

## **Social context of Intimate Partner Violence and system response during Covid-19 in Africa: A scoping review**

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### **Abstract**

**Background:** Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a global social and public health crisis entrenched in broader social and cultural context. COVID-19 disproportionately affected relationships and interactions in diverse ways. This scoping review attempts to synthesize evidence on the social contexts of IPV and system responses to covid-19 in Africa.

**Methods:** A scoping review will be conducted following Arksey and O' Malley (2005), refined by Briggs (2020). Published and unpublished literature will be sourced from bibliographic databases, institutional websites and electronic libraries from January 2020 to April 2021. The search strategy will be executed in phases using multiple search techniques from the following databases: Academic Search Complete (EBSCO), Gender Studies Database, Africa-Wide and Social Science Database (via EBSCO), Web of Science, WHO Covid-19 Library and Middle East & Africa Database (via ProQuest), Sociological Abstract (EBSCO), and Google Scholar. In addition, Open Grey, Grey Literature, the BBC portal and other relevant websites will be searched. Only articles written in English language will be screened following the Briggs (2020) recommendations. Extracted information from these sources will be convergently synthesised and presented using both thematic approach and descriptive statistics.

**Discussion:** The concomitant impact of Covid-19 on IPV and system response requires clear understanding in addressing the issue.

### **Introduction**

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a global social and public health crisis entrenched in broader social and cultural context (Moreira & Pinto da Costa, 2020). COVID-19 disproportionately affected developed and developing countries disproportionately in terms of mortality rates and periods of lockdowns. Developing countries, especially sub-Saharan Africa had fewer mortality cases, short periods of lockdown, yet the disruptions in socio-economic activities, well-being, food security and relationships are still unfolding (Furbush, Josephson, Kilic, & Michler, 2021). Governments in Africa adopted isolation, social distancing and lockdown as measures to curtail the spread of covid-19 among the populace. These measures yielded some fruitful outcomes as it could be seen in the reported cases and mortality rates. Nonetheless, concerns have been raised on the unintended consequences of these measures. The concerns are valid as sudden disruption due to the pandemic provided limited opportunities for the gendered consequences and measures that could ameliorate the challenges. The partial reflections on the inherent gendered disparities in vulnerability within existing structures could have exacerbated the incidence and prevalence of IPV in Africa, like it occurred in some developed countries.

Contexts play critical roles in the derivative impacts of covid 19. The virus, despite the variants, remains the same across cultures, especially in the symptoms and the possible consequences on the host. The social networks and relationships had differentiated and gendered experiences of the outbreak and the attendant measures in place to curtail the spread. From around March 2020, when African Countries started recording index cases of covid-19, the governments followed existing protocols of managing covid-19 by adopting isolation, social distancing and restrictions on movements. Similar to what obtained in places where such measures were introduced (Agüero, 2021; Donato, 2020; Moreira & Pinto da Costa, 2020), cases of IPVs escalated as many sexual partners, couples and families were forced into spaces and more time together. The growth in reported cases appears cross cultural. For example, there was a 7.5 per cent increase in IPV within the first 3 months of lockdown in some metropolitan areas of the United States (Leslie & Wilson, 2020). The situation was worse in China where cases of IPV tripled in the first quarter of 2020 compared to that of the previous year (Roesch, Amin, Gupta, & García-Moreno, 2020; Zhang, 2020). A survey in Peru also reflected a 48 per cent increase in cases of IPVs compared to the period before covid-19 (Agüero, 2021). In Europe, with reference to Spain, Italy (Donato, 2020), a similar increase was recorded from a small-scale survey in Ethiopia (Tadesse, Tarekegn, Wagaw, Muluneh, & Kassa) also documented an increase in cases during lockdown periods.

The novelty of covid-19 like other complex emergencies partly supports the much-needed evidence that can guide policies, measures and interventions and mitigate the disruptions of socioeconomic structures and network of relationships. Africa is one of the regions with the highest prevalence of IPV before covid-19 pandemic. A 2020 systematic review and meta-analysis of cross-section studies reported a pooled prevalence of 44 percent of domestic violence in Africa (Muluneh, Stulz, Francis, & Agho, 2020). Also, across counties in sub-Saharan Africa, there are variations in the share of IPV, as prevalence ranged from about 30 per cent to almost 60 percent (Bamiwuye & Odimegwu, 2014). The somewhat enabling environment for IPV in Africa supports the conjecture that the region would be worse hit by IPV due to inherent defects in social institutions and excruciating effects from the political economy on households and network of relations. Certain contextual factors make IPV highly gendered and women as victims in most African communities. Gender inequalities, low women status (Oyediran & Feyisetan, 2017); poverty, low level of education and drinking appear common across African communities (McCloskey, Boonzaier, Steinbrenner, & Hunter, 2016).

Comparatively, Africa lags behind in the literature on availability of organized evidence on the impacts of covid-19 on relationships and the inherent weaknesses in institutions, structures and the attendant effects on well-being and inequalities. Organised evidence is needed to expand the frontiers of knowledge, policy and practice. The immediate relevance of this form of evidence is critical as most African countries adopted isolation and the ‘stay at home’ order during the Covid-19 pandemic. How these measures shaped the contexts, incidence and prevalence of IPV in Africa has been marginally documented. The absence of nationwide surveys, functional spaces for evidence gathering and the need for social distancing and isolation also impacted on what is evidence as evidence. Despite these limitations, a scoping review that adopts a mixed method

approach and convergence in orientation will help in bridging existing gaps in knowledge. We envisaged that this review will offer insights into the responses from systems, which include State and non-state actors to the increase in IPV cases and how responsive measures, interventions and policies can be more responsive in reducing vulnerabilities in complex humanitarian emergencies in Africa.

### **Research Questions**

The review will be guided by questions that will facilitate evidence mapping and synthesis on IPV's occurrence within the period under consideration and the responses from State and non-State actors. The specific questions are:

1. What are the prevalent IPV's across different social categories in sub-Saharan Africa during the covid-19 lockdown between January 2020 to April 2021?
2. How did State and non-State Actors respond to the cases of IPV's in these regions?
3. What measures or interventions are traceable to State and non-State in this region as a result of IPV's during the lockdown in 2020?

### **Methods/Design**

The scoping review protocol is developed following Arksey and O' Malley (2005), suggestions as refined in the updated Methodological Guidance for Scoping Review by Joana Briggs (Peters et al., 2020). A mixed methods approach that is convergent in orientation will guide the evidence generation and the presentation of findings.

### **Search Strategy**

We will implement the search strategy in phases to find both published and unpublished literature from a wide range of sources (bibliographic databases, institutional websites and electronic libraries). The search techniques will include the conventional subject searching, reference list checking, citation searching and contact with experts.

First, we will conduct preliminary searches for Social Science Database, Middle East & Africa Database (via ProQuest), Academic Search Complete, Africa-Wide, Medline Complete (all via EBSCO) and Google Scholar. This will be followed by analysis of the text words contained in the title and abstract of the search results, to identify keywords in the natural language and controlled vocabulary. This will be conducted to develop a list of general and sub-categories of terms related to IPV and Covid-19.

These terms will be used for searching the bibliographic databases or websites using the Boolean operators (See Appendix for the full list of search terms). The search strings will be adapted for each database or website to retrieve relevant studies published in English within the last 12 months (2020 to date). The search will be filtered by region (Africa or SSA). The databases, institutional websites and other sources to be searched are listed in table 1:

Table 1: The Databases that will be searched

S/N	Database
1	Google Scholar
2	Web of Science
3	Coronavirus Research Library, Middle East & Africa Collection, Psychology, Sociology and Social Science Database (all via ProQuest)
4	Sociological Abstract (via EBSCO)
5	Africa-wide (EBSCO)
6	Academic Search (via EBSCO)
7	Medline Complete (via EBSCO)
8	Africa Portal
9	Africa Journal Archive
	Institutional web sites and other sources
10	World Bank eLibrary ( <a href="https://elibrary.worldbank.org/">https://elibrary.worldbank.org/</a> )
11	· Open Grey
12	· Grey Literature Report
13	· BBC Website

### **Inclusion Criteria**

Studies reporting IPV cases in Africa will be considered for the review. Likewise, studies published between January 2020 to April 2021 focusing on IPV reactions, strategies, intervention and policies will also be included.

### **Exclusion Criteria**

Only studies published in English will be retrieved. Reports, cases, experiences, stories and studies focusing on IPV in other regions outside Africa and other languages will be excluded.

### **Participants:**

The target population for this review will include reports, cases and experiences that are IPV in nature among male, female men or women, young, old, and older adults, Adolescent or Young People, Teens or Teenagers.

### **Context:**

The focus is on Africa and availability of evidence or reports portraying cases, experiences, and stories on IPV within the African contexts. Focus will also be on system responses. By responses, we will target measures, interventions, reactions and efforts that were taken or being considered by government agencies and their representatives, high commissions and other governmental agencies in Africa. The non-state actors will include religious bodies, community-based organisations and other non-governmental organisations. Their responses will be assessed in the form of steps taken to raise up, champion measures, initiatives or interventions that address IPV and can mitigate vulnerability. We will also consider responses in the form of support given to

victims to reduce the possible effects on their well-being and improve their resilience. Responses initiated to also punish or rehabilitate perpetrators will also be considered at systems levels.

#### Expected Results:

The appendix contains preliminary evidence from the pilot search and the search terms that will guide this review. From these sources, we expect both qualitative and quantitative evidence that will be synthesised through a converging lens and presented following the suggestions by Peters et al. (2020). Through this approach, it will be possible to gain insights into the contexts that supported or shaped the prevalence of IPV that emerged across the African countries covered in this review and the system responses to the challenge. Lessons learnt will be presented for research, policy and practice purposes.

#### **Discussion**

The concomitant impact of Covid-19 on IPV and system response requires clear understanding in addressing the issue.

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## Appendix

### Search Terms

(COVID\* [Title/Abstract]) or (Corona\*[Title/Abstract])

(“Intimate Partner Violence” [Title/Abstract]) or (“Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse” [Title/Abstract]) or (“Intimate Partner Homicide” [Title/Abstract]) or (“Domestic Violence” [Title/Abstract]) or (“Domestic Abuse” [Title/Abstract]) or (“Courtship Violence” [Title/Abstract]) or (“Abusive Relationship” [Title/Abstract]) or (IPV\*[Title/Abstract]) or (Partner Violence, Intimate [MeSH Terms]) or (Violence, Intimate Partner [MeSH Terms]) or (“Intimate Partner Abuse” [MeSH Terms]) or (Abuse, Intimate Partner [MeSH Terms]) or (Partner Abuse, Intimate [MeSH Terms]) or (“Dating Violence” [MeSH Terms]) or (Violence, Dating [MeSH Terms]) or (“Spouse Abuse” [MeSH Terms]) or (“Spousal Violence” [Title/Abstract]) or (LGBTQ[MeSH Terms]) (“Partner Abuse”[MeSH Terms]) or (“Lesbian Partner Abuse”[MeSH Terms]) or (“Bisexual Partner Abuse”[MeSH Terms]) or (“Abused Gay Men” [MeSH Terms])

3. (“Sub-Saharan Africa” [Title/Abstract]) or (Africa[Title/Abstract]) or (“West\* Africa” [Title/Abstract]) or (“South\* Africa” [Title/Abstract]) or (“Central Africa” [Title/Abstract]) or (“Northwest\*”[Title/Abstract]) or (“Southwest\*”[Title/Abstract]) or (“East\* Africa” [Title/Abstract]) or (“Northeast\* Africa” [Title/Abstract]) or (“North\* Africa” [Title/Abstract]) or (“Africa South of the Sahara” [MeSH Terms]) or (Africa, Western[MeSH Terms]) or (“Africa, Southern” [MeSH Terms]) or (“Africa, Northern” MeSH Terms]) or (“Africa, Eastern” MeSH Terms]) or (“Africa, Central” MeSH Terms])

Table 2: Results of the Pilot Search

Database	Result (Number of Eligible articles)
Africa-Wide via EBSCOHOST	8
Coronavirus Research Library, Middle East & Africa Collection, Psychology, Sociology and Social Science Database via ProQuest	14+52= 76 (See search results below)
Academic Search Complete (EBSCO)	6
Medline Complete (EBSCOHOST)	8
Google Scholar	4,040

Five databases namely: Coronavirus Research Library, Middle East & Africa Collection, Psychology, Sociology and Social Science Database were searched via ProQuest were searched.

Filtered by 12 months, Africa OR Uganda OR South Africa OR Nigeria OR Kampaka Uganda OR Kenya OR Senegal OR Egypt OR Ethiopia OR Ghana OR Sierra Leone

Table 3: search Terms

Set	Search	Databases	Results
S4	<p><u>(ti(Corona*) OR ab(Corona*) OR mainsubject(Covid*)) AND (ti(("Intimate Partner Violence" OR "Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse" OR "Intimate Partner Homicide" OR "Domestic Violence" OR "Domestic Abuse" OR "Courtship Violence" OR "Abusive Relationship" OR IPV* OR Partner Violence, Intimate OR Violence, Intimate Partner OR "Intimate Partner Abuse" OR Abuse, Intimate Partner OR "Dating Violence" OR Violence, Dating OR "Spouse Abuse" OR "Spousal Violence" OR "Partner Abuse" OR "Lesbian Partner Abuse" OR "Bisexual Partner Abuse" OR "Abused Gay Men")) OR ab(("Intimate Partner Violence" OR "Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse" OR "Intimate Partner Homicide" OR "Domestic Violence" OR "Domestic Abuse" OR "Courtship Violence" OR "Abusive Relationship" OR IPV* OR Partner Violence, Intimate OR Violence, Intimate Partner OR "Intimate Partner Abuse" OR Abuse, Intimate Partner OR "Dating Violence" OR Violence, Dating OR "Spouse Abuse" OR "Spousal Violence" OR "Partner Abuse" OR "Lesbian Partner Abuse" OR "Bisexual Partner Abuse" OR "Abused Gay Men")) OR mainsubject(("Intimate Partner Violence" OR "Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse" OR "Intimate Partner Homicide" OR "Domestic Violence" OR "Domestic Abuse" OR "Courtship Violence" OR "Abusive Relationship" OR IPV* OR Partner Violence, Intimate OR Violence, Intimate Partner OR "Intimate Partner Abuse" OR Abuse, Intimate Partner OR "Dating Violence" OR Violence, Dating OR "Spouse Abuse" OR "Spousal Violence" OR "Partner Abuse" OR "Lesbian Partner Abuse" OR "Bisexual Partner Abuse" OR "Abused Gay Men"))))Limits applied</u></p> <p>S2 AND S3</p>	5 databases	52

S3	<p><u>(ti(Covid*) OR ab(Covid*) OR mainsubject(Covid*)) AND (ti(("Intimate Partner Violence" OR "Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse" OR "Intimate Partner Homicide" OR "Domestic Violence" OR "Domestic Abuse" OR "Courtship Violence" OR "Abusive Relationship" OR IPV* OR Partner Violence, Intimate OR Violence, Intimate Partner OR "Intimate Partner Abuse" OR Abuse, Intimate Partner OR "Dating Violence" OR Violence, Dating OR "Spouse Abuse" OR "Spousal Violence" OR "Partner Abuse" OR "Lesbian Partner Abuse" OR "Bisexual Partner Abuse" OR "Abused Gay Men")) OR ab(("Intimate Partner Violence" OR "Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse" OR "Intimate Partner Homicide" OR "Domestic Violence" OR "Domestic Abuse" OR "Courtship Violence" OR "Abusive Relationship" OR IPV* OR Partner Violence, Intimate OR Violence, Intimate Partner OR "Intimate Partner Abuse" OR Abuse, Intimate Partner OR "Dating Violence" OR Violence, Dating OR "Spouse Abuse" OR "Spousal Violence" OR "Partner Abuse" OR "Lesbian Partner Abuse" OR "Bisexual Partner Abuse" OR "Abused Gay Men")) OR mainsubject(("Intimate Partner Violence" OR "Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse" OR "Intimate Partner Homicide" OR "Domestic Violence" OR "Domestic Abuse" OR "Courtship Violence" OR "Abusive Relationship" OR IPV* OR Partner Violence, Intimate OR Violence, Intimate Partner OR "Intimate Partner Abuse" OR Abuse, Intimate Partner OR "Dating Violence" OR Violence, Dating OR "Spouse Abuse" OR "Spousal Violence" OR "Partner Abuse" OR "Lesbian Partner Abuse" OR "Bisexual Partner Abuse" OR "Abused Gay Men"))))Limits applied</u></p> <p>S1 AND S3</p>	5 databases	14
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S2	<u>ti(("Intimate Partner Violence" OR "Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse" OR "Intimate Partner Homicide" OR "Domestic Violence" OR "Domestic Abuse" OR "Courtship Violence" OR "Abusive Relationship" OR IPV* OR Partner Violence, Intimate OR Violence, Intimate Partner OR "Intimate Partner Abuse" OR Abuse, Intimate Partner OR "Dating Violence" OR Violence, Dating OR "Spouse Abuse" OR "Spousal Violence" OR "Partner Abuse" OR "Lesbian Partner Abuse" OR "Bisexual Partner Abuse" OR "Abused Gay Men")) OR ab(("Intimate Partner Violence" OR "Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse" OR "Intimate Partner Homicide" OR "Domestic Violence" OR "Domestic Abuse" OR "Courtship Violence" OR "Abusive Relationship" OR IPV* OR Partner Violence, Intimate OR Violence, Intimate Partner OR "Intimate Partner Abuse" OR Abuse, Intimate Partner OR "Dating Violence" OR Violence, Dating OR "Spouse Abuse" OR "Spousal Violence" OR "Partner Abuse" OR "Lesbian Partner Abuse" OR "Bisexual Partner Abuse" OR "Abused Gay Men")) OR mainsubject(("Intimate Partner Violence" OR "Intimate Partner Violence and Abuse" OR "Intimate Partner Homicide" OR "Domestic Violence" OR "Domestic Abuse" OR "Courtship Violence" OR "Abusive Relationship" OR IPV* OR Partner Violence, Intimate OR Violence, Intimate Partner OR "Intimate Partner Abuse" OR Abuse, Intimate Partner OR "Dating Violence" OR Violence, Dating OR "Spouse Abuse" OR "Spousal Violence" OR "Partner Abuse" OR "Lesbian Partner Abuse" OR "Bisexual Partner Abuse" OR "Abused Gay Men"))Limits applied</u>	5 databases	<u>1,431</u>
S2	ti(Corona*) OR ab(Corona*) OR mainsubject(Corona*)Limits applied	5 databases	24602
S1	<u>ti(Covid*) OR ab(Covid*) OR mainsubject(Covid*)Limits applied</u>	5 databases	<u>54,367</u>