

Perceptions on Violence Against Women in Uganda: Implications for Policy

Executive Statement

Despite the existence of supportive laws, policies and programs, women and girls continue to face various forms of violence including sexual, physical, psychological, and economic, among others. Evidence from the 2017 National Governance, Peace and Security Survey reveals a high tolerance to violence against women. This is in part attributable to social attitudes and norms that condone and perpetuate the prevalence of violence against women in Uganda; women's high financial dependence on men; shame and low self-esteem and concern for children. In addition, there is limited reporting of violence related cases by victims and limited knowledge of laws and policies that criminalize various forms of violence such as human trafficking and female genital mutilation. This brief¹ recommends zero tolerance to violence against women through positive change in perceptions, beliefs, behaviors and practices; popularizing relevant policies through mass sensitization campaigns and providing timely, equitable access to justice and effective enforcement of laws.

Introduction

Violence Against Women (VAW) has been acknowledged to be of great concern, not only from a human rights perspective but also from a health and economic perspective. VAW – defined as an “any act of gender based violence that results in, or likely to result in physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats to such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life (United Nations 1993) – imposes insecurity and limits the level of peace every woman is supposed to enjoy. VAW negatively affects women’s well being and comes with a high cost to individuals, families, societies and economies (UN WOMEN 2014).

The prevalence of VAW, although on a declining trend remains quite high. The percentage of women who have ever experienced physical violence since the age of 15 declined from 60

percent in 2006 to 56 percent 2011 and 51 percent in 2016. In addition, twenty two percent (22%) of women aged 15-49 reported to have ever experienced sexual violence compared with 8 percent for men in the same age band (UBOS and ICF 2018). The most common perpetrators of both physical and sexual violence among women who have been or are married women is the current husband or a former partner.

In response, Uganda has tried to address the issue of violence against women through various legislative and policy measures. In addition to ratifying United National Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Uganda has formulated a number of national level laws, policies and frameworks. The constitution of Uganda accords women full and equal dignity of both women and men and prohibits laws, cultures, customs and traditions that undermine their welfare, dignity and status (Republic of Uganda 1995, Article 33). The Domestic Violence Act, enacted in 2010, put in place regulations in 2011 that operationalized the constitutional provisions. In addition, the National Policy on the Elimination of Gender Based Violence and the National Action

¹ The brief is an excerpt from a 2018 report by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) titled “National Governance Peace and Security Survey 2017. National Governance Peace and Security Survey 2017”

Plan (NAP) for implementing the GBV policy were approved in August 2016. The NAP provides a framework for all national and local government interventions aimed at preventing and responding to GBV and spells out the roles of various state and non-state actors, the strategic actions that need to be undertaken, and milestones for measuring progress at the national and local levels. The GBV policy is a vehicle for the achievement of a zero-tolerance environment and a comprehensive response to support survivors and victims of GBV.

The various policies and laws notwithstanding, there exist perceptions, attitudes and norms that have continued to condone and perpetuate the occurrence of VAW in Uganda. Using the nationally representative 2017 National Governance Peace and Security Survey (NGPSS) conducted by UBoS, this brief explores perceptions and attitudes toward violence against women in Uganda.

Key Findings

There is generally a high tolerance/acceptance of violence against women

The perceptions as shown in Table 1 reveal a relatively high tolerance of VAW among both female and males; about 6 in every 10 women and men agree or partially agree that a woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together. Moreover about 50 percent of both males and females believe that intimate partner violence is a private matter that should not be discussed outside the couple. Compared with females, a higher percentage of men think that there are times when a woman deserves to be beaten and that VAW is justified if a man is insulted (Table 1). The foregoing perceptions imply that women are likely to suffer in silence since violence in homes is seen as a private matter and is tolerated for the sake of

keep families together. Such beliefs are likely to perpetuate the prevalence of violence, as victims tend to accept violence or see violence as normal, making it more likely for them to enter or remain in violent and abusive relationships. Also, with high levels of tolerance among the victims, perpetrators are less likely to be reported to the relevant authorities for punishment.

Concern for children, financial dependency on the man and low self esteem are the major reasons women stay in abusive relationships

A high proportion of both women and men (above 80%) believe that women stay in abusive relationships out of concern for their children. This could be attributed to the patrilineal cultural norms stipulating that children “belong” to their fathers’ lineage and fathers should therefore retain custody after divorce or separation regardless of who is the primary caregiver. Another key reason women endure abusive relationships and violence is financial dependency on their partners. To reduce the observed tolerance levels of VAW, there is a need to heighten interventions that are aimed at economically empowering women and making them self-reliant. Women also endure abusive relationships as a result of shame, low esteem and fear of divorce since divorce separation is considered “shameful” in some societies.

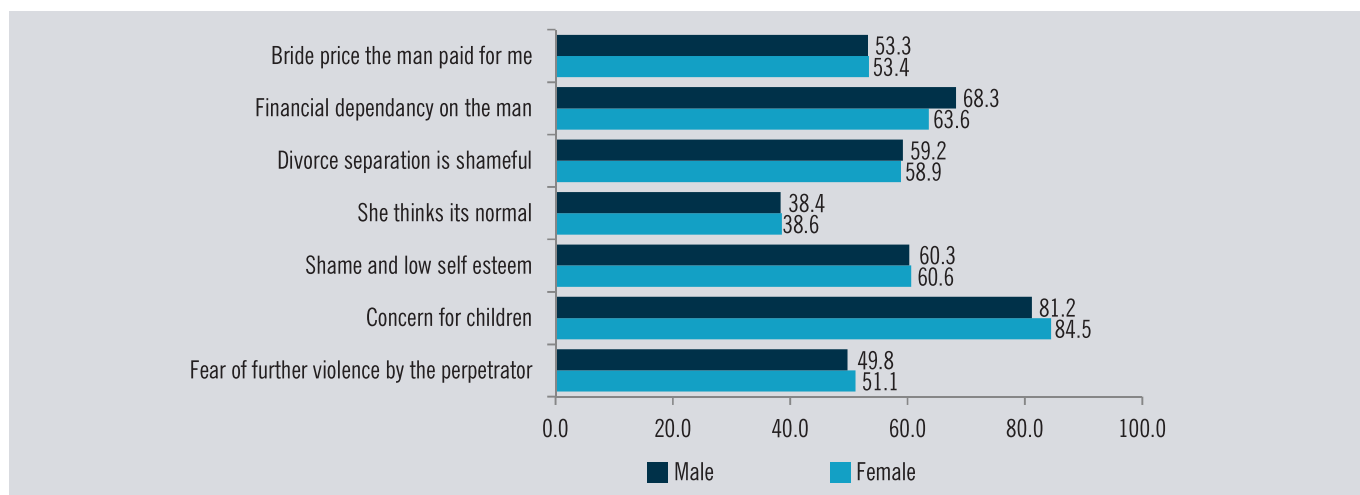
Perceptions on causes of violence against women

The respondents attributed VAW to several individual and societal factors. With regard to individual factors (related to the perpetrator and victim), husbands’ dependency on alcohol and “provoking/nagging” behavior from the woman were cited as major causes of VAW. More than 70 percent of both men and women attribute the observed VAW to men’s abuse of power while 60.4 percent of women and 66.1 % of men attribute VAW to “provoking and nagging” partners (Figure 2). At the society

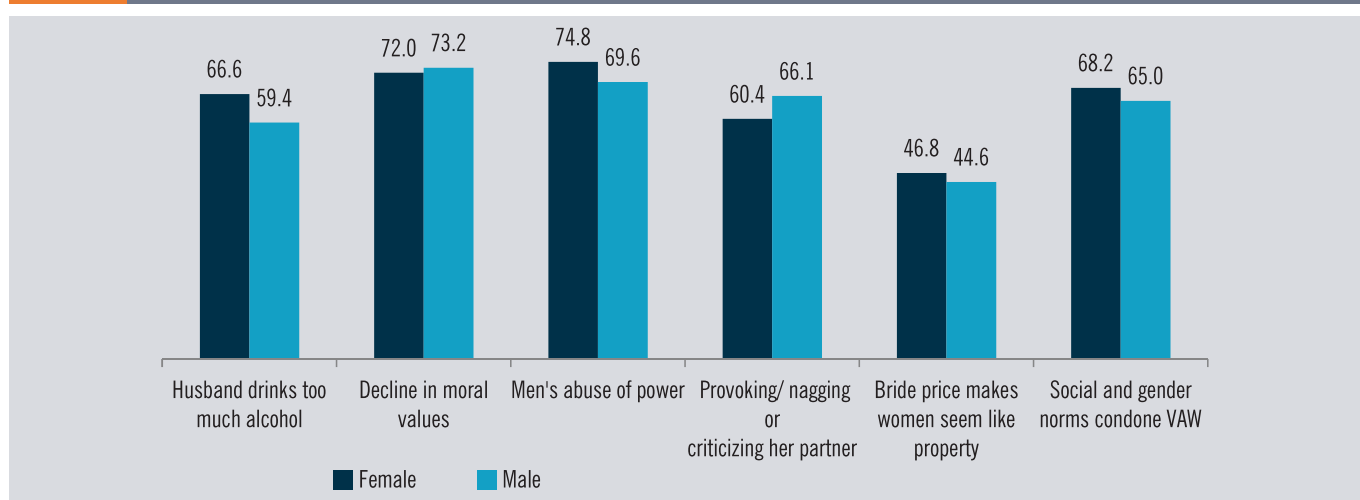
Table 1: Perceptions of violence against women (%)

Statement	Agree or partially agree to the statement (%)	
	Female	Male
Woman should tolerate violence to keep her family together	67.6	66.3
A man using violence against his wife is a private matter that shouldn’t be discussed outside the couple	49.0	50.7
If one insults a man, he should defend his reputation, with force if he has to	25.5	32.2
There are times when a woman deserves to be beaten	18.9	26.5
Some men beat women as a way of showing love.	14.2	17.7
It is okay for a man to hit his wife if she won’t have sex with him	7.6	10.6

Source: Author’s computation based on NGPSS 2017

Figure 1: Reasons why women stay in abusive relationships (%)

Source: Author's computation based on NGPSS 2017

Figure 2: Causes of violence (%)

Source: Author's computation based on NGPSS 2017

level, decline in moral values and men's abuse of power, social and gender norms are believed to be the leading cause of VAW.

There is a positive link between VAW and HIV status

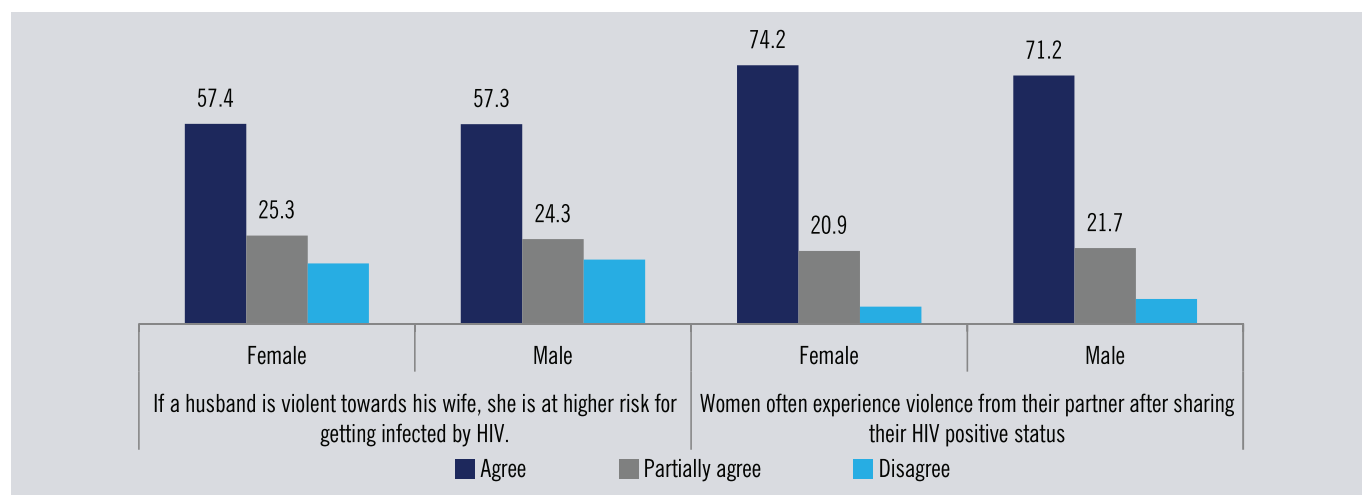
There is increasing recognition that VAW is both a cause and consequence of HIV/AIDS. More than 70 percent of both men and women believe that women who share their HIV positive status with their partners are more likely to experience violence (Figure 3). In addition, about 57.3 percent of both women and men believe that women who have experienced intimate partner violence are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. Violence against women is an obstacle to prevention efforts: it often

prevents women from getting tested and limits their access to prevention and treatment. Fear of violence from partners makes many women reluctant to bargain for safe sex through use of condoms and abstinence. Also, HIV transmission increases during violent or forced sex as the abrasions caused through penetration facilitate entry of the virus.

Women are less likely to report cases of violence

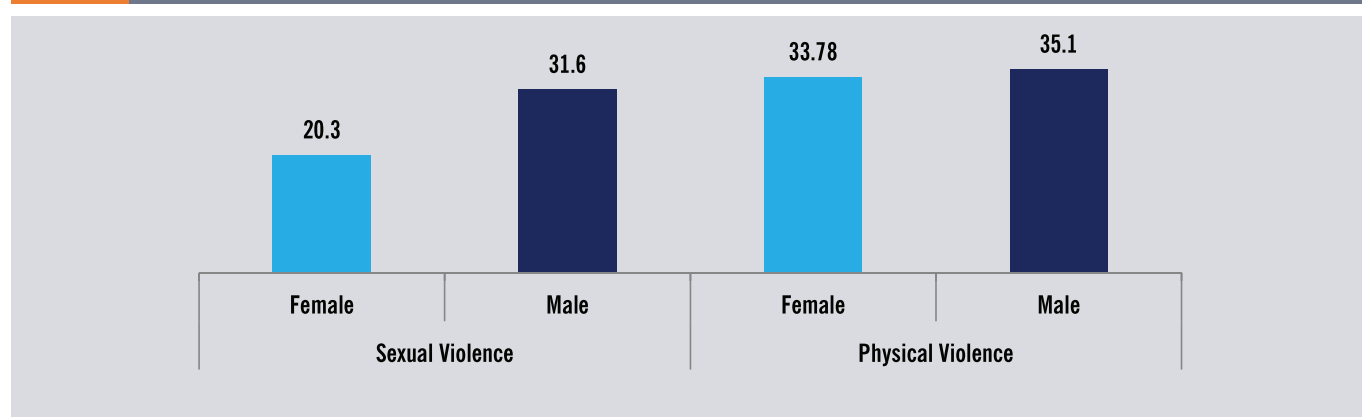
Although reporting of gender based violence is generally low, it is much lower among victims of sexual violence compared to those of physical violence. Compared with their male counterparts, women are less likely to report cases of sexual violence to relevant authorities. Among the women who experience

Figure 3: Beliefs on the linkage between violence against women and HIV (%)



Source: Author's computation based on NGPSS 2017

Figure 4: Percentage of those who experienced and reported violence (%)



Source: Author's computation based on NGPSS 2017

sexual violence in the 12 months preceding the survey, only 20 percent reported it; the percentage was higher for men and stood at 31.6 percent (Figure 4).

Some of the reasons as to why women and girls do not report incidents of violence to formal justice system include lengthy procedures, poverty, lack of support systems, weak enforcement of laws and protection of their husbands from being imprisoned (Figure 5).

Effectiveness of public security systems in addressing VAW

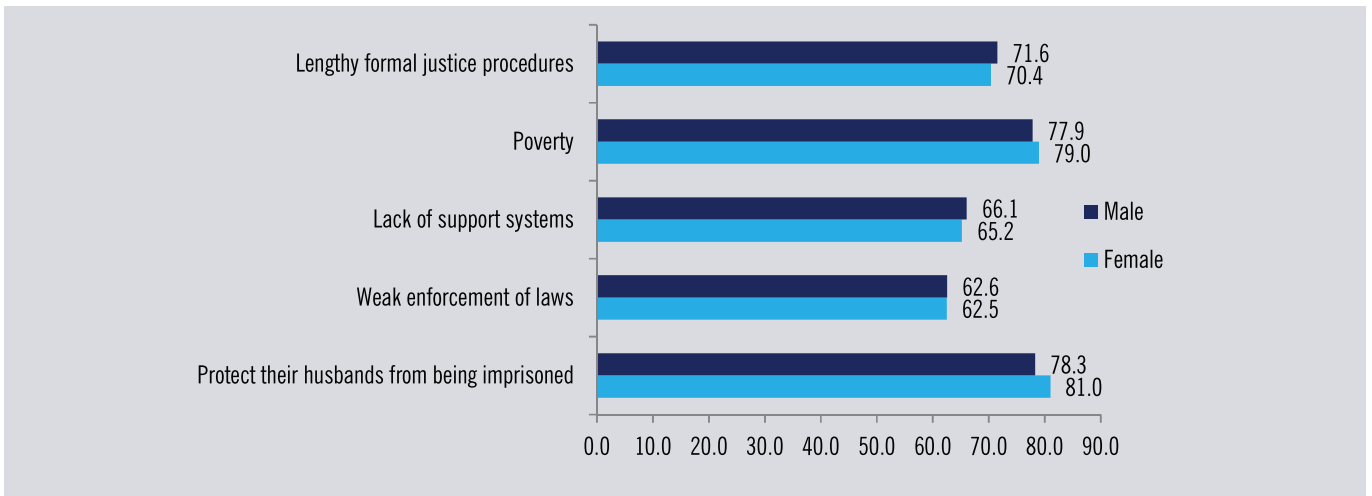
The majority of both women and men think that the public security system has only been fairly effective in addressing VAW (49.4% females and 51.3% males). In fact, 5.6 percent

of females and 5.3 percent of males believe that the concerned public authorities have not been effective at all/ineffective. Ineffectiveness of the authorities that are meant to address issues of VAW may further reduce the likelihood of reporting among victims of VAW, which may in turn perpetuate it.

Knowledge of laws that criminalize VAW

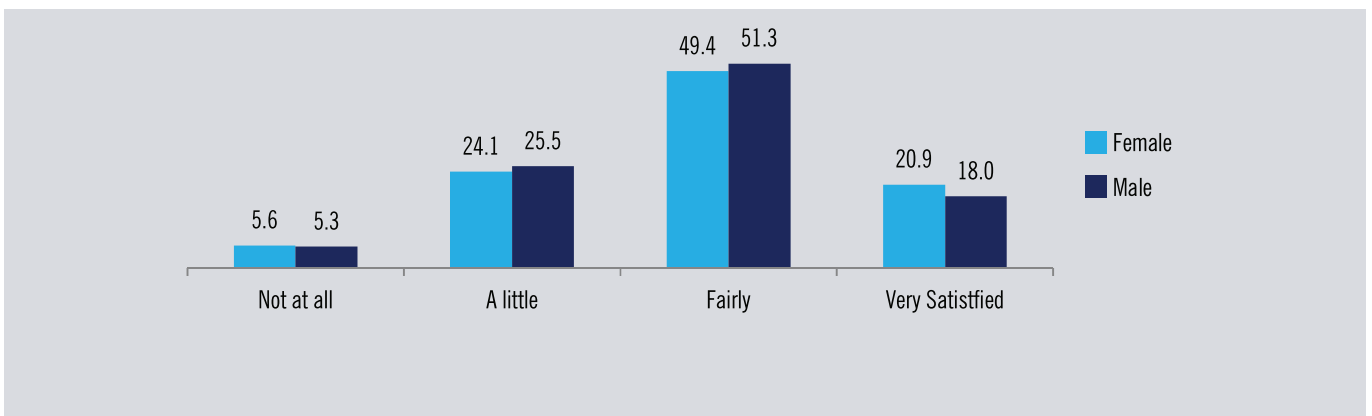
Uganda has formulated a number of policies aimed at preventing violence against women and men alike. Although this is a step in the right direction, a high proportion of the respondents are unaware of their existence. Of the five laws that respondents were asked about, the one on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) remains the least known across the board. Fifty percent (50.5%) of the women reported no awareness of the law that protects women against FGM (Figure 7). Although ignorance

Figure 5: Perceptions on why women and girls do not report cases of violence (%)



Source: Author's computation based on NGPSS 2017

Figure 6: Effectiveness of public security systems in addressing VAW (%)

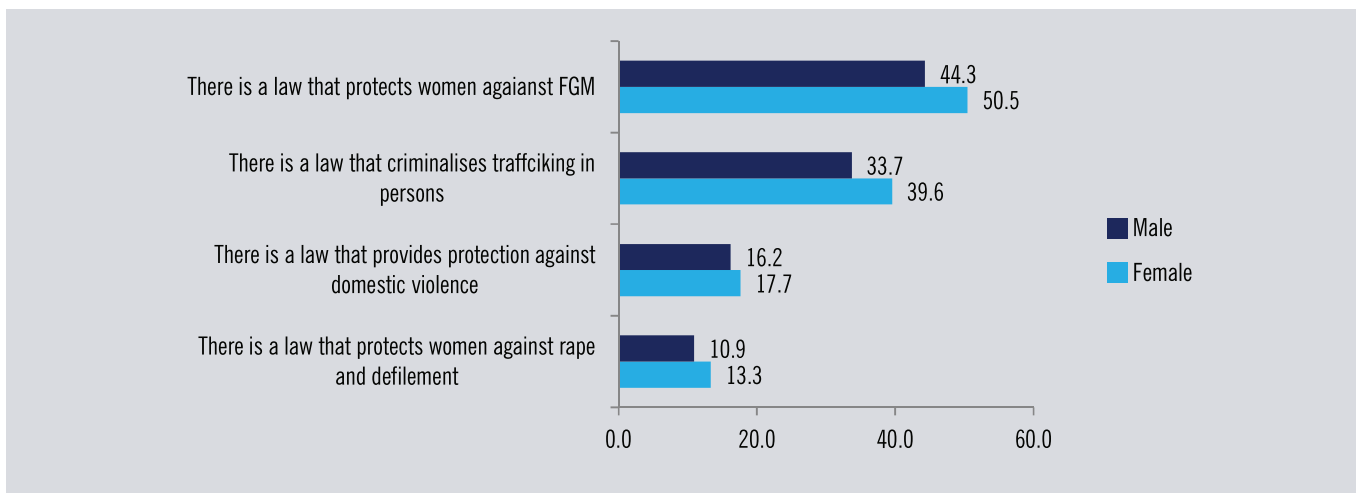


Source: Author's computation based on NGPSS 2017

of the law amongst women in the eastern region is relatively lower compared to north, central and western regions, it still remains unacceptably high at 40.8 percent since the practice of FGM is very high in this particular region.

The other law that most respondents (both male and female) were unaware of is the one related to human trafficking. As per the 2017 police crime report transnational human trafficking is the most common form of trafficking experienced in Uganda. One hundred and six (106) incidents of internal trafficking and 249 transnational incidents were reported in 2017. Given the relatively high levels of ignorance of existing laws, there could be many cases that are unreported.

The laws that provides protection against domestic violence and the one that protects women against rape and defilement are to a great extent known by both men and women.

Figure 7: Proportion of people that is not aware of selected VAW related laws (%)

Source: Author's computation based on NGPSS 2017

Emerging issues for policy consideration

Promote zero tolerance to VAW through positive change in perceptions, beliefs, behaviors and practices: Cultural and social norms are highly influential in shaping behavior, including the use of violence. Therefore, there is a need to change attitudes and social norms that regulate the acceptability of violence against women and girls through implementation of interventions that challenge social and cultural which are supportive of violence. Interventions that explicitly attempt to change community norms, power inequalities between men and women and notions of masculinity that legitimize and promote male control should be intensified. For instance use of male role models who have adopted gender equitable behaviors as change agents may positively influence others.

Popularize VAW related policies through mass sensitization campaigns: Women who are unaware of their rights cannot claim them. Consequently, there is a need to popularize policies and legal frameworks that are aimed at protecting women from VAW. Given the active role that civil society organizations (CSOs) play in community sensitization, it is important that Development Partners especially those geared towards enhancing gender equality and women empowerment partner with CSOs to undertake mass sensitization of communities on the legal frameworks and the various provisions that protect women and girls against violence.

Provide timely, equitable access to justice and effective enforcement of laws: As per the findings, one of the reasons VAW victims do not report is related to lengthy justice proce-

dures and weak enforcement of laws. While the Government has tried to put in place various law enforcement and justice systems for management of VAW related cases, challenges remain. There is need for the relevant authorities, such as police, to provide timely apprehension of perpetrators/suspects and to strengthen law enforcement procedures.

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About the Authors

Gemma Ahaibwe is Research Fellow at the Economic Policy Research Centre, Kampala, Uganda.

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Address:

Economic Policy Research Centre

51, Pool Road, Makerere University Campus,

P. O. Box 7841 Kampala, Uganda

Tel: +256414541023/4 Fax: +256414541022

Email: eprc@eprcug.org, Website: www.eprc.or.ug