flowe and her team spent time with the WKF, who have been at the forefront of positive change for over a decade.

The Foundation walks alongside the survivor throughout the process, helping them to navigate the many layers of bureaucracy at the police station, the medical examiner's office and the courtroom. The Survivors of Sexual Violence in Kenya network ensure that all survivors have a sympathetic individual who will listen to them and help them through the justice system.

The relationship between the IGI research team and WKF was paramount in accessing key stakeholders along the case referral pathway including the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Interior and the Judiciary/National Council of Administration of Justice, the Internal Affairs Unit, and the National Police Service.

'In the stakeholders we talked to, there is a definite appetite for change,' explains Dr Flowe. 'There is a desire to shift the culture and stigma that surround sexual violence in Kenya. To this end, stakeholders such as the WKF said that data on the nature of sexual violence in Kenya would be key for both the protection of survivors and the development of effective prevention and response strategies.'

'There is also a need to better equip medical service providers and law enforcement officers who investigate sexual violence in countries with limited resources like Kenya. As examples, we are developing innovative and low cost approaches for police interviews drawing from what we know about best practices for obtaining memory evidence from rape victims in the UK. This, along with crime linkage tools, will better enable police to prioritise cases and solve crimes committed by serial perpetrators.' Addressing this second set of challenges has underpinned much of Dr Flowe's previous work in Kenya. She is working with an IGI supported interdisciplinary team from across the University, including colleagues from Nursing, Public Policy, Political Science, Law, and Arts and Humanities. They are focusing on translating the Protocol for the Documentation and Investigation of Sexual Violence in Conflict for use by people on the ground, like smaller NGOs, in carrying out interviews to document sexual violence cases using best practice.

Sexual violence cases can often span many years. At trial it is common to see cases thrown out due to memory contamination or leading suggestions in the initial interview, casting doubt on the account of the survivor. Carrying out interviews in line with said Protocol requires training, mentorship and a regular feedback process with experts familiar with best practice. Using this work as a launch pad, the IGI research team set about developing innovative approaches to support effective sexual violence case prosecutions.

EMPOWERING SURVIVORS TO GATHER EVIDENCE

The MobApp project shows what can be achieved when expertise from the UK research community work together with local partners in low and middle income countries.

The recently launched pilot project is gathering testimony from over 1,000 survivors which will help provide policy makers with country-wide data about sexual violence and law enforcement with the information to help focus their resources on areas that require more attention.

Equally, by providing a wider picture of sexual violence characteristics, such as who is perpetrating and who is most at risk, MobApp can potentially be used to reduce incidents; whether that is by improving security measures in locations with a high number of incidents, or by helping police – who have limited resources – prioritise cases by using crime linkage to identify serial perpetrators.

'MobApp data will help WKF and other organisations campaign for meaningful policy change,' says Dr Flowe. 'Past research has shown that in Kenya, rape victim blaming is prevalent and perpetrators are not held to account. There are serious misconceptions about rape which hold women responsible for rape. These include the idea that women provoke men to rape, that rape is only perpetrated by strangers, and that men are entitled to sex through marriage or gift giving.'

Crucially, the intimate and painful information that is collected from survivors requires a different approach to conventional surveys. While survivors can self-report, the WKF and their partners found that evidence was vastly improved, in terms of response rates and accuracy, by using interviewers from the

'We need to restore dignity to survivors of sexual violence and we need to be innovative and use technology for efficiency through the Access to Justice Referral pathway'

– Wangu Kanja

Survivors of Sexual Violence in Kenya network. They are inherently trusted by interviewees and their communities and can build empathy and rapport based on their shared experience.

Dr Flowe adds, *'Though we are looking at getting the wider snapshot of information through the app and the interviews, we should not lose sight of the importance of having survivors be supported and having their voice heard. Knowing there is a network of support is invaluable. However, there is still much more to be done.'*

Once the pilot project is completed, the team plan to roll it out further afield. The data and methodology already established through the project could equally inform similar pilot schemes in other resource-poor countries.

'The potential for MobApp to achieve justice for more victims via crime linkage should not be underestimated – for example, some rape series contain more than 50 offences, and apprehended rapists have reported committing an average of 7–11 rapes for every rape they were convicted for'

– Professor Jessica Woodhams,
Director of the Centre for Applied
Psychology at the University of
Birmingham.