

The impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on the lives of women and girls in Botswana, particularly in relation to gender-based physical and sexual violence against them.

Methodology

The hypothesis to be tested is whether gender-based violence has increased during the lockup. Secondly did the women who were subjected to violence try to seek help, and from whom? If they did attempt to seek help, how far did they succeed in reaching the persons or organization they wanted help from? If they succeeded in reaching them, to what extent were they given help and was it effective? The likelihood is that these women who were abused during the lockdown with abusive men were also abused before the lockdown. A determination will be made to see if they ever sought help during the earlier violence and to what effect. Was there the same possibility to get help during the lockdown, and how effective that was? The method employed will be to have in-depth interviews with these women and girls. The information obtained will be combined with the data gathered by any other means available in order to estimate the extent of violence. This estimate will be compared with the baseline established for the pre-lockup period.

The interviews will be conducted by trained research assistants (RA), who will all be female. The research assistants will be chosen on the basis of their ability to communicate, empathy as far as it can be assessed, and preferably with prior similar experience with an NGO or other organization. The sampling will be done to ensure that all the districts of Botswana are covered. The research assistants will be trained in conducting interviews with confidentiality, respectful behaviour towards the interviewees and with a regard for their own safety. They will receive instructions in following the standard operating procedures laid out for them for interaction with their interviewees and for ensuring safety of all the team members. The Principal Investigator or her associate will make random checks on research assistants to assess their work to make sure that the data obtained is factual and unbiased.

After the lockdown is over, recruitment of the research assistants will be initiated. The positions will be announced on the University website, social media and in newspapers. The applicants will be interviewed to assess their ability for the job. Those selected will be given training in how to conduct interviews with the women, how to gain their confidence, how to assure them of strict confidentiality and what questions to ask. The research assistants will be in constant communication with the investigators and will be given advice as and when necessary. They will be encouraged to communicate with the other members of the team as well, in order to learn from one another's experience. After the data is collected it will be collated and statistically treated to draw conclusions. Qualitative and quantitative information will be extracted from the raw data and summarised. A report will be prepared based on the findings and disseminated to the relevant government departments and social welfare organisations.

The period of the COVID-19 lockdown has not been experienced in living memory in Botswana or elsewhere. Unfortunate as it was, it does provide a once in a century opportunity to study

what the effect of being locked down has been on women who in a lot of cases were confined to their home with their abusers. While the people in Botswana learned about the lockdown-related increase in gender-based violence in several countries, including Canada, the US, the UK, Singapore, Cyprus, Brazil and a host of others, regrettably no information is available from within Botswana. Since to our knowledge no effort has been made to gauge this very important social factor involving hundreds of thousand women and girls, we find it imperative that this be done. Since such a situation has never been experienced before, our proposed study will be unique and have a great impact since it would provide very valuable information for social organisations and policy makers of the government.

Expected knowledge outputs and outcomes for the project

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The interviews will be conducted by trained research assistants (RA), who will all be female. The research assistants will be chosen on the basis of their communication ability, empathy as far as it can be assessed and prior experience of similar work with an NGO or other organizations. The sampling will be done to ensure that all the districts of Botswana are covered.

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