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INTERSECTION OF LAW AND LOCAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN IGANGA, UGANDA

Nicolette Esparza

Mentor: Shanti Parikh

The passing of Uganda's Domestic Violence Act of 2010 marked a concrete action taken by the government that acknowledged Uganda's households as among the highest rates of African countries in domestic violence. The law outlines domestic violence as any threatening or harmful set of behaviors or actions from a perpetrator that takes away a survivor's sense of security or safety. The law is thorough in defining each word and the mediums in which domestic violence can occur in a romantic and familial relationship between individuals. After seven years, the law has been addressed with much more scrutiny as the culture of relationships and the rates of violence have not seen any significant change. I conducted 34 interviews over the course of 10 weeks and three focus groups with five individuals per group in rural and peri-urban areas in the greater Iganga District. The interviews were made up by local leaders, key informants, community members, and employees in the criminal justice system. The three focus group interviews were accomplished with five young adults 18-25 years old per group. The lack of implementation of government funded programs and grass roots initiatives left local communities to carry out the same lifestyle and set of cultural expectations. There was little to no consideration of the traditions and systematic barriers in place that contributed to these high rates of violence. From those interviewed, I gathered that there remains a disconnect between what is interpreted as violence at local levels. Survivors of domestic violence take many avenues before approaching the criminal justice system with their case. These avenues vary in education on the law and possibly fall into perpetuating harmful notions and expectations, Uganda is not unique in its struggle for education and justice. Without a change in culture and advocacy surrounding the Domestic Violence Act, domestic violence continues to impact and silence voices in communities.