Violence......
It is the individual Man, raising his fist against his wife.
It is the gang of boys, cheering on the fight in the middle of a tight circle.
It is the young man on a date, acting without regard for the desires of the young woman he is with.
It is the man pushed by rage and fear, driving his car to his death.
It is the physical or verbal attack, on another man, because of his sexual orientation or religion or skin colour.
It is the gangs of men – we call them armies – who have been commanded to view each other as less than human, and to view citizens as something even less.
It is violence on the playing field.
It is, perhaps metaphorically, perhaps not, our relationship to our natural environment.
It is men’s violence in a myriad of forms.

By Michael Kaufman, founder White Ribbon Campaign

I. Introduction

Violence against women (and girls) is a global problem occurring in every culture and social group. Normally, it is occasioned by power inequalities between women and men and the masculine culture found among almost all social groupings across the globe. In fact in many cultures across the world, men are encouraged to take risks and express their “manhood” often in ways that lead to violence and spread of HIV &AIDS. Such risks include having sex with multiple (and concurrent) partners, use of alcohol and drugs as well as display of dominant violent behaviours. Consequently, women and girls constitute an increasing proportion of the population living with HIV&AIDS and the rate of female infection continues to rise.

The high rates of HIV infection in most communities in Kenya (and other parts of the world) today, can be attributed to social factors, tradition, deep rooted gender inequalities including violence of one form or the other–physical, psychological, sexual etc. In fact, there is a high correlation between sexual and other forms of violence against women and girls and their chances of HIV infection.

While there is no doubt that even men experience violence (from women), it is men who pause a lot of danger to women and girls. If the tide of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is to be tamed, then it is imperative that the focus of attention needs also to be directed toward men as perpetrators.
II. Definitions

i) Gender

Gender normally refers to male and female labels to social roles and responsibilities AS IF they arise from sexual differences, although such attributes are acquired by a process of socialization. It related to how we are perceived and expected to think and act as women and men because of the way society is organized not because of our biological differences.

ii) Gender Based Violence (GBV)

Is “violence involving men and women, in which the female is usually the victim and which arises from unequal power relationships between men and women” It is violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty. Arguably, GBV can and/or refers to:

- Biased response to human needs based on gender
- Any negative perception and /or attitude that undermine the dignity and identity of one sex over another; it is discrimination, exploitation! It is the keeping the discriminated and exploited in fear and, therefore, unable to claim their rights as human persons. Gender based violence does not arise on the basis of one’s sex.

III. Gender and Sex

Most people think that gender violence arises on the basis of sex of a person. This is not true. Otherwise women would be experiencing violence in the same way throughout the world. The apparent confusion between sex and gender, calls for a distinction. This distinction is surrounded by certain critical questions such as:

- What CAN a man do that a woman CANNOT do?
- What CAN a woman do that a man CANNOT do?

There is a recognition that at the centre of this distinction (between sex and gender) rests the very concept of GENDER BASED VIOLENCE.

The distinction between sex and gender remains indubitably clear:
Sex on the one hand is natural; biological construct; common to humanity; based on facts; static–time/situations…etc., while gender on the other hand is human designed; a social construct; culture specific; perceptions and dynamic.

Against this backdrop, one rightly observes that GBV is mainly occasioned by a mentalism, a thought pattern, an epistemic orientation that requires radical scrutiny in order to be tamed. GBV violence as the name suggests is gender specific.

It, therefore, suffices to look at some of the causal factors and manifestations of GBV

IV. The Reality of Gender Based Violence in Kenya

Two weeks ago, Maendeleo Ya Wanaume (Men’s organization) in Kenya issued a report of violence against them in which about 3 or 4 out of every 10 of Men in Kenya are battered with Central and Nairobi provinces leading in the count – this study was as a result of sex strike that was called by women.

Nairobi Women’s Hospital, which is the only shelter for victims of GBV violence in Kenya, receives an average of 21 cases of rape and incest each day. Majority of the victims of violence are girls (KDHS 2006:2, 24-26).

In 2006, Kenya’s Demographic Health Survey on women, girls and HIV&AIDS highlighted the following:

- HIV prevalence in women in the age range 15-49 is 8.7% while HIV prevalence for men in the same age range is 4.3% (almost 2 to1).
- HIV prevalence in girls 15-19 years old is six times higher than that in boys of the same age(3% of young women in this age range are infected, but less than 0.5% of young men)
- HIV prevalence among women between ages 20-24 is over four times that of men in the same age group (9% versus 2%). There is a peak prevalence rate among women between ages 25-29 which stands at 13%.
- At least 2 in North Eastern and Eastern (hardship) provinces in Kenya have offered themselves to unprotected sex in exchange for food (for their malnourished and dying babies and children)

The above figures have since gone up due to the interplay of socio- economic and political factors – the reality of post election violence of 2007 and the global economic decline, which has since increased poverty among the Kenyan low and middle class citizens.
National studies confirm that between 40 and 50 percent of Kenyan women and girls experience different forms of violence – (physical sexual, verbal or emotional) from childhood to adulthood. Women who are abused or live with the threat of violence cannot have the privilege of choosing how to engage in sex. This means that at least half of Kenyan women are unable to protect themselves from exposure to HIV – 1 in every 4 women have been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused by a man. And, 25% of 12-24 year olds lose their virginity by force (UN, 2006).

Gender-based violence, therefore, accounts for more death and disability among young women of university or college age in Kenya (Koinage St. experience).

V. Causal Factors and Manifestations: The Case of Kenya

Most cases of GBV are as a result of the following factors:

a) Culture:

Traditional myths and beliefs such as having sex with a virgin as a cure for HIV result in rape and sexual abuse against many girls.

In Kenya as in most African countries, a boy child is more preferred to a girl-child. For example, among the Luo of Kenya a boy is regarded as “SIRO” (PILLAR), a woman who has given birth to a boy has completed the process of marriage = TRULY and FULLY married and cannot be divorced. She simply obtains a higher status above the one who has only given birth to girls. In most cases to give birth to girls is a source of ridicule – such a woman would be asked to try other men to get her a son.

Among the “Shona” of Zimbabwe – when a young woman gives birth to a girl-child, women ululate 3 times. If a boy, the ululation is 5 times and a husband whose wife has given birth to a girl is regarded as “WEAK”. It should be noted that men did not regard themselves as weak and in such a case a man would marry another wife to prove he was strong. This was a reason enough for a man to marry another wife.

This preference is manifested even business titling and naming e.g. OMOLLO & SONS ENTERPRISES, JACK & SONS FARM etc it is NEVER “so and so …and children or daughters”. With this preference, a boy in the African society, grows up as superior to the and better than girl. This is the beginning of GBV in boys.
b) Patriarchy
In Africa men have the power and authority. Women MUST have the moral audacity to listen to men. This is a reality that is extant even in universities and colleges. Women should not lead because that will make them to be listened to, which is a near taboo. A woman who does not “listen” (submit) to a man should be disciplined and shown how to behave.

c) Patrilineality
This is where the lineage is traced through the male/fathers line even. On this premise too, the society socializes women to be safe in the presence of men. As such women MOSTLY try to play into the needs of men to avoid controversy and to keep safe within community structures.

d) Concubinage and Extra-Marital Affairs
Multiple and concurrent sexual partners is viewed as okay and as a preserve of men. This puts women at risk of contracting HIV virus. But nobody condemns it!

e) Poverty
Poverty means that ‘opportunities and choices most basic to human development are denied—to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-respect and the respect of others’ (UNDP 1997:15). Poverty and VAW interact in complex cycles of causality. Poverty can be a causal factor in GBV, and vice versa in most cases women are kept poor to guarantee their submissiveness to men. However, a more serious form of poverty that plays into GBV is a situation of drought where women have to sleep with men as to get food for their families. Men control means of production and women have to submit to the ways of men in order to “enjoy the fruits”.

f) Socialization
In most African societies, a man is presented as an accomplished sexual performer: a woman is to serve his sexual interests. This makes men to behave as if the world is in deficiency of men and “their sexual” acts that injure women and society in the long run – particularly in the era of
HIV&AIDS. There is a lot of pressure on the boy child to succeed even at the expense of a woman/girl’s security.

**g) Perceptions of Masculinity and Femininity**

Children understand their gender identity. At very tender age, about 3 or 4 years, children begin to avoid actions and activities they believe to be inappropriate for their sex simply because it is appropriate for the other. It is therefore important to address the issue of gender equity at an early stage in children’s lives in order to address emerging gender inequalities. Such perceptions perpetuate violence against girls and women later in life in different forms.

**h) Religion**

This is mainly seen in ecclesiastical hierarchy, which has played a big role GBV directed towards women. Most religions churches prefer male to women leadership. This is further compounded by the fact that even in churches where women are allowed to preach, a man is called upon afterwards to clarify the issues raised by their preaching. The underlying factor here is that even though they can do “well”, still women cannot measure to the standards of men.

**VI. Effects of Gender-Based Violence**

Effects of GBV are normally seen in areas such as:

- Increased Vulnerability of women to Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and HIV&AIDS
- Underdevelopment due to lessened or lack participation of women in socio-economic and political activities
- Family breakdown
- Loss of property
- Improper/insufficient child-care
- Low self-esteem among women etc,

In view of these and many other effects of GBV, the question to ask is what is the way forward?
VII. Way Forward: TAMAR

GBV should be addressed in an all encompassing manner. In a way that challenges the familiar ways of thinking that place men on a pedestal too high for women to reach and thus making them to subjugate women. TAMAR approach as drawn from the Bible (2Samuel 13:1-22) offers such approach which manifests itself in a paradigm shift of mentalism and popular thought patterns of the community.

The TAMAR is a Contextual Bible Study campaign that was launched in Kenya in 2005 under the sponsorship of the Fellowship of Christian Councils of Churches in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa – FECCLAHA. It focuses on domestic and sexual violence. As such it challenges churches, religious institutions individuals as well as institutions of higher learning to address the crisis of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and HIV&AIDS (cf. Separate hand out, The Tamar Story).

How does the TAMAR Approach do this?

The Tamar is a Contextual 5-Step Bible Study, which involves:

1. Choosing the Theme – the reality of the community
2. Finding a Biblical Text – reading familiar text in unfamiliar way
3. Questioning and reading – community consciousness questions; drawing from the lived experiences of the community
4. Articulating and Owning – the theological understandings of the text
5. Developing a plan of Action: Tamar is not only about interpreting the Bible BUT ALLOWING the Bible to equip us to change our world and mentalities for mutuality in existence.

NB: A contextual Bible study revolves around facilitation – enabling the involved group to work together in a collaborative manner by sharing their resources in order to establish a common course of action.

From the story of Tamar for instance, the following issues need to be addressed from a discursive perspective:

- What are the themes in this text?
- What are the main characters in the story and what do we know about them?
- What can you say about the characters in the story – which one can you/can you not identify with and why?
• What crimes are committed in the story?
• What are the implications of Tamar’s rape?
• In view of the current situation of HIV&AIDS how can we relate the situation of Tamar to that of those infected with HIV today?
• Are there women like Tamar in the society today? How are they viewed and/or treated?
• What are some of the motive that led Amnon to rape Tamar? Are such motives extant in men today?
• Is there a call to action / what can be done in the context of this story?

VIII. The Role of Tangaza Men’s Initiative

Tangaza Men’s Initiative on Gender Based Violence and HIV&AIDS is a forum supported by Ecumenical HIV&AIDS Initiative in Africa, EHAIA in collaboration with Tangaza College of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, CUEA in order to engage College and University young men in Kenya more effectively to:

- Establish and support men-based initiatives that may raise awareness in the realms of human sexuality, gender and HIV&AIDS in ways in line with Theology and Scripture
- Address violence in men’s programmes conducted in social places such as bars, churches and workplaces.
- Deeply involve male students in colleges and universities in issues that address gender based violence in their institutions, during sporting activities, and through the non-broadcast media (at least for now) in order to effectively fight the HIV&AIDS pandemic

IX. Conclusion and Suggestions

NGOs that deal with this specifically with HIV/AIDS are often strong in the fight against the epidemic, but few have the capacity or resources to deal with issues surrounding violence against women and HIV&AIDS. It is important that AIDS organizations link with those other organizations that address Gender Based Violence to create synergies and maximize collective effectiveness. Thus, the call to tame Gender based Violence is both urgent and necessary and
everyone is called upon to take part. If this co-joint effort is not taken up then there is no way that the HIV&AIDS pandemic can be mitigated

Consequently, there is need to:

- Analyze the various forms of masculinity; reveal the violent forms, and work towards changing them and reveal and question the values promoting violence – competition, hardness, insensitivity, pressurizing men to succeed whatever the cost.
- Analyze and question male roles and ideals, the concept of “male honour” prevailing in male cultures
- Develop and value fatherhood; develop the skills and qualities of fatherhood among men and boys
- Integrate a gender perspective into institutions of higher learning to create awareness of the different positions of boys and girls within the family, in culture and reproduction, and to promote their development into balanced personalities and into men and women in a relationship of equality and mutual respect.
- Develop legislation on violence against women to criminalize gender violence in all forms and provide women with protection when facing violence or being threatened by it.
- Encourage men to establish their own groups and voluntary activities to combat men’s
- Allow the participation of women in socio-economic and political activities

References