

Responsibility for Sexual Violence in Marriage: The Case of Burundian Spouses

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Abstract

This article is dedicated to an in-depth analysis of the responsibility for sexual violence in a legal marriage, with a particular focus on Burundian spouses. Sexual violence within marriage constitutes a serious violation of human rights, with significant repercussions for the victim. This study examines the liability associated with this form of violence among Burundian spouses, highlighting both the civil and criminal aspects of this liability. The objectives of this article are to determine the frequency of sexual violence among married couples in the Mairie of Bujumbura, to identify the etiological factors of sexual violence in marriage, to analyze the legislative aspects surrounding civil and criminal liability in cases of marital sexual violence, and to assess the effectiveness of interventions put in place to prevent and treat cases of sexual violence in marriage. The study used a quantitative approach with a sample of 88 spouses residing in Bujumbura Mairie. Structured questionnaires were distributed and the data collected were statistically analyzed to obtain a clear overview of trends and dynamics. The results show that 40% of couples surveyed reported incidents of sexual violence. This significant percentage highlights the urgent need to address this issue within Burundian society. Among the etiological factors identified, the most frequent included alcoholism (30%), patriarchal culture (25%), and lack of communication (20%). These elements demonstrate the complexity of the causes of sexual violence in marriage. Legislative analysis reveals that although laws exist to protect victims of sexual violence, their enforcement often remains ineffective. Some 60% of respondents were unaware of the legal remedies available, underlining an urgent need for legal awareness and education. This article demonstrates that sexual violence in marriage is a

persistent problem among Burundian spouses. The findings underline the need to strengthen legal and social interventions, improve enforcement of existing laws, and raise awareness of victims' rights. A multidimensional approach is essential to effectively combat this form of violence and protect the rights and dignity of those concerned.

Keywords

Civil Liability, Criminal Liability, Sexual Violence, Marriage, Burundian Spouses, Frequency of Violence, Etiological Factors, Victims' Rights, Legal Remedies

1. Introduction

Sexual violence is a phenomenon that affects many women and girls around the world, including in developing countries. In the East African nation of Burundi, the issue is of particular concern. It is estimated that over 40% of Burundian women have suffered some form of rape or sexual assault in their lifetime (UNICEF, 2020). This sexual violence can take many forms, from sexual coercion to female genital mutilation. Sexual violence within marriage specifically affects married women. Indeed, it is common for Burundian husbands to use violence to control and exploit their wives. Married women are thus often subjected to symbolic or physical rape, which can have serious consequences for their mental and physical health (Substitute by Croix rouge Burundi, 2016). In this context, it is essential to understand the factors contributing to sexual violence in marriage and to define strategies to eradicate it.

The case of Burundian husbands and wives is particularly interesting, as it provides insight into the cultural and sociological specificities surrounding sexual violence in marriage. Burundian husbands and wives live in a context where family and community play an important role in daily life. Women are often considered family property and are subject to strong male authority (Amnesty International, 2018). This situation can create an environment conducive to sexual violence and the exploitation of women. However, it is important to note that sexual violence in marriage is a complex phenomenon that can only be understood by taking into account the surrounding socio-economic, cultural, and political factors. It is therefore essential to analyze the links between poverty, resource scarcity, illiteracy, and sexual violence in marriage. It is also important to understand how social and political institutions contribute to the perpetuation of sexual violence. In addressing the notion of responsibility, we distinguish two main types: civil responsibility and criminal responsibility (Birger et al., 2012; Nyabenda & Sindayigaya, 2024; Sindayigaya & Hitimana, 2016). This distinction leads to an examination of the mechanisms for enforcing this responsibility and to a determination of the powers required to bring legal proceedings against the perpetrator of sexual violence. To provide an effective solution to this societal problem, it is necessary to follow the procedure established by Burundian

legislation for bringing cases to court. The three categories of persons authorized to bring a case before the competent court include the victim of the violence, an interested third party, the Judicial Police Officer, and the Public Prosecutor.

Violence, by its very nature barbaric, involves the use of force, whether physical or moral, to compel the victim to submit to the malevolent intentions of the aggressor. This violence results in injuries that can be both physical and psychological. We also address the dimension of sexuality by discussing assaults on the intimate parts of the victim of sexual violence, a flagrant violation of her sexual freedom. The law even considers penetration of any part of the human body or any object into any of the orifices of the human body as a form of sexual violence (UNODC, 2014). This article is addressed to anyone interested in our subject, and more specifically to spouses at risk of falling prey to sexual violence. It aims to make the Burundian public aware of the consequences of acts of sexual violence (Sindayigaya, 2024a, 2023a), in order to dissuade husbands from committing such acts, which could qualify them as rapists. Ultimately, accountability for sexual violence in marriage is a challenge that requires a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach (Cardi & Pruvost, 2011; Crombach & Bambonyé, 2015). It is essential that governments, international institutions, non-governmental organizations, and communities work together.

The existing literature on responsibility for sexual violence in marriage offers an in-depth look at the various aspects of this complex problem. Studies such as those conducted by Amnesty International (2018) and Substitute by Croix rouge Burundi (2016) highlight the scale and consequences of sexual violence perpetrated by spouses, emphasizing the role of patriarchal norms and gender inequalities in its perpetuation. This research underscores the importance of understanding the socio-cultural factors that contribute to sexual violence in marriage and calls for interventions aimed at transforming these social norms to prevent violence. In terms of legal mechanisms, work such provides a framework for understanding legal responsibility for sexual violence in marriage. These documents highlight the importance of legal remedies available to victims of sexual violence, while also highlighting the challenges faced by victims when seeking justice. In addition, research conducted by the World Bank highlights gaps in law enforcement and the need to build the capacity of legal institutions to combat sexual violence. Furthermore, medical literature offers valuable information on the consequences of sexual violence in marriage on the health of victims. Studies such as those conducted by the World Health Organization examine the long-term impacts of sexual violence on women's mental and physical health, highlighting the importance of holistic care for victims. In addition, research on medical and psychosocial interventions, such as that presented in the UN's work (UNODC, 2014), highlights the effectiveness of support programs for victims of sexual violence in marriage, offering insights into best practices in treatment and prevention.

The issue of responsibility for sexual violence in marriage is a complex and

multidimensional one, requiring in-depth analysis. Firstly, it is crucial to examine the socio-cultural and economic factors that contribute to the perpetuation of this form of violence. Studies such as those conducted by [Amnesty International \(2018\)](#) and [Substitute by Croix rouge Burundi \(2016\)](#) have highlighted the role of patriarchal norms and gender inequalities in perpetuating sexual violence in domestic relationships. These social norms can exert pressure on men to exert control over their partners, including through sexual violence, as a means of maintaining their power status in marriage. In addition, it is important to explore the role of institutions and legal systems in combating sexual violence in marriage. Research by organizations such as the UN and the World Bank has highlighted the challenges faced by victims of sexual violence when seeking justice. Barriers such as social stigma, gaps in laws and policies, and inadequacies in law enforcement can hinder victims' access to effective legal remedies.

Furthermore, the issue of responsibility for sexual violence within marriage raises questions about fundamental human rights and the dignity of individuals. According to the principles set out in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ([CEDAW, 2011](#)), every individual has the right to live free from all forms of violence, including within marriage. However, reality shows that many women are deprived of these fundamental rights due to sexual violence perpetrated by their spouses. Moreover, the issue of accountability for sexual violence in marriage highlights gaps in prevention and intervention mechanisms. Studies such as those conducted by the World Health Organization have highlighted the importance of implementing awareness and education programs to prevent sexual violence in marriage. However, these programs are often insufficient or inaccessible, leaving victims without adequate support ([Dünkel et al., 2010](#); [UNDOC and UNICEF, 2009](#)). Furthermore, the issue of accountability for sexual violence in marriage highlights the long-term consequences of this form of violence on the mental and physical health of victims. Research has shown that women who have experienced sexual violence in marriage are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety disorders, and post-traumatic trauma. These consequences can have a lasting impact on victims' lives, compromising their well-being and quality of life.

Finally, the issue of accountability for sexual violence in marriage raises questions about how communities and societies as a whole can work together to put an end to this form of violence. Initiatives such as those promoted by the United Nations and other international organizations aim to mobilize governments, institutions, and civil society to combat sexual violence in marriage. However, further efforts are needed to overcome the obstacles and create significant change in the prevention and elimination of this form of violence.

2. Methods and Methodology

The methodology used in this study on the responsibility for sexual violence in marriage, focusing on Burundian spouses, was rigorously planned to guarantee

reliable and significant results. Firstly, the target population for the study was defined as spouses residing in the Mairie of Bujumbura, Burundi. This population was selected for its representativeness of the Burundian community and its relevance to the study objective.

2.1. Study Population

The population of this study on the responsibility of sexual violence in marriage consists of spouses residing in the Mairie of Bujumbura, Burundi. This population was selected because of its relevance to the study's objective, which is to understand the factors associated with sexual violence in the context of marriage among Burundian spouses. Spouses, whether legally or de facto married, were included in the study population. The Mairie of Bujumbura was chosen as the geographical setting because of its demographic diversity and its representativeness of the Burundian population. The study population therefore includes all spouses, married men, living in this specific geographical area, whatever their age, level of education, socio-economic status, or ethnicity.

2.2. Data Collection

To collect data on responsibility for sexual violence in marriage among Burundian husbands, a combination of data collection techniques and tools was used to ensure the reliability and validity of the information gathered. Questionnaires were developed to collect quantitative data on husbands' experiences of sexual violence in marriage, their understanding of legal responsibility in this area, and their perceptions of interventions available to prevent and address sexual violence. The questions were carefully designed to cover a wide range of relevant areas and were worded clearly and concisely to facilitate participants' responses. To complement the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sub-sample of spouses to deepen the understanding of their experiences and perceptions of sexual violence in marriage. These interviews allowed participants to express themselves freely and provided rich and detailed qualitative information on the subject. An analysis of relevant legal documents, such as Burundi's Penal Code and women's rights laws, was carried out to understand the legal framework surrounding liability for sexual violence in marriage. This document review provided important contextual information for interpreting the study results. In some cases, researchers used participant observation to directly observe interactions between spouses and gather data on power dynamics and behaviors associated with sexual violence in marriage. This approach provided complementary data and enriched our understanding of the social reality of Burundian husbands and wives. The survey population comprised 1056 individuals, from whom a sample of 88 was selected using Alain Bouchard's formula. According to Alain Bouchard's formula, when the study population is less than or equal to 1,000,000 individuals, it corresponds to a sample of 96 individuals with a margin of error of 10%.

$$nc = \frac{n}{1 + \frac{n}{N}} \quad \text{By developing} \quad nc = \frac{n}{1 + \frac{n}{N}} = \frac{n}{\frac{N+n}{N}} = \frac{n}{1} \times \frac{N}{N+n}$$

$$nc = \frac{n \times N}{N+n}.$$

N = total parent population (target population).

nc = Corrected sample.

The total universal sample of a finite universe is $n = 96$.

$$\text{Corrected sample (nc)} \quad nc = \frac{96}{1 + \frac{96}{1056}} = \frac{96}{\frac{1056+96}{1056}} = \frac{96}{\frac{1152}{1056}} = 96 \times \frac{1056}{1152} = \frac{110592}{1152} = 88.$$

The sample size for our study was therefore 88 époux de la Mairie de Bujumbura.

After applying this formula, a sample of 88 husbands was randomly selected from the population of Bujumbura Mairie. This sample size enabled significant results to be obtained while taking into account the logistical and financial constraints of the study. In terms of data collection techniques and tools, structured questionnaires were used to gather information from participants. The questionnaires were designed to cover a range of relevant areas, including spouses' personal experiences of sexual violence in marriage, their understanding of legal responsibility in this area, and their perceptions of interventions available to prevent and treat sexual violence. Data were collected confidentially and anonymously to ensure the protection of participants and the reliability of the results.

2.3. Data Analysis

Results were analyzed using logical analysis and Microsoft Office Excel software.

2.4. References and Bibliography

Zotero helped with referencing and creating bibliographies.

3. Analysis Results

This part of the article presents the data collection for this study. It also deals with the data analysis and interprets and discusses the results, conclusions, and interpretation of the results. Data were collected using a questionnaire. However, a quantitative and qualitative research methodology was used to interpret the results found in the field.

According to **Figure 1**, an in-depth analysis of the data collected in the field reveals significant diversity in participants' experiences of sexual violence in marriage. The results indicate that the prevalence of rape is particularly striking, affecting 40% of the individuals surveyed. This finding underscores the seriousness of this form of violence, highlighting the need for special attention to rape survivors in interventions and support services. Furthermore, the results show that 25% of participants reported having been sexually assaulted, a reality that broadens the spectrum of traumatic experiences. Sexual harassment was also a notable

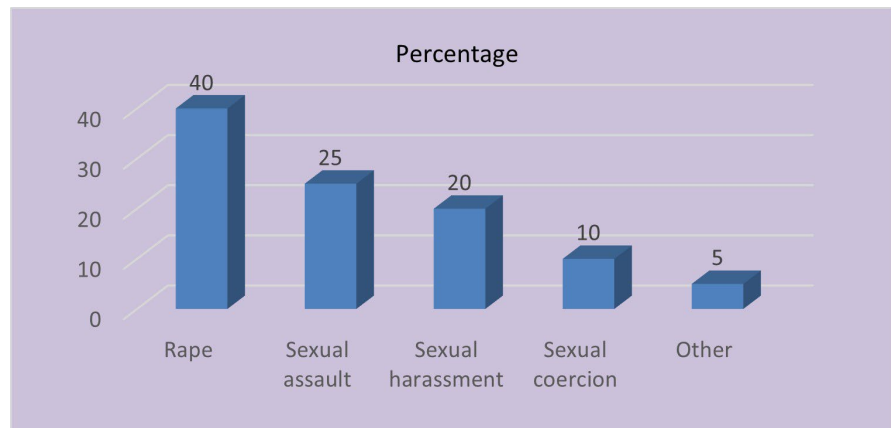


Figure 1. Exploring the forms of sexual violence experienced by individuals.

issue, affecting 20% of those surveyed. These figures reveal the complexity of the dynamics of sexual violence in marriage, encompassing varied forms of violence that require diversified approaches to support and prevention. The presence of sexual coercion in 10% of participants, as well as other forms of gender-based sexual violence in 5%, underlines the diversity of traumatic experiences. This variability underscores the importance of an individualized approach to the care of survivors of sexual violence in marriage, taking into account the complexity and specificity of each experience. These data should guide interventions and policies aimed at eradicating sexual violence in marriage, highlighting the need for targeted strategies to respond to different forms of sexual violence.

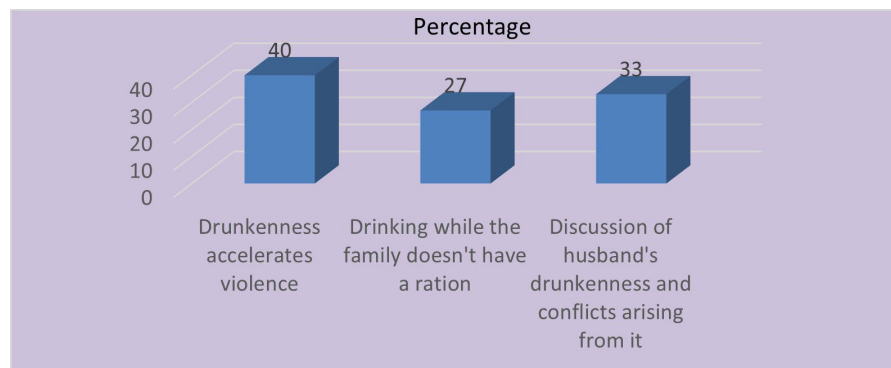


Figure 2. Respondents' responses to alcohol as a trigger of sexual violence in marriage.

The data extracted from **Figure 2** reveal that 40% of respondents consider alcohol to act as a trigger for sexual violence in marriage. They argue that under the influence of drunkenness, some men enter into conflict with their partners, and this quarrel is exacerbated by excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages. On the other hand, 33% believe that alcoholic beverages are a major source of conflict within the couple, as some men frequent drinking establishments without leaving food provisions for their families, often returning drunk. Discussions at home then turn into arguments. As for the remaining 27%, they maintain that whenever women try to report alcohol-related expenses, men react angrily, triggering sexual

violence in the marriage. This analysis thus clarifies that alcohol overconsumption is an inescapable element at the root of sexual violence in marriage.

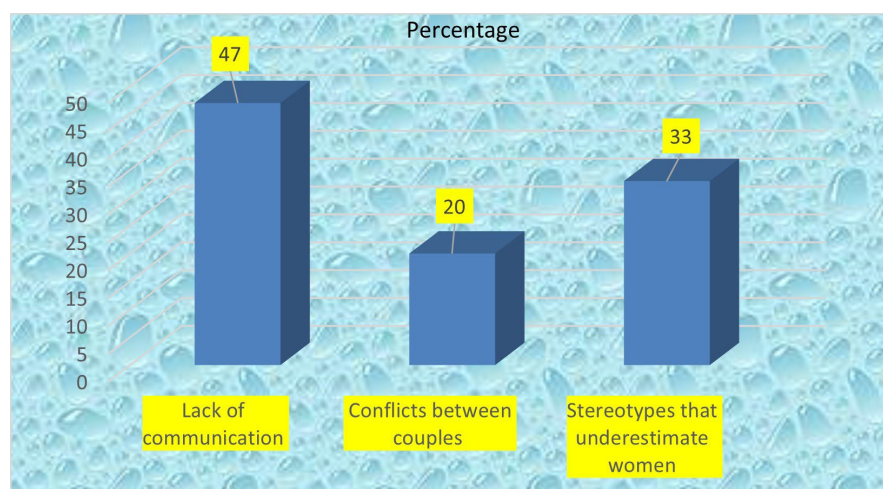


Figure 3. Respondents' assessment of the causes of sexual violence in marriage.

The data extracted from **Figure 3** above reveal that 47% of respondents attribute a lack of communication in the family as the cause of sexual violence in marriage within the couple. A further 33% maintain that devaluing stereotypes of women are a major factor, while the remaining 20% focus on marital conflict. This diversity in responses underlines the complexity of sexual violence in marriage, indicating that it results from multiple interconnected factors. It should be noted that a lack of communication, the stereotypical devaluation of women, and marital conflict are not mutually exclusive, but rather interact to aggravate the situation. This analysis highlights the need for a holistic approach to understanding and effectively combating sexual violence in marriage, taking into account the diversity of factors that contribute to this phenomenon.

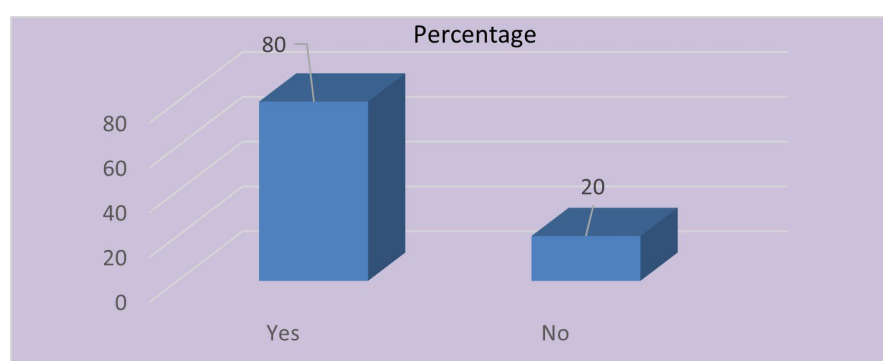


Figure 4. Culture is a factor of sexual violence in marriage.

The data extracted from **Figure 4** above reveal a significant perspective on the influence of culture on sexual violence in marriage. A high percentage, 80% of respondents, maintain that culture is a major factor in such violence, while the remaining 20% disagree. According to the explanations given by the first group,

Burundian culture attributes superiority to men, which is sometimes abused, leading to the mistreatment of women. This cultural conception encourages men to exercise their power inappropriately, contrary to respect for the law. For the minority group, other corollary factors may also contribute to sexual violence in marriage, suggesting an increased complexity in the dynamics underlying this phenomenon. This analysis underlines the importance of recognizing and addressing cultural aspects in the fight against sexual violence in marriage, while remaining attentive to nuances and other potential influences.

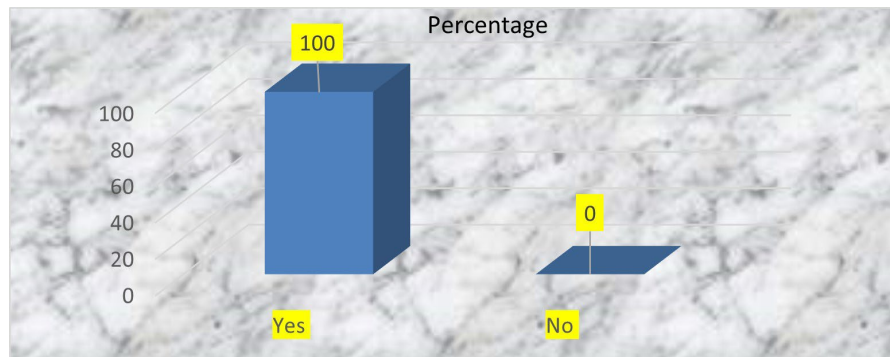


Figure 5. Sexual abuse and sexual violence in marriage.

The data extracted from **Figure 5** above reveal a unanimous consensus among respondents, with 100% affirming that sexual abuse constitutes sexual violence in marriage. This finding clearly underlines that women victims of sexual violence in marriage have often been confronted with sexual abuse, sometimes within the domestic and conjugal sphere. However, an intriguing observation emerges from women's ability not to press charges, thus perpetuating the cycle of sexual violence in marriage. This complex mechanism, illustrated by the reluctance of victims to initiate legal proceedings for abuse suffered in the home, requires an in-depth analysis of the socio-cultural, economic, and psychological factors influencing this decision. The Bujumbura municipal authorities, in their interventions, adopt an attentive approach by listening to the victims and jointly exploring possible alternative solutions to this delicate issue. This highlights the need for a holistic, context-sensitive approach to effectively combat sexual violence in marriage and support survivors.

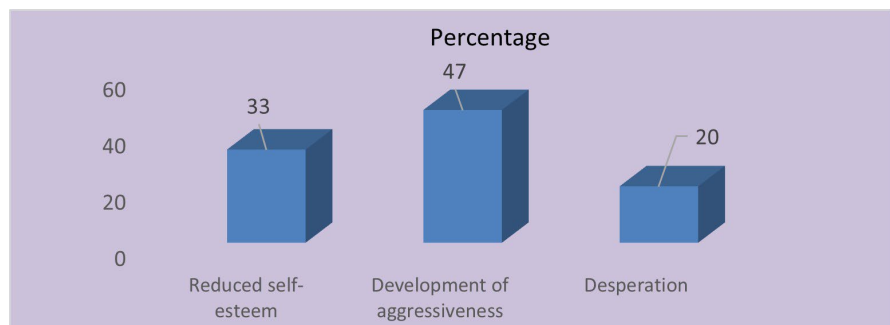


Figure 6. Pathological behavior linked to sexual violence in marriage.

Figure 6 reveals that 47% of respondents identified the development of aggression as a pathological behavior resulting from sexual violence in marriage. This reaction suggests that women victims of sexual violence in marriage manifest aggressive tendencies in response to the psychological impact of such violence. Furthermore, 33% of those surveyed indicated that reduced self-esteem was a pathological behavior engendered by sexual violence in marriage. This finding underlines the devastating consequences on survivors' self-perception, negatively impacting their psychological well-being. Finally, for 20% of respondents, hopelessness was identified as a pathological behavior associated with sexual violence in marriage. This response suggests that women affected by such violence may develop a profound sense of hopelessness, signaling significant emotional distress.

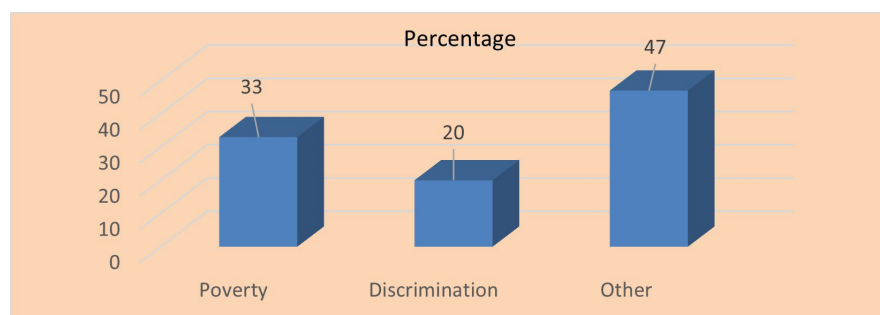


Figure 7. Social effects suffered by victims of sexual violence in marriage.

Figure 7 reveals that 47% of respondents identified lack of access to family assets as one of the main social effects suffered by victims of sexual violence in marriage. This suggests that these women are often excluded from the management of household assets, despite their supposed responsibility in this area. In addition, 33% of respondents indicated that poverty was another major social effect suffered by victims of sexual violence in marriage. This finding underlines the significant economic impact of gender-based violence, contributing to the financial precariousness of survivors. Finally, 20% of respondents mentioned discrimination as a social effect of sexual violence in marriage. These results underline the complexity of the social consequences of sexual violence in marriage, encompassing aspects such as access to family resources, poverty, and discrimination. The identification of these social effects highlights the need for integrated approaches aimed at mitigating these consequences, notably through economic support and awareness-raising programs to combat discrimination linked to sexual violence in marriage.

Figure 8 reveals a striking consensus among respondents, with 100% expressing categorical agreement that dialogue within the household, particularly about problems, could help limit sexual violence in marriage. This unanimity underlines the importance attached to communication within the household as a potentially preventive mechanism against sexual violence in marriage. Interestingly, none of the respondents objected to this proposition, highlighting the strong consensus on the crucial role of communication in preventing domestic violence. These results suggest that promoting open and constructive dialogue within households

can be a promising strategy for easing tensions and conflicts, thus contributing to the reduction of sexual violence in marriage.

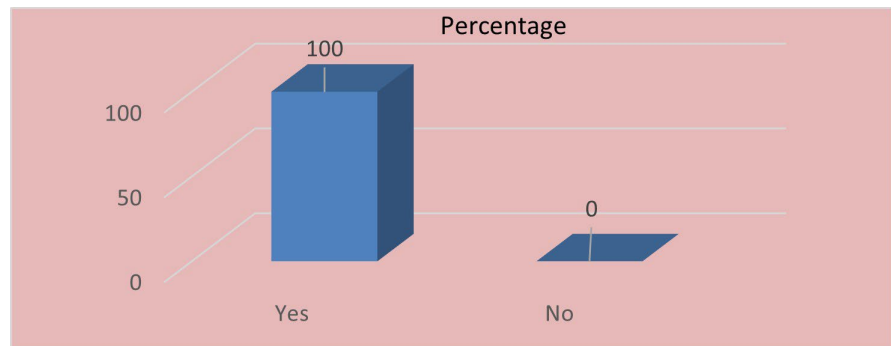


Figure 8. Family dialogue: a way to limit sexual violence in marriage.

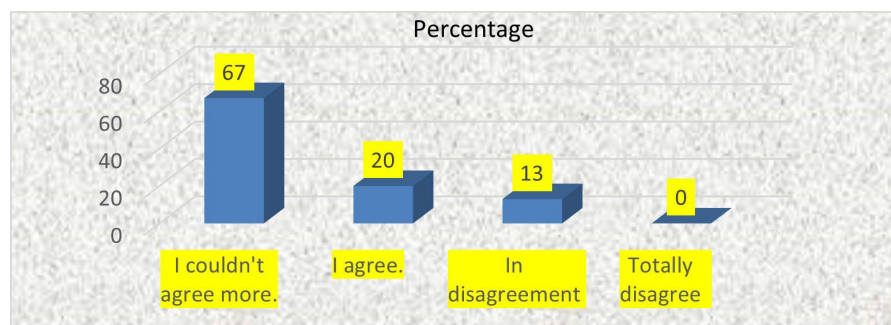


Figure 9. Importance of a specific law of repression in the fight against sexual violence in marriage.

Figure 9 reveals strong support for the idea that a specific law against sexual violence in marriage could eradicate this phenomenon. Indeed, an overwhelming majority of 67% express total agreement, underlining the deep conviction that the establishment of dedicated legislation is a crucial measure in the fight against sexual violence in marriage. Significantly, a further 20% expressed general agreement with this perspective. However, it is pertinent to note that a minority of 13% disagreed, suggesting that, in their view, simply passing a law may not be a comprehensive solution. These respondents raise the importance of couples' awareness-raising as a necessary complement to legislation to effectively combat sexual violence in marriage. This diversity of opinions highlights the complexity of the problem, indicating that multiple approaches can be envisaged to tackle this delicate issue.

Figure 10 reveals essential information about preferences for support and care for victims of sexual violence in marriage. Among the respondents, it is interesting to note that 80% expressed a preference for individual therapy, suggesting a strong preference for personalized, targeted interventions. This result highlights the need for a more individualized approach to meet the specific needs of each survivor. At the same time, 30% mentioned group therapy, indicating a certain openness to interventions involving a collective dynamic. The combination of these two ap-

proaches may offer a range of complementary solutions for addressing sexual violence in marriage. Furthermore, a remarkable 90% of respondents stressed the importance of medical support. This highlights the need for holistic care, integrating medical services into the healing process. Legal support was also identified by 65% of participants, underlining the relevance of legal action in the fight against sexual violence in marriage. However, gaps were observed in other areas of support, such as family support and support from friends, mentioned by 30% and 20% respectively. These results suggest that respondents do not always consider these sources of support a priority, indicating a possible need for education or awareness-raising in these areas. Finally, we note that 8% mentioned another type of support, underlining the diversity of needs and expectations of victims of sexual violence in marriage.

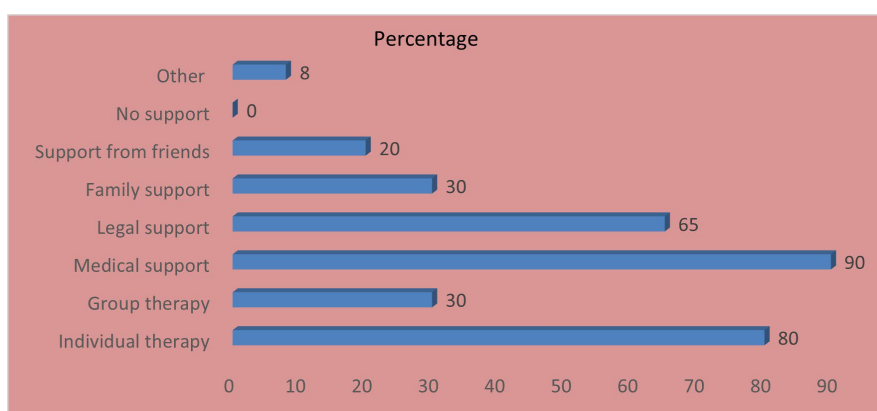


Figure 10. Support and care approaches sought by survivors of sexual violence in marriage.

The Spouse's Criminal Responsibility in Cases of Sexual Violence in Marriage in Burundi

Spousal criminal liability for sexual violence within marriage in Burundi is governed by national laws, notably the Penal Code, which criminalizes acts of sexual violence, including those committed within marriage.

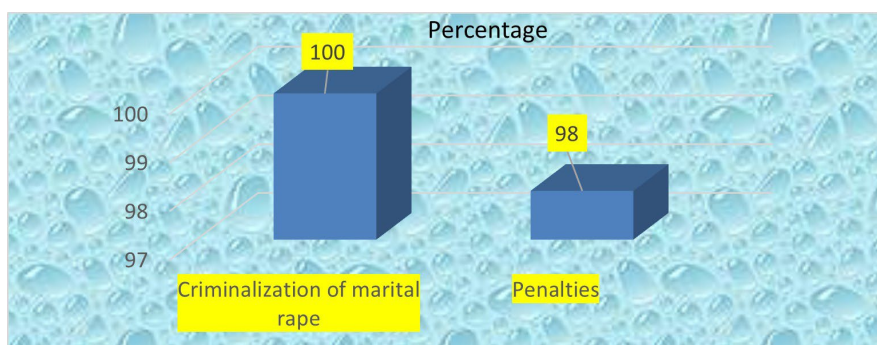


Figure 11. Burundian penal code on sexual violence in marriage in burundi.

When analyzing the data collected in the field, it is striking to note that all respondents (100%) confirmed that the Burundian Penal Code explicitly criminal-

izes marital rape (see **Figure 11**). This unanimity reflects a widespread awareness of the existence of specific legal provisions against rape, including within marriage. By recognizing marital rape as a criminal offence, the Burundian Penal Code marks an important step towards protecting individual rights and combating sexual violence, which is unfortunately still commonplace in many societies. This legal recognition is crucial in providing a solid legal framework for victims to seek justice and redress. However, despite this clear criminalization, marital rape often remains a taboo subject in Burundian society. Culture and social norms can sometimes hinder the reporting and prosecution of such crimes. Victims, often faced with stigmatization and fear of reprisals, are reluctant to come forward. Official recognition of this crime by the Penal Code is only the first step; it is just as essential to promote greater awareness and support victims so that they can feel safe in denouncing these acts. Efforts must be redoubled to educate the public and deconstruct the taboos surrounding marital rape.

Furthermore, 98% of respondents indicated that the penalties for rape and other forms of sexual violence are particularly severe, with significant prison sentences. This severity of penalties reflects the authorities' desire to deter potential aggressors and underline the seriousness of these crimes. Deterrence is a key element in the fight against sexual violence: strict penalties send a clear message that such acts will not be tolerated and will be severely punished. This approach aims not only to punish the perpetrators, but also to prevent future crimes by establishing firm and dissuasive consequences. Finally, the fundamental aim of these rigorous sanctions is to protect victims and reaffirm their rights. By severely punishing the perpetrators of sexual violence, Burundian justice seeks to provide reparation to victims and restore their dignity. In addition, these measures aim to establish a sense of security in society, ensuring that the fundamental rights of every individual are respected and protected. Support for victims must also include psychological and legal follow-up services, ensuring that they receive the help they need to overcome the trauma they have suffered and rebuild their lives. In short, the effective implementation of these laws and sanctions is essential to building a more just and equitable society, where everyone can live without fear of violence or persecution.

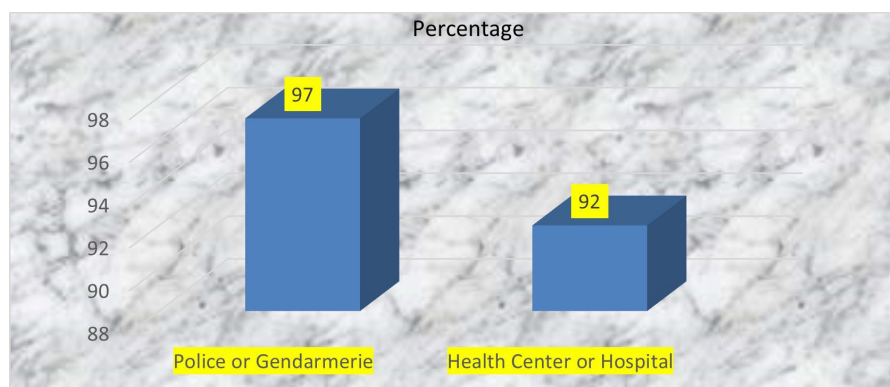


Figure 12. Complaint process in cases of sexual violence in marriage in Burundi.

Figure 12 reveals that 97% of those questioned stated that the complaint process in cases of sexual violence in marriage in Burundi begins with the filing of a complaint with the police or gendarmerie. This initial step is crucial, as it not only initiates legal proceedings, but also ensures the preservation of the evidence needed for prosecution. The speed of this action is essential, as evidence of sexual violence, whether physical or psychological, can quickly disappear or be altered. Thus, the effectiveness of police response and the sensitivity of officers to domestic violence issues play a decisive role in protecting victims and prosecuting perpetrators. At the same time, 92% of respondents indicated that victims of sexual violence in marriage go to a health center or hospital to obtain a medical examination and certificate. This medical step is just as essential as the initial complaint, as it provides objective documentation of the abuse suffered. Health professionals are trained to identify and record signs of sexual violence, providing solid medical evidence in legal proceedings. The medical certificate issued after this examination becomes a key piece of evidence in the victim's file, corroborating her statements and reinforcing the credibility of her testimony in court.

However, although these steps are well known and followed, the success of this process depends on awareness and access to appropriate services. Victims of sexual violence, often isolated and traumatized, may be reluctant to take these steps without adequate support. It is imperative to step up awareness-raising campaigns and provide clear information on the remedies available. In addition, access to health centers and police services must be facilitated, particularly in rural areas where infrastructures may be limited. Ongoing training of health professionals and law enforcement officers on issues of domestic and sexual violence is also essential to ensure respectful and effective care for victims.

Finally, the synergy between health services and law enforcement needs to be optimized to offer a coordinated and holistic response to victims of sexual violence in marriage. Collaboration between these two sectors ensures that medical evidence is properly integrated into police investigations and judicial proceedings, thus ensuring swifter and fairer justice for victims. In addition, psychological and legal support for victims throughout this process is essential to enable them to overcome the trauma and rebuild their lives. In short, although current procedures are in place and well known, their effectiveness depends on awareness, accessibility of services, and intersectoral collaboration to protect and support victims of sexual violence in marriage in Burundi.

From the data shown in **Figure 13**, it is clear that 98% of respondents consider the preservation of evidence to be the main reason for acting quickly in cases of sexual violence in marriage in Burundi. This urgency is dictated by the need to guarantee the integrity of medical evidence and testimonies, crucial elements in substantiating a complaint. Tangible evidence, such as physical injuries documented by medical examinations, and immediate testimony from victims and eyewitnesses, loses reliability over time. Therefore, prompt filing of a complaint maximizes the chances of gathering solid evidence, which is essential for the prosecution and conviction of the culprits. Furthermore, the speed with which a complaint

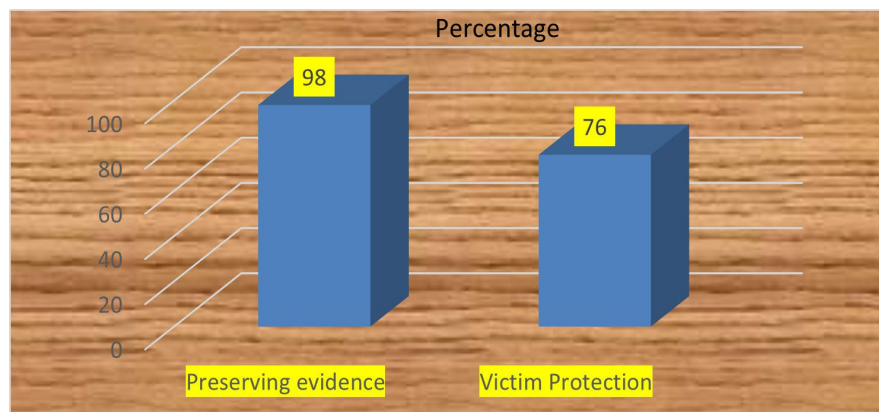


Figure 13. Reasons to act quickly in cases of sexual violence in marriage in Burundi.

is lodged plays a decisive role in protecting the victim. Indeed, 76% of respondents stressed that filing a complaint also triggers protective mechanisms for the victim, such as protection orders. These measures are designed to keep the aggressor away and guarantee the victim's immediate safety, thus reducing the risk of reprisals or re-offending. The rapid implementation of these protections is vital to ensure a safe environment where the victim can begin to rebuild without the constant threat of the aggressor. This need for speed and protection also underlines the importance of accessibility to support services and raising victims' awareness of the remedies available. Information campaigns need to be stepped up to ensure that victims know their rights and the procedures to follow in the event of sexual violence. In addition, improving access to health and justice services, particularly in rural and marginalized areas, is crucial if all victims are to benefit from rapid and effective assistance. Ongoing training for health professionals, law enforcement agencies and the judiciary on the specific issues of domestic and sexual violence also contributes to respectful and competent care.

Finally, inter-institutional collaboration is essential for a holistic response to sexual violence in marriage. Health services, law enforcement agencies and the judicial system must work in close coordination to ensure an unbroken chain of evidence and ongoing victim protection. This synergy ensures that the medical evidence gathered is properly integrated into police investigations and court proceedings, increasing the chances of justice for victims. In addition, psychological and legal support throughout this process is essential to help victims overcome trauma and return to a normal life. In conclusion, the effectiveness of the fight against sexual violence in marriage in Burundi relies on swift action, victim protection and effective coordination between the various players involved.

To carry out a preliminary investigation into cases of sexual violence in marriage in Burundi (see **Figure 14**), it is imperative to collect testimonies, a step unanimously recognized as compulsory by all those surveyed (100%). The police must collect testimonies from the victim, potential witnesses and the accused. This initial phase is crucial to establishing a coherent account of events. Testimonies bring a human and contextual dimension to the facts, enabling investigators

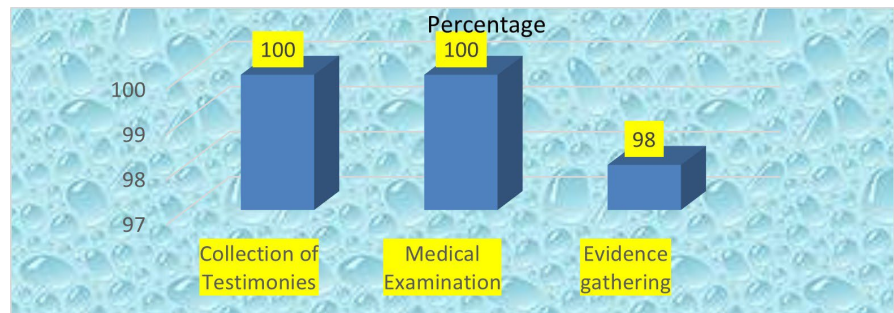


Figure 14. Preliminary survey in cases of sexual violence in marriage in Burundi.

to understand the circumstances surrounding the incident. They form the cornerstone of the investigation, providing essential information that will guide the subsequent stages of the investigation. At the same time, 100% of respondents stressed the importance of a thorough medical examination. This examination provides objective documentation of injuries and signs of sexual assault, often invisible to the naked eye. A medical report detailing these observations is crucial for building a legal case. It provides scientific and indisputable proof of the assault, thus consolidating the victim's complaint. Doctors play a key role in meticulously recording all physical and psychological clues, ensuring that every detail is taken into account in the prosecution. The collection of material evidence, mentioned as essential by 98% of respondents, completes this methodical approach. In addition to testimonies and medical reports, other material elements such as the clothing worn at the time of the attack, audio or video recordings, and any other relevant objects, are scrupulously collected. This tangible evidence plays a decisive role in corroborating statements and strengthening the case. Each piece of evidence is analyzed and integrated into the investigation to provide the most complete and accurate view of the facts.

The success of a preliminary investigation depends on a rigorous combination of witness testimony, medical evidence and physical evidence. This triad enables us to build a solid case, essential for the prosecution and conviction of the culprits. The effectiveness of these investigations is determined by the speed and precision with which these elements are gathered and analyzed. Furthermore, effective coordination between the various players involved—police officers, doctors and experts in material evidence—is essential to ensure that every aspect of the investigation is exhaustive and beyond reproach. Ultimately, the rigor of these procedures is essential to ensure justice and protection for victims of sexual violence in marriage in Burundi.

Figure 15 reveals that, in the process of prosecuting cases of sexual violence in marriage in Burundi, 85% of respondents stressed that cases are systematically referred to the Public Prosecutor's Office. This step is of the utmost importance, since it is the Public Prosecutor's Office that decides whether to indict and prosecute the alleged perpetrators before the courts. This is an essential milestone in the pursuit of justice, marking the start of the formal judicial process aimed at ensuring accountability for wrongdoing. Subsequently, 90% of those surveyed

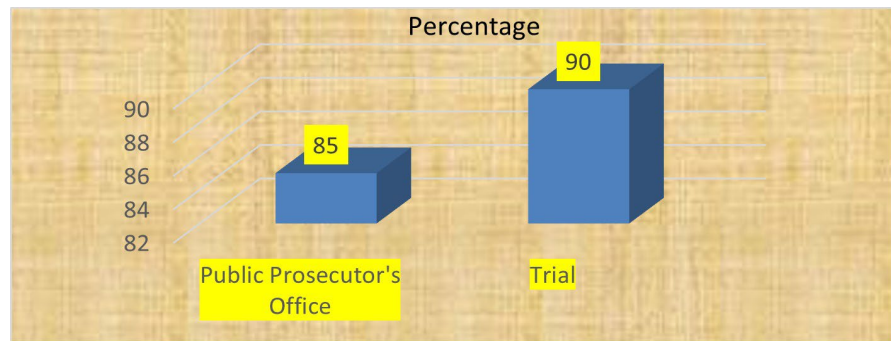


Figure 15. Prosecution of sexual violence in marriage in Burundi.

point to a criminal trial, where the guilt of the accused spouse will be determined by a court of law. This trial represents the pinnacle of the judicial process, where the evidence presented by both parties will be scrupulously examined. It is at this point that the truth of the alleged facts will be established impartially, in accordance with the principles of fairness and the law. The court's deliberations reflect the search for justice, where the balance of evidence weighs heavily in the quest for truth and reparation for victims.

However, it is important to note that the success of these legal proceedings depends on a number of factors, including the quality of the evidence presented, the competence of lawyers and judges, and the efficiency of the judicial system as a whole. Obstacles such as procedural delays, corruption and prejudice can hinder the fair conduct of trials, compromising the quest for justice for victims. It is therefore imperative to ensure that the principles of the rule of law are rigorously applied at every stage of the judicial process, to ensure fair and impartial justice for all parties involved. In conclusion, the process of prosecuting cases of sexual violence within marriage in Burundi is a complex and rigorous one, marked by the transmission of files to the Public Prosecutor's Office and the holding of criminal trials before the courts. However, to guarantee the integrity and efficiency of this process, it is imperative to overcome institutional obstacles and ensure that each stage is carried out with diligence, transparency and impartiality. Only a fair and equitable judicial approach can truly meet the needs for reparation and justice of victims of sexual violence in marriage in Burundi.

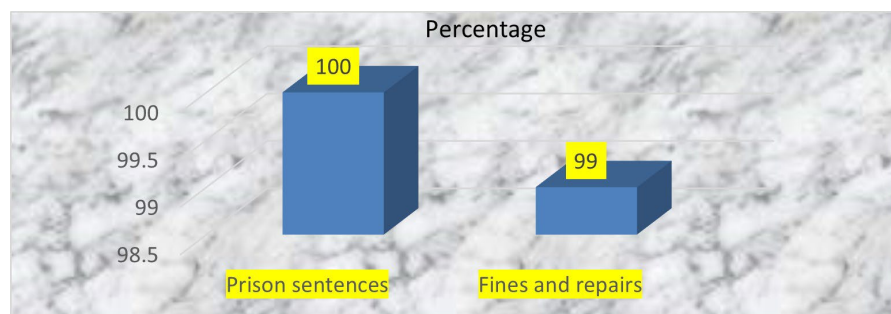


Figure 16. Convictions for sexual violence in marriage in Burundi.

After analyzing the data in **Figure 16**, it is striking to note that all the respond-

ents (100%) stressed that prison sentences are one of the main penalties for sexual violence in marriage in Burundi. Indeed, if the spouse is found guilty, he or she is generally sentenced to a term of imprisonment. The length of this sentence depends on various factors, including the seriousness of the offence and aggravating circumstances. This sanction, although severe, is often considered necessary to deter reprehensible behavior and protect victims. Moreover, 99% of respondents also stressed that fines and reparations are significant sentences in cases of sexual violence in marriage in Burundi. In addition to prison sentences, fines can be imposed on perpetrators, and the victim can receive damages. These financial penalties are designed not only to punish the perpetrators, but also to compensate the victims for the harm they have suffered. They serve to restore some form of justice by acknowledging the wrongs done and offering tangible compensation to victims, thus contributing to their physical, emotional and financial recovery.

However, it is essential to note that the effectiveness of these sentences depends on a number of factors, including the consistent and fair application of the law, and the availability of resources and monitoring mechanisms to ensure their implementation. Appropriate and proportionate sanctions are essential to ensure that perpetrators are held to account for their actions, and that victims obtain some form of reparation and justice. It is therefore imperative to ensure that the justice system has the necessary tools to deal effectively with cases of sexual violence in marriage, and to respond to the needs of victims with sensitivity and compassion. Prison sentences, fines and reparations are crucial sentences in cases of sexual violence in marriage in Burundi. These sanctions aim to punish the perpetrators, repair the harm caused to the victims and deter future wrongdoing. However, their effectiveness depends on the consistent and fair application of the law, as well as the availability of resources to ensure their implementation. Only a fair and balanced judicial approach can truly guarantee the protection of victims' rights and the accountability of perpetrators of sexual violence within marriage. Spousal criminal responsibility for sexual violence in marriage in Burundi is clearly defined by law, but its implementation requires swift action and solid evidence. Victims have legal recourse and can obtain support to help them in their quest for justice. It is crucial to raise awareness and strengthen protection mechanisms to guarantee the safety and rights of victims.

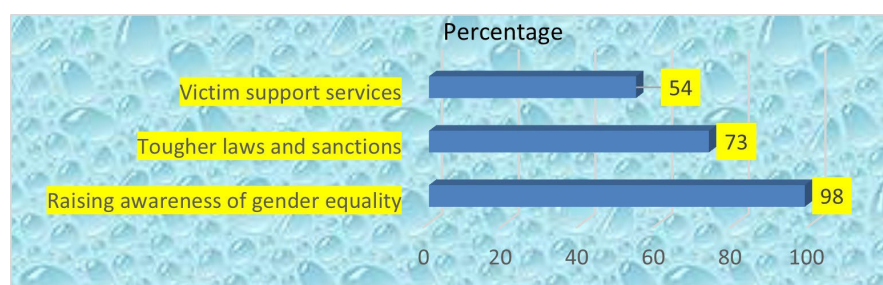


Figure 17. Actions to be taken to prevent sexual violence in marriage.

Figure 17 shows that 98% of respondents consider raising awareness of gender

equality to be one of the key actions for preventing sexual violence in marriage. Such awareness-raising is essential to deconstruct the gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms that often underpin violent behavior. Through educational campaigns, school programs and community initiatives, it is possible to promote a culture of respect and equality between the sexes. By challenging traditional roles and promoting mutual respect, society can gradually reduce the incidence of domestic violence. At the same time, 73% of respondents stressed the importance of strengthening laws and sanctions as another fundamental pillar in the prevention of sexual violence within marriage. The implementation of robust legislation and dissuasive sanctions is crucial to creating a legal framework that effectively protects victims and deters potential aggressors. This means updating existing laws to close legal loopholes and rigorously enforcing penalties. Strict, impartial justice, combined with severe penalties, sends a clear message that society neither accepts nor tolerates such behavior. Furthermore, 54% of respondents indicated that victim support services are also an essential component in the prevention of domestic sexual violence. These services include shelters, helplines, psychological counseling and legal support. Offering comprehensive and accessible support to victims is essential to enable them to escape abusive situations and rebuild their lives. In addition, the availability of these services plays a preventative role by providing resources and options to potential victims, which can encourage them to report abuse before it escalates.

In conclusion, the fight against sexual violence in marriage in Burundi is based on a multidimensional approach. Raising awareness of gender equality, strengthening laws and sanctions, and developing support services for victims are complementary actions which, together, create a safer and more equitable environment. Effective prevention of domestic violence requires ongoing collaboration between governments, non-governmental organizations, communities and individuals. By working together on these different fronts, it is possible to make significant progress towards eradicating sexual violence in marriage and ensuring the dignity and safety of all people.

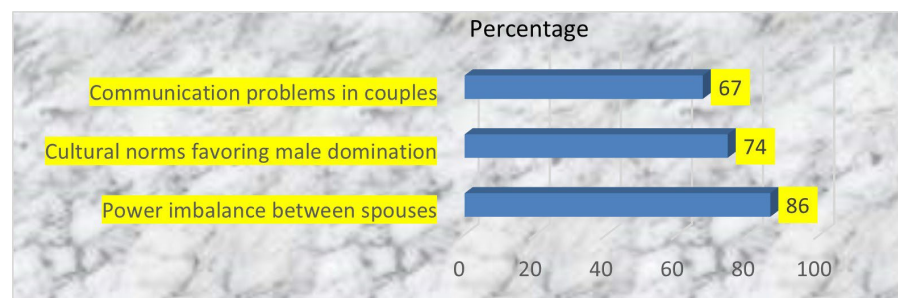


Figure 18. Main causes of sexual violence in marriage.

Figure 18 reveals that 86% of respondents identified the imbalance of power between spouses as one of the main causes of sexual violence in marriage. This imbalance often manifests itself in a dynamic where one spouse, usually the man,

exerts excessive control over the other, which can include financial, emotional and physical aspects. This unequal balance of power creates an environment conducive to abuse, where the dominant spouse can use sexual violence as a means of maintaining and reinforcing his or her position of power. Combating this root cause requires efforts to promote equality within the couple and empower women, so that they can make decisions freely and without fear of reprisal. Furthermore, 74% of those surveyed attributed the persistence of domestic sexual violence to cultural norms that favor male domination. These norms, deeply rooted in society, value and perpetuate the superiority of men over women, thus legitimizing various abusive behaviors. Traditional beliefs prescribing the submission of women and the unchallenged authority of men in the domestic sphere provide fertile ground for sexual violence. To remedy this situation, it is crucial to run awareness campaigns that challenge these cultural norms and promote an egalitarian vision of gender roles, both within the family and in society at large.

In addition, 67% of those surveyed cited communication problems within the couple as a significant contributing factor to sexual violence. Ineffective or non-existent communication can lead to misunderstandings, frustrations and unresolved conflicts, which in turn can escalate into violence. Couples who fail to express their needs, expectations and limits are particularly vulnerable to these destructive dynamics. Improving communication within couples through marriage counseling, relationship skills workshops and couple therapy can play a crucial role in preventing sexual violence. By learning to dialogue openly and respectfully, couples can resolve their differences constructively and reduce tensions that might otherwise lead to abuse.

In conclusion, the causes of sexual violence in marriage in Burundi are multiple and interconnected. The power imbalance between spouses, cultural norms favoring male domination and communication problems within the couple are key factors identified by respondents. Addressing these root causes requires a holistic approach that includes gender equality education, challenging patriarchal cultural norms, and strengthening couples' communication skills. By combining these strategies, it is possible to create a more balanced, respectful and violence-free marital environment, where each partner can flourish to the full.

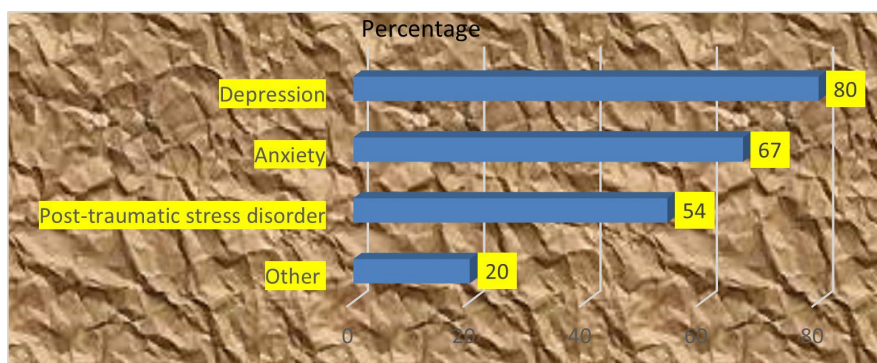


Figure 19. Main legal consequences for perpetrators of domestic sexual violence.

Figure 19 Analysis of data from the field highlights the serious psychological consequences suffered by victims of domestic sexual violence. In this respect, 80% of respondents report that depression is one of the most frequent consequences. Violence within marriage can lead to a deep sense of hopelessness, helplessness, and worthlessness in victims, who can find themselves trapped in a cycle of negative thoughts and emotional distress. Depression can have a devastating impact on victims' quality of life, compromising their ability to function normally in their daily lives and maintain healthy social relationships. In addition, 67% of those surveyed cited anxiety as another significant psychological consequence for victims of domestic sexual violence. Anxiety often manifests itself as feelings of apprehension, nervousness, and constant fear, which may be triggered by traumatic memories or the fear of further assaults. Victims may find it difficult to feel safe, even in ordinary situations, which can lead to long-term deterioration in their mental and physical health. Anxiety can also interfere with daily functioning, disrupting sleep, concentration, and interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, 54% of those surveyed highlighted post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a frequent consequence for victims of domestic sexual violence. Post-traumatic stress disorder is a severe psychological reaction to a traumatic event, characterized by flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, and constant hypervigilance. Victims may repeatedly relive the sexual assault, even long after it occurred, which can have a devastating impact on their emotional well-being and quality of life. Post-traumatic stress disorder requires specialized intervention and ongoing support to help victims overcome their symptoms and make the best possible recovery. Finally, 20% of respondents mention other psychological consequences that victims of domestic sexual violence may experience. These consequences can include guilt, shame, loss of self-confidence, and attachment disorders. Each of these emotional reactions can have a profound impact on the mental health and well-being of victims, affecting their ability to function normally in their daily lives and to maintain healthy interpersonal relationships. It is therefore essential to recognize the diversity of individual responses to domestic sexual violence and to offer appropriate, individualized support to help victims recover and rebuild their lives.

In conclusion, evidence from the field highlights the devastating psychological consequences of domestic sexual violence. Depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and other emotional reactions can have a profound impact on victims' mental health and well-being. It is imperative to recognize these consequences and offer specialized, holistic support to help victims overcome their trauma and rebuild after traumatic experiences.

Figure 20 highlights the various physical consequences suffered by victims of domestic sexual violence. With this in mind, 97% of those surveyed reported that physical injuries were among the most frequent consequences. These injuries can vary in severity, from bruises and abrasions to fractures and internal trauma. They are often the direct result of the physical aggression associated with sexual violence and can lead to significant physical pain, temporary or even permanent disability, and lasting psychological scars for victims. In addition, 84% of respondents

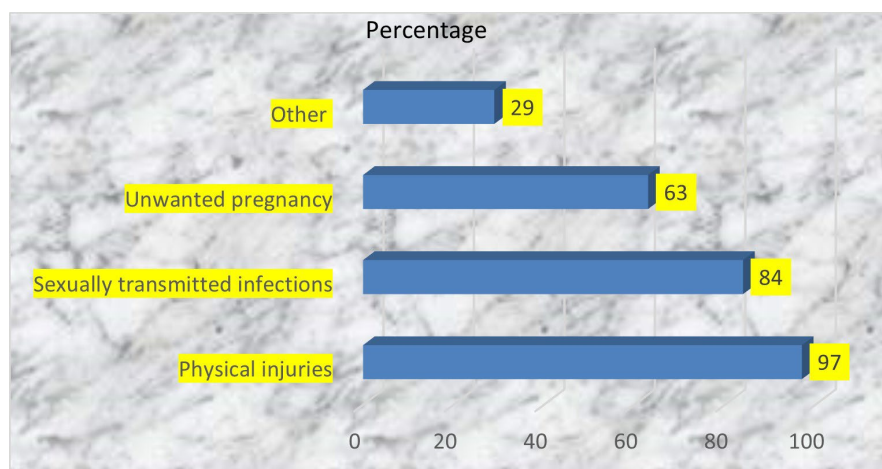


Figure 20. Most common physical consequences for victims of domestic sexual violence.

highlighted sexually transmitted infections (STIs) as another important physical consequence for victims of domestic sexual violence. STIs, such as HIV/AIDS, syphilis, and gonorrhea, can be transmitted during unprotected sexual acts, exposing victims to serious health risks. In addition to the medical implications, STIs can also have significant psychological consequences, such as social stigmatization and health-related anxiety, affecting victims' quality of life and well-being. Furthermore, 63% of those surveyed cited unwanted pregnancy as a frequent physical consequence of marital sexual violence. Sexual assaults within marriage can lead to unplanned pregnancies, exposing victims to complex emotional and practical dilemmas. Unwanted pregnancies can compromise victims' physical and mental health, as well as their reproductive autonomy, confronting them with difficult decisions about their future and that of their unborn child. Finally, 29% of respondents mentioned other physical consequences that victims of domestic sexual violence may suffer. These include genital lesions, chronic pelvic pain, gastrointestinal problems, and chronic headaches. Each of these physical manifestations can have a significant impact on the health and well-being of victims, requiring medical attention and appropriate support for recovery. In conclusion, data from the field highlight the serious physical consequences of domestic sexual violence. Physical injuries, sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies, and other physical manifestations can have a devastating impact on victims' health and well-being. Recognizing these consequences and providing appropriate medical, psychological, and social support is essential to help victims recover and rebuild their lives after suffering physical and emotional trauma.

Figure 21 reveals the profound social consequences suffered by victims of domestic sexual violence. From this perspective, 95% of respondents identified social isolation as one of the most common consequences. Victims may find themselves isolated from their social network, whether out of fear of judgment or reprisal from the aggressor or because of the sense of shame associated with the experience of violence. This isolation can exacerbate the traumatic effects of violence, depriving victims of the support they need to rebuild and recover. Moreover, 90% of

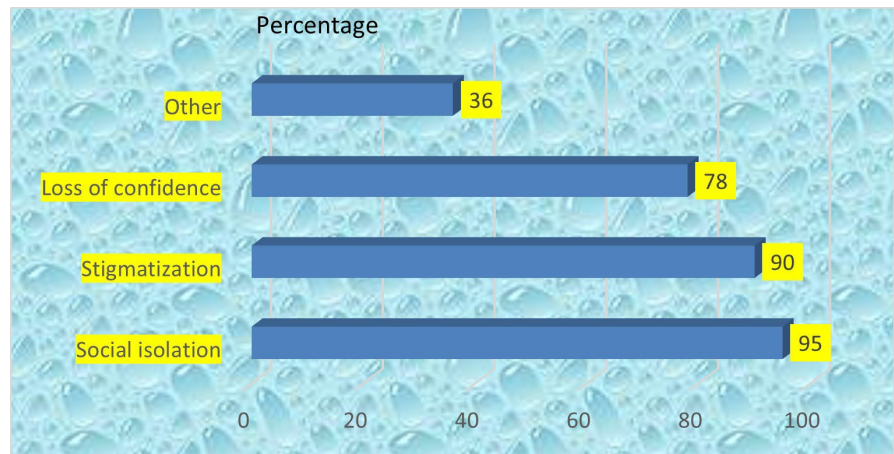


Figure 21. The most common social consequences for victims of domestic sexual violence.

those surveyed highlighted stigmatization as another significant social consequence of domestic sexual violence. Victims may be subject to prejudice and discrimination from those around them, from their community, or even from health professionals or the justice system. This stigma can hinder victims' ability to seek help or report abuse, keeping them in a cycle of silence and suffering. Furthermore, 78% of those surveyed cited loss of confidence as a frequent social consequence for victims of domestic sexual violence. The assaults suffered within marriage can profoundly undermine victims' self-confidence, calling into question their self-worth and their ability to trust others. This loss of confidence can have lasting repercussions on their ability to establish healthy relationships and integrate into society.

Finally, 36% of those surveyed mentioned other social consequences that victims of domestic sexual violence may suffer. These include the breakdown of family ties, loss of employment, economic insecurity, and homelessness. Each of these social manifestations can have devastating consequences on the lives of victims, preventing them from rebuilding and fully recovering from traumatic experiences. Recognizing and addressing the social consequences of domestic sexual violence is therefore crucial to offering comprehensive support to victims and helping them regain their autonomy and dignity.

4. Discussion of the Results

Analysis of data on responsibility for sexual violence in marriage among Burundian husbands highlights several crucial aspects at both legal and social levels. The results show that legislative and social measures are needed to tackle this problem comprehensively. According to the results, 100% of respondents affirmed that the toughening of penalties is one of the additional legislative measures needed to reinforce criminal responsibility for sexual violence in marriage. This consensus underlines a strong demand for a tougher response from the justice system to deter perpetrators and ensure stricter justice for victims. Tougher penalties could include longer prison sentences and heavier financial penalties, sending a clear mes-

sage that sexual violence within marriage is intolerable and will be severely punished. In addition, 93% of respondents support increased resources for law enforcement services. This implies that law enforcement agencies must be better equipped and trained to deal with cases of domestic sexual violence (Bahati Sebasore et al., 2024; Bashangwa et al., 2024; Manegabe et al., 2025; Ndayisenga et al., 2025; Ndayisenga & Sindayigaya, 2024; Nduwimana & Sindayigaya, 2023a, 2023b, 2025; Nyabenda & Sindayigaya, 2023; Sindayigaya, 2020, 2022, 2023a, 2023b, 2024b, 2025). Adequate training of police officers in dealing with situations of sexual violence and the careful investigation of complaints is essential. Increased resources could also include specialized domestic violence management units, capable of providing tailored support and rigorous follow-up of reported cases.

Furthermore, 86% of those surveyed stressed the need to strengthen victim protection measures. This indicates the need for effective protection mechanisms to be put in place to ensure the safety of victims once violence has been reported. Protective measures can include protection orders, shelters for victims, and psychological support programs. Guaranteeing the safety and well-being of victims is crucial to encouraging more people to report the violence they suffer and seek the help they need.

In addition, 100% of those surveyed said that awareness-raising and education are essential measures to prevent sexual violence in marriage. Raising public awareness of the seriousness of sexual violence and its consequences can play a key role in transforming cultural and social attitudes that tolerate or minimize these acts. Educational programs can be developed to inform communities about victims' rights, available resources, and the importance of gender equality. Awareness campaigns can also target young people to instill values of respect and consent from an early age. The results also reveal the serious psychological and social consequences of domestic sexual violence. Social isolation, mentioned by 95% of respondents, as well as stigmatization (90%) and loss of confidence (78%), underline the devastating impact this violence can have on victims' lives. These consequences require a holistic response that includes not only legal support, but also psychosocial support. Counseling and therapy can help victims overcome the trauma and rebuild their lives. In conclusion, the results of this study highlight the need for a multidimensional approach to combating sexual violence in marriage in Burundi. Tougher penalties, strengthened law enforcement services, effective protection measures for victims, and awareness-raising and education initiatives are all essential components of a comprehensive strategy (Sindayigaya, 2020; Sindayigaya & Nyabenda, 2022). Recognizing and addressing the psychological and social consequences of this violence is equally crucial to ensuring that victims receive the support they need to recover and regain their dignity. It is imperative that efforts are coordinated and supported by strong political will and adequate resources to bring about lasting and significant change in the fight against domestic sexual violence.

5. Conclusion

An in-depth examination of accountability for sexual violence in marriage, with a particular focus on the case of Burundian spouses, reveals a complex situation requiring multifaceted and coordinated interventions. The results of this study highlight several key areas where immediate and sustained action is essential to effectively prevent and respond to this form of violence. It is imperative to strengthen the legislative framework by toughening penalties for perpetrators of domestic sexual violence. The unanimity of respondents on the need for tougher penalties shows a growing awareness of the importance of deterring these acts through strict penal measures. Such tougher penalties must be accompanied by an increase in resources dedicated to law enforcement services, thus ensuring that law enforcement agencies have the necessary means to rigorously investigate and protect victims. Robust protective measures for victims are essential. The data highlight the need for support and safety mechanisms, such as protection orders and shelters, to help victims rebuild in a safe environment. Awareness-raising and education also play a crucial role in preventing sexual violence. Ongoing awareness campaigns and appropriate educational programs can help change the cultural and social attitudes that perpetuate this violence.

In addition, the psychological and social consequences of domestic sexual violence, such as depression, social isolation, and stigmatization, require special attention. It is vital to provide victims with appropriate psychosocial support to help them overcome the trauma and regain their self-confidence. Counseling and therapy services must be accessible and adapted to the specific needs of victims.

In conclusion, combating sexual violence in marriage in Burundi requires a holistic and integrated approach. It is crucial that authorities, communities, and non-governmental organizations work together to strengthen laws, increase resources for law enforcement, put in place effective protection measures, and promote awareness and education. Only a concerted and resolute response will create a safe and just environment for all, ensuring that the rights and dignity of victims are fully respected and protected.

We make the following recommendations to the Government of Burundi:

- ✓ Tougher penalties for perpetrators of domestic sexual violence to deter such acts and ensure strict justice for victims.
- ✓ Offer specialized training to police officers and gendarmes on managing cases of domestic sexual violence and protecting victims.
- ✓ Allocate sufficient resources to law enforcement to ensure rigorous investigation and adequate support for victims.
- ✓ Implement protection orders, safe shelters, and support programs for victims of domestic sexual violence.
- ✓ Organize national awareness campaigns to educate the public about the rights of victims and the consequences of sexual violence.
- ✓ Integrate educational programs in schools and communities to promote gender equality and respect for human rights.

- ✓ Simplify legal procedures and offer free legal assistance to victims of domestic sexual violence.
 - ✓ Establish accessible counseling and therapy services to help victims overcome trauma and rebuild their lives.
 - ✓ Set up monitoring and evaluation systems to track the impact of measures taken and adjust strategies accordingly.
 - ✓ Work in partnership with specialized non-governmental organizations to benefit from their expertise and experience in combating domestic sexual violence.
- We make the following recommendations to the spouses of Burundi:
- ✓ Always obtain your partner's consent before having sex, and respect his or her choices and limits.
 - ✓ Maintain honest, open communication with your partner to understand his or her needs, desires, and concerns.
 - ✓ Educate each other about each other's sexual and relationship rights to prevent abuse.
 - ✓ Promote and practice gender equality within marriage, valuing mutual respect and cooperation.
 - ✓ Take part in training programs on domestic violence and healthy relationships to better understand the dynamics of power and respect.
 - ✓ If you become aware of an act of sexual violence, support and encourage the victim to seek help and report the incident.
 - ✓ Refuse and denounce all forms of violence, physical or sexual, as a means of resolving conflicts or exercising control over a spouse.
 - ✓ Foster an environment where everyone feels safe to talk about their feelings, fears, and experiences without fear of judgment or reprisal.
 - ✓ Cultivate and demonstrate consistent mutual respect, recognizing the value and dignity of your spouse in all interactions.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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