

“EKITTABAKAZI” (Women Murders): A Twist in Violence Against Women in Uganda

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For a long time, Uganda has been perceived as a generally pleasant and safe country, where gender concerns are highly recognized. For over three decades, the current government has been praised as having gotten women out of the kitchen to higher ranks socially, economically and politically, although more efforts are still required for full occupancy of their rightful positions.

Nonetheless, what went wrong in 2017 still remains unexplainable in the minds of women in particular and all Ugandans in general. Dubbed as the year of kittabakazi, 2017 was the deadliest year with awful and enigmatic crimes against women characterized by murder. Indeed the country faced the worst form of violence against women. Over twenty five women were killed in the country. Reported cases were 23 women by the end of the year, and all these were from in and around Kampala, the capital and primate city in the country, particularly in Entebbe and Wakiso. There were other isolated cases reported in other different parts of the country.

List of victims as published in New Vision Murder Victim No. 20 Nakimuli Rose - RIP



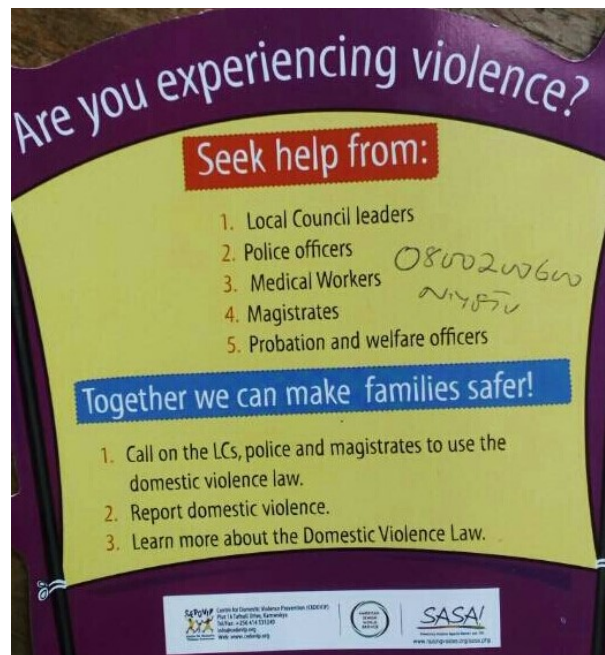
Source: New Vision News paper

Source: Julian Hattam article, www.pri.org/stories

The mysterious killings of women not only sparked terror in the communities but also created a sense of hopelessness in the country. The ghastly murders shared almost similar characteristics whereby victims were raped and/or strangled and afterwards inserted with

wood sticks in their mouths and/or genitals. The cause of the murders as suspected by security agencies varied from retaliation for lost love among lovers to contract killings by gangs of unemployed youth, drug abuse, alcoholism, witchcraft, domestic violence, murder for organ trade, and murders for devilish rituals. There was perplexity arising from the fact that similar murders were attributed to many different causes, which increased social unrest among women, tension and fear as well as psychological trauma and overall distress. All were scared of becoming the next victim.

What was even more disturbing was the less attention accorded to the crime by especially the government that is meant to protect the people. The crime reports published about the murders were cosmetic. In addition, the police acting with impunity merely called on women to be more conscious and not to move alone at night or stay at home after dark. Voices of women parliamentarians, Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development, political parties, Law Society, and civil society organizations other than women's NGOs were less heard. The murders raised people's eyebrows at the country's commitment to protect women. Many thought that government could afford to turn a deaf ear since the lives deprived were of women who are never a priority in the country. Women believed that the government had not done enough to protect them because they were women and that the attention would have been different if the victims had been men. As such, most local people came to rightly believe in a political motive for the murders, with either a need to hurt the government by making the country insecure or creating a situation where people live in fear.



Efforts to raise women's awareness about violence against women (VAW) by Uganda Muslim Women Vision Source: Hadijah Kibira

There were promises to curb the crimes, right from the president of Uganda who happened to stay in Entebbe, where most murders were committed. He promised to apprehend those behind the "senseless murders" as he termed them, since the government had the capacity to deal with even more complicated crimes. There were some suspects arrested, and security operations at night instituted. Nonetheless, there was a general failure to account for the blunder of not being able to find the killers.



Murder scene. Source www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/10/women-murdered-uganda

The murders ended mysteriously as they started. However, the murders depicted a gross violation of human rights as well as the marginalization of women. The lesson learnt is that there is a need for national efforts to raise perceptions about women, and a call for a general outcry and concrete actions about violence against women, the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act 2010, and the enactment and enforcement of a law on violence against women beyond the Domestic Violence Act.