



IJM

The State of Violence Against Women & Children in Zambia

An IJM Report

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Acronyms & Key Terms

CBO – Community Based Organisation
CEDAW – Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CHAZ – Churches Health Association of Zambia
CRC – Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO – Civil Society Organisation
DHS – Democratic Health Survey
DPP – Director of Public Prosecutions
EFZ – Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia
ENACT – Enhancing Africa’s Response to Transnational Organised Crime
FGM – Female genital mutilation
FGM/C – Female genital mutilation/cutting
VAWC – Gender based violence
GII – Gender Inequality Index
GRZ – Government of the Republic of Zambia
IJM – International Justice Mission
ILO – International Labor Organisation
IOM – International Organisation for Migration
IPV – Intimate partner violence
KII – Key Informant Interviews
NAP-VAWC – National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence
NGO – Non-governmental Organisation
NHRC – National Human Rights Commission
NPA – National Prosecution Authority
OHCHR – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSC – One Stop Centre
PEP – Post-exposure prophylaxis
SADC – Southern African Development Community
SVAWC – Sexual and gender-based violence
SOP – Standard Operating Procedure
SRVAWC – School-related gender-based violence
SVAC – Sexual violence against children
UNDP – United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund
UNRCO – United Nations Resident Coordinator
UPR – Universal Periodic Review
VACS – Violence Against Children Survey
VAWC – Violence against women and children
VSU – Victim Support Unit
WLSA – Women and Law in Southern Africa
WV – World Vision
ZCCP - Zambia Centre for Communication Programme

Introduction



The Zambian assessment team pictured above (clockwise from bottom left): Patrick Denis Nyeko, Phionah Birungi, Judy Karioko, Hassanat Dahiru-Gumel, Claire Wilkinson, Edward Mutibwa, Wycliffe Abwao. Patricio Penaherrera, and Charles Maina; our local drivers, Edward, Patrick Musonda (former IJM Zambia) and Eugene.

Consultants: Mobe Mulaisho (former IJM Zambia), Phoeby Musonda (former IJM Zambia) and Anusha Reddam (former IJM Bangalore) are not pictured.

(referenced as ‘Online Survey’ throughout).

The findings captured in this final report intend to summarise the scale and nature of violence against women & children (VAWC) in Zambia as collected through the data and are designed to act as a resource for all national stakeholders – from the international to community level – to foster knowledge sharing and collaboration in order to end violence against women and children.

Thank you to the entire IJM Zambia assessment team for their efforts to collect this important data that will help inform and shape a collective response, and our sincere thanks to all the organisations, government officials and ministries, and international agencies who participated and so willingly shared their knowledge and expertise.

Violence against women and children (VAWC)¹ continues to be a prevalent issue globally. An estimated one billion children (one in two children worldwide) suffer some form of violence each year.² 852 million women (nearly one in three women) aged 15 years or older experience physical or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime.³ This violence knows no borders – women and children everywhere must be protected.

In response to this pervasive problem, International Justice Mission (IJM) – an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) whose goal is to protect 500 million people in poverty from violence across the world by 2030 – conducted an initial assessment in February and March 2022 to capture the state of violence against women and children in Zambia. Over two weeks, the IJM team collected qualitative and quantitative data from 48 different actors, 29 of whom also completed an online quantitative assessment

¹ Also commonly referred to in Zambia as GBV or SGBV

² World Health Organisation, “Global status report on preventing violence against children,” Geneva: World Health Organisation, 18 June 2020, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240004191>.

³ World Health Organisation, “Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018: global, regional and national prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence against women and global and regional prevalence estimates for non-partner sexual violence against women,” Geneva: World Health Organisation, 2021. <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240022256>.

Key factors contributing to violence in Zambia

In Zambia, sociocultural norms and pressures contribute to the prevalence and acceptance of VAWC across the country. Gaps in gender equality are embedded in cultural practices and create a higher risk of violence against women and children. Social norms not only influence men's willingness to act violently against women and children, but also increase the likelihood that a woman will accept the violence as normal and will not report the crime. Imbalanced gender dynamics and harmful cultural traditions and practices leave most women and children in Zambia vulnerable to violence.

Gender imbalance leads to male dominance

Gender inequality within Zambian culture remains an issue and disadvantages women while promoting male dominance. According to World Economic Forum's statistics, Zambia ranks 116th out of 145 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index.⁴ Gender inequality shapes every aspect of society – social, political, economic, and cultural. The majority of Zambians accept and enforce traditional stereotypes of gender roles such as the 'male breadwinners' and the 'female housewife' and, "patriarchal dominance appears to have emerged from religious and traditional principles and an economic climate that largely 'enables' men to financially provide for their families."⁵

Additionally, the dual nature of the justice system recognises the authority of both statutory and customary laws that do not support women's empowerment.⁶ As women suffer from gender inequalities, they have fewer or no education rights, political power and rights, land rights, sexual and reproductive health rights, and human rights when compared to men.

For instance, girls in Zambia do not attain the same level of education as their male counterparts. Despite similar initial enrolment rates for girls and boys for primary education, girls drop out of school as their education advances, often as a result of early marriage and teenage/adolescent pregnancy.⁷ Limited access to education for girls and women in Zambia has long-term consequences, compounding their exclusion from meaningful participation and involvement in decision making in society. This is evident in Zambia's political system where women have visibly less political power than men. In 2015, Zambia was ranked 11th out 15 countries for women's involvement in politics among Southern African Development Community (SADC) member states.

Women in employment are more frequently in lower paying jobs and in informal sectors. The majority of working women (78%) work in the agriculture sector – one of the major sources of income in the country - however, men profit more from the work while women, "tend to fulfil a supporting role in family farming, have less access to production equipment and land compared to men, and their activities are often limited to subsistence farming or other simple work due to the fixed role expected of women."⁸

⁴ Dennis Mtonga. "The Zambian gender gap: Between law and custom," We are Restless, 23 March 2020, The Zambian gender gap: Between law and custom | We Are Restless.

⁵ Mtonga, "The Zambian gender gap," 23.

⁶ Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). "Country Gender Profile: Zambia," JICA & Japan Development Service Co., Ltd. (JDS), March 2016. i, zambia_2016.pdf (jica.go.jp).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid, ii.

Women also own less of the land used for agriculture than men as customary law (under which 94% of the land is owned) uses a system of male land inheritance.⁹ Furthermore, available career paths for women severely limit their socioeconomic opportunities and only 10% of Zambian women engage in skilled employment.¹⁰ Without leadership positions in their communities or decent jobs, women cannot hope to advocate for themselves to end gender inequality and violence, and social norms will continue to reinforce women’s “status as lower beings and second class citizens.”¹¹

Cultural views on marriage and traditional practices fuel VAWC

Cultural and traditional practices in Zambia also contribute to higher rates of VAWC. Some of the harmful cultural and traditional practices include initiation ceremonies, payment of bride price, early marriages¹², polygamy, and sexual cleansing rituals. Many of these traditional norms and practices embed certain expectations for women to be subservient to husbands.



The Ng’wala Traditional Ceremony in Eastern Province attracted thousands of participants in February 2022 and marked a rise in GBV, which local police and the Madzimawe

According to the culture, a woman is expected to become pregnant shortly after she gets married and often, “a married woman is also obliged to have sex with her husband even when she knows that he is having extramarital affairs and may not be using condoms to prevent sexually transmitted diseases.”¹³ Not only do these practices decrease women’s empowerment and men’s dominance over them, but also lead to health risks and increased exposure to sexual violence.

Evidence of women’s submission to the violence against them represents one of the most concerning aspects of VAWC in Zambia. Most of those interviewed for this report – including police officers – stated that a majority of offenders are known to victims and typically fall into the category of fathers, uncles, spouses, or neighbours.

Marriage for women has earned the label of *the shipikisha club*, which means ‘the enduring club’ in the Nyanja language. Such characterisations of marriage normalise violence and mean that women will be less likely to report

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Catherine M. Ngoma. “Factors Influencing Women’s Optimum Health in Zambia,” *Journal of Healthcare Communications*, Vol.1, No.4(30), 2016, 1, [Factors Influencing Women’s Optimum Health in Zambia \(imedpub.com\)](https://www.imedpub.com/).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Note that we were also told of increasing cases of boys (aged 15-19 years) being married early too along with increasing (though still low) numbers of men and boys coming forward to share stories of abuse, including IPV.

¹³ Ngoma. “Factors Influencing,” 2.

family-based violence.¹⁴ Domestic violence and patriarchal cultural values exacerbate IPV and create a high tolerance level among women for this type of violence. In fact, research shows that more women (46%) than men (only 26% comparatively) agreed that a man is justified in beating his wife for a reason such as burning food or refusing to tell her husband where she is going.¹⁵ Men are also allowed to marry more women if they want, without input from their existing spouse, while women are expected to accept this with no questions asked. These cultural beliefs and social norms around relationships and marriage and the role of men and women within them, create a culture in which women must be ‘strong and endure’ and carry the violence they experience like a mantle with pride.¹⁶

Harmful cultural messages around sex put women & girls at risk

Culturally, boys are encouraged to practise forced sex and if a boy rapes a girl of a lower economic status, he will pay off the family to cover up the assault. If a child is raped it is commonly expected that they must be married off to their abuser or the perpetrator can bring cows and/or goats to the victim’s family as a resolution.

A practice in some parts of the country called *Unyao* dancing – a form of ‘masquerade’ during a Ntwala initiation ceremony – allows the soldiers of the chief to take any woman of their choice for their sexual pleasure. It is also common practice in many communities for young girls who have just reached puberty to undergo an ‘initiation ceremony’ that signals they are eligible for marriage. This ‘ceremony’ involves the girl being removed from her family for around two weeks and being taught how to ‘hold’ her husband (including detailed sexual positions) and then ‘practice’ what they have learned, which often results in early pregnancy.¹⁷

In some communities, once a girl reaches her thirteenth birthday, she is considered mature and fit for marriage,¹⁸ which assumes she is also of age to engage in sexual activity, even without consent. Just before the assessment team arrived in Zambia, the national press reported on a rape case in Chipata in mid-February 2022. The female victim was raped on a public golf course at 7:00am and her assault was captured on video. When community members heard her cries for help, they allegedly did not intervene, instead coming to help restrain the victim for the perpetrator.

There are also false beliefs in some communities that say a man can acquire significant wealth supernaturally through sex with a child. There are communities which believe that having sex with virgin girls will cure them from HIV/AIDS, and others who carry out ‘sexual cleansing’ practices when girls start menstruating and/or when a woman becomes a widow. Many use religion and Biblical references to suppress women by misinterpreting religious texts that suggest women should “submit” to their husbands. It is common for children to be married soon after puberty.

¹⁴ Beatrice May Banda. “Socio-Cultural Factors Associated with Gender Based Violence in Chipata City, Zambia,” *Texila International Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 7(4), 2, December 2019, [Public Health Vol7 Issue4 Article 25.pdf \(texilajournal.com\)](https://www.texilajournal.com/public-health/vol7-issue4/article-25.pdf).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ One NGO representative shared that in regards to marriage women are told that their ‘mouth is now full of stones/water’ – i.e., they are unable to speak about what their husband does, they must endure as all women do.

¹⁷ Per Eastern Province Women’s Development Association, interviewed March 1, 2022. These ceremonies happen from age 10 years.

¹⁸ One interviewee shared that local communities refer to girls aged 13-17 years as ‘broiler chickens’ and those over 18 years as ‘village chickens’ – (i.e., no longer desirable, ‘the leftovers’).

Fear prevents victims from speaking out

The patriarchal nature of Zambian society creates massive fear among victims around reporting cases of violence.

For example, we heard of victims beaten by the police, family, or their communities for coming forward. For others, their parents chose not to testify against perpetrators – especially relatives – while many women feared the economic fallout of reporting violence. The latter concern was repeatedly cited as the prime reason for cases not reaching court and the cause of the large drop off between cases reported to One Stop Centres and those in court.¹⁹ Women who were victims of violence worried that coming forward would leave them with no source of income or livelihood to support their children and themselves.

Covid-19 pandemic worsened violence against women & children

Finally, Covid-19 caused a steady increase in VAWC in Zambia while at the same time disrupting the work of organisations supporting survivors. During the pandemic, most partners noticed a reduction in cases being reported, despite the media reporting an increase of instances of violence against women and children during the closure of schools. Most health facilities or hospitals prioritised COVID-19 treatment and management over other health services including SVAWC services. Movement restrictions and school closures increased the incidences of violence, domestic abuse, rape, and defilement among vulnerable women, girls, and children in Zambia. Adolescent and teenage pregnancies significantly increased.

Prevalence of violence against women & children (VAWC)

Issues of VAWC are longstanding in Zambia and elsewhere and it “affects women and girls disproportionately.”²⁰ An evaluation of increased instances of VAWC in Zambia by the United Nations Africa Renewal magazine defined VAWC in the national context as, “physical, mental, social, or economic abuse against a person because of that person’s gender and includes violence that may result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm and suffering to the victim. It may also include threats or coercion, or the arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether in public or private life.”²¹ A UNICEF report published in 2013 stated that the Demographic Health Survey probably underestimates the true prevalence of violence in Zambia.²²

The annual Gender Based Violence Statistics produced by the Zambian Police Service in 2021 revealed that 20,540 cases of violence were reported countrywide, compared to 26,370 cases in 2020 – marking a 22.1% decrease.²³ The Copperbelt province recorded the highest number of VAWC criminal cases. 107 cases of VAWC-related murders also occurred of which 59.8% of the victims were women and 10.3% girls.²⁴ Country-wide, approximately 5,301 child victims were

¹⁹ Interview with VAWC Coordinator at the Chipata OSC March 2, 2022.

²⁰ Bessa and Malasha. “Gender-based violence and land documentation,” 2.

²¹ Brenda Zulu. “Zambia: Fighting gender-based violence as fresh cases continue to emerge,” United Nations Africa Renewal, Accessed 6 July 2021, [Zambia: Fighting gender-based violence as fresh cases continue to emerge | Africa Renewal \(un.org\)](https://www.un.org/africarenewal/feature/zambia-fighting-gender-based-violence-as-fresh-cases-continue-to-emerge).

²² Samuels et al. “Baseline Study,” viii, 4.

²³ Partners interviewed noted a drop in reporting due to COVID-19 during 2021 which these figures confirm: Zambia Police, ‘Annual VAWC Statistics for 2021’ [ANNUAL GBV STATISTICS FOR 2021 - zambiapolice.gov.zm](https://www.zambiapolice.gov.zm/annual-gbv-statistics-for-2021).

²⁴ Ibid.

abused, which represented roughly a quarter of all victims²⁵ and 77.6% of those were girls.²⁶ Finally, research conducted by the Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) in 2021 revealed 10,049 physical abuse cases were reported of which 74.4% involved women victims.²⁷ Approximately, 3,814 cases of emotional, psychological, and economic abuse were also reported.

Many incidents of violence include children, perhaps due to the country's young demographics – 66% of Zambians are under the age of 24.²⁸ The National Prosecution Authority (NPA) confirmed this, reporting that cause lists are full of these cases at trial and appeal. The highest number of incidents of violence against children result from child marriage – child marriage rates in Zambia are 31.4% for girls²⁹ – and school-related gender-based violence (SRVAWC).³⁰

Zambia is one of the countries with the world's highest rates of IPV.³¹ Data from World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2018 reported that 41% of ever-married and/or partnered women between ages 15-49 have experienced IPV in their lifetime.³² We learned from the YWCA that in 2020, their nine shelters for women and children fleeing VAWC housed over 587 women and children – a more than 25% increase from 2019. Their programmes alone engage with over 12,000 cases of VAWC a year.

Zambia's 2014 Violence Against Children Survey indicated that, "20.3% of females and 10.0% of males experienced sexual abuse before age 18." This includes unwanted sexual touching, unwanted attempted sex, physically forced sex, and pressured sex.³³ Sexual violence against children often begins at an early age and perpetrators are frequently authority figures or parents. In fact, "parents, adult caregivers, or other adult relatives were the most frequent perpetrators of physical violence prior to age 18."³⁴ GRZ's 2021 research also noted that 51.6% of females who have experience childhood sexual abuse were first abused by a spouse, boyfriend, or romantic partner.³⁵

In Zambia, sexual violence against women and children (SVAWC) affects mostly girls and women and stems from many contributing factors including, "sexual cleansing rituals, initiation ceremonies, women's economic dependency on men, socialisation of boys and girls at home and in school, inadequate laws on VAWC and domestic violence, lack of laws enforcement, and

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ministry of Youth, Sport and Child Development, Ministry of Community Development and Social Services, University of Zambia, United Nations Children's Fund, Save the Children International, United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Violence against Children in Zambia: Findings from a national survey, 2014," Republic of Zambia, Ministry of Youth, Sport and Child Development, 2018, 1, [Zambia-VAC-study-2018.pdf \(unicef.org\)](#).

²⁹ [UNICEF The State of the World's Children 2016](#), Table 9.

³⁰ According to Together for Girls, SRVAWC is "any act or threat of sexual, physical or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes, and enforced by unequal power dynamics."

³¹ Samuels et al. "Baseline Study," 4.

³² World Health Organisation. "WHO AFRICAN REGION FACT SHEET VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN PREVALENCE ESTIMATES, 2018," WHO, 2021, [WHO-SRH-21.7-eng.pdf](#).

³³ Ministry of Youth, Sport, and Child Development. "Violence against Children in Zambia, 18.

³⁴ Ministry of Youth, Sport, and Child Development. "Violence against Children in Zambia, xviii.

³⁵ Ministry of Youth, Sport, and Child Development. "Violence against Children in Zambia, 20.

intimate partner violence (IPV).³⁶ Among the NGOs and CSOs interviewed, 92% said that the culture, economic conditions, legal system, and politics were the key drivers for SVAWC.

Child defilement cases have been reported in all 10 provinces, with Lusaka province having the highest proportion of child defilement cases at 35.7%. Of victims, the overwhelming majority (99.2%) are girls. Rape accounts for the highest percentage of cases (58.1%) among adults who've experienced sexual abuse. 20% of all rape cases were reported in Lusaka.

NGOs and CSOs we interviewed identified the most common types of SVAWC cases they handle as: SVAC (30%), IPV (29%), and forced/child marriage (26%).

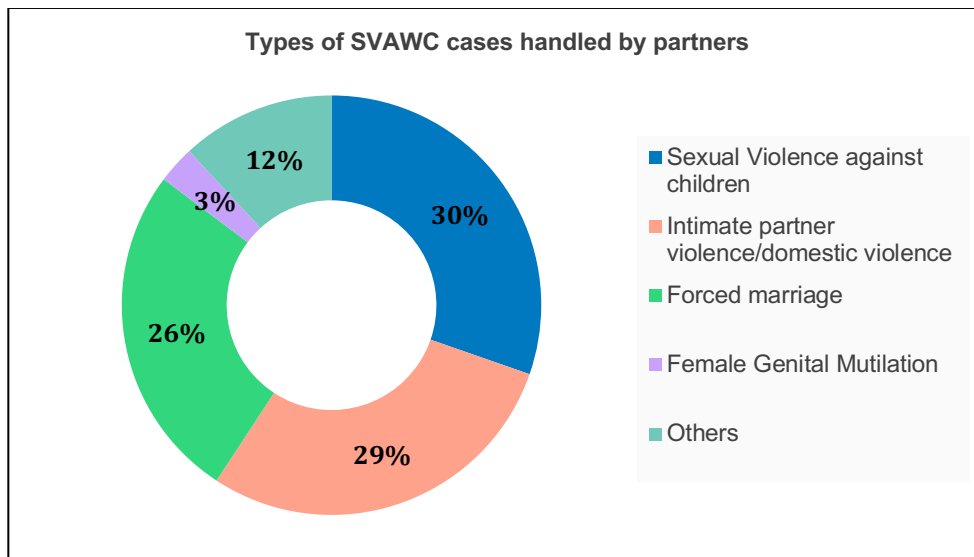


Figure 1: Major forms of SVAWC cases handled by partners
(Source: Key Informant Interviews)

Performance of the Public Justice System

Laws & policies

In the last two decades, Zambia has developed and strengthened its legislation and the justice system to better support and protect women and children from violence. The Constitution (1997) mandates general provisions that prohibit mental violence (Article 11) and any form of torture or other cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment (Article 15) against children and citizens alike.³⁷ Zambia's family laws prohibit child marriage by setting the minimum marriage

³⁶ Samuels, F., Ndubani, P., Walker, D., & Simbaya, J. "Baseline study: Stamping Out and Preventing Gender Based Violence (STOP VAWC) in Zambia," London: Overseas Development Institute, March 2015, viii, [Baseline Study: stamping out and preventing gender based violence \(STOP VAWC\) in Zambia - - Research reports and studies \(odi.org\)](#) viii.

³⁷ "Zambia Policy Progress to End Violence against Children." 26 Nov. 2019. <https://www.wvi.org/publications/zambia/zambia-policy-progress-end-violence-against-children>, 3

age at 21 years but written parental consent can authorise marriage from age 16 and Zambian customary law allows marriage from puberty.³⁸

The Anti-Gender Based Violence Act 2011 – which has been described as, “one of the most comprehensive laws on VAWC in the SADC region”³⁹ – repealed all previous provisions in relation to marriage, but it has not become fully operational. Additionally, the legal age (age of majority) varies across different pieces of legislation (sometimes 16, 18 or 21 years) and several interviewees (including a Senior Chief) flagged the urgent need for harmonising the law in this regard.

While the 2011 Act has comprehensive provisions for preventing VAWC and providing services for survivors, a research study conducted in 2017 revealed that six years on, there were significant gaps in its implementation:

1. Survivors prefer to seek justice from customary institutions as they perceive formal justice as retributive instead of restorative.
2. No operational plan to sensitise communities and duty bearers about the law.
3. A lack of clarity among duty bearers on the application and implementation of protection orders and occupation orders.
4. Reliance by law enforcement on physical evidence for offences of SVAWC.
5. A lack of One Stop Centres for survivors, with existing centres having minimal capacity and no common protocols for operation.
6. Counselling service approaches are heavily influenced by culture and religion.
7. Inadequate funding (the Anti-VAWC fund had only 100,000 Kwacha (\$4,540 USD) as of 2017).⁴⁰
8. Confusion regarding government line ministry responsibility for implementation.⁴¹

Currently, the Ministry of Justice is working on reviewing the 2011 Anti-Gender Based Violence Act and has engaged various stakeholders in preparing the Children’s Code Bill which seeks to comprehensively consolidate and update all the existing laws on children. This includes resolving the gap in the law around the age of child marriage and domesticating international instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The Bill was due to reach Parliament in 2022 but has been under discussion for over 12 years already.

Penalties⁴² for crimes of VAWC are outlined in the national Penal Code,⁴³ primarily under the classification as “crimes against morality.”⁴⁴ Rape, attempted rape, and defilement are considered felonies and perpetrators convicted are liable to life imprisonment. Amendments to the Penal Code in 2005 added assault and/or battery against children (Section 248) as a crime.⁴⁵

³⁸ Ibid, 4.

³⁹ Chalira and Ndimurwimo, “Violence Against Women,” 109.

⁴⁰ Avocats Sans Frontières, “Challenges of Implementation of the Anti-Gender-Based Violence Act 2011 in Zambia,” ASF, YWCA Zambia, & EU, 2017, 6-7, [ASF_ZAM_StudyAntiVAWCAct_201708_EN.pdf](#), 6

⁴¹ Ibid, 33-34 and fn 68

⁴² Zambian Penal Code (Appendix 10.4)

⁴³ Originally passed in 1931.

⁴⁴ Ministry of Legal Affairs, Government of the Republic of Zambia, “The Penal Code Act: Chapter 87 of the Laws of Zambia,” Ministry of Legal Affairs, 1 November 1931, [Printing - The Laws of the Republic of Zambia \(parliament.gov.zm\)](#).

⁴⁵ Ibid 3

Finally, The Education Act 2011, “prohibits the use of corporal punishment or degrading treatment in education institutions (Section 28).”⁴⁶

Many gaps in law and policy still prevent the country from implementing effective protection strategies. Age limitations make protection conditional and offer loopholes to perpetrators. For example, even though international standards state that a child cannot consent to sexual activity under the age of 18, in cases of sexual abuse and violence, the law limits the protection of children up to age 16 (Penal Code Act, Section 138). Similarly, laws concerning commercial sexual exploitation of children and child pornography only offer protection to children 16 years of age or younger, leaving children above the age of 16 vulnerable to exploitation, “without consequences for exploiters.”⁴⁷

In addition, Zambia operates a dual legal system in which both statutory and customary law play a role in the practice and application of the law. This dual system creates major barriers for women in terms of accessing justice as customary law often overshadows more equitable statutory laws and, “the day-to-day life of a majority of the Zambian population is governed by the local courts that administer customary laws, which is primarily based on male power, authority, and domination over women.”⁴⁸ At community level, victims’ families more often opt for compensation through customary courts rather than pursuing criminal proceedings through the penal system. Codifying the customary law and clarifying the role of the Chief under the Constitution would provide clarification for traditional leaders and a formal framework for responding to cases of VAWC, whilst maintaining existing community-level deference to customary law.⁴⁹

One Stop Centres & supporting structures

One Stop Centres (OSCs) are well established in Zambia and aim to provide holistic care for survivors of violence, including a range of medical, psycho-social, and legal services, and safe shelters for women who are at risk of violence.⁵⁰ OSCs are invariably set up by development partners and NGOs, including The Stop VAWC programme led by World Vision (WV), Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA), and the Zambia Centre for Communication Programme (ZCCP). Together, they have established 28 OSCs in total.⁵¹ Unfortunately, many interviewees flagged a long pattern of NGO-funded OSCs failing after NGOs transition, as the budget is not taken over by GRZ.

We learned that there is a continuous need for capacity building, mentoring, and budget and financial support for OSCs. With 116 Districts in Zambia – and District Centres hard to access for the rural population of this vast country – there is significant work to be done to ensure OSCs or similar are accessible and reliable. For example, in Eastern Province – which is 51,476 km² and has a population of 1.9 million people – there are only 3 OSCs.

OSCs are intended to provide comprehensive care facilities, but existing centres frequently lack a full staff. A centre should have a VSU officer, a paralegal (usually provided by an NGO), a nurse,

⁴⁶ World Vision International, “Zambia: Policy Progress,” 3.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Republic of Zambia Gender in Development Division. “National Action Plan,” 5.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Samuels et al. “Baseline Study,” 12.

⁵¹ U.S. Embassy in Zambia. “Zambia Launches Four New One-Stop Centers Providing Essential Services for Gender-Based Violence Survivors,” U.S. Embassy Zambia, 7 December 2020, [Zambia Launches Four New One-Stop Centers Providing Essential Services for Gender-Based Violence Survivors | U.S. Embassy in Zambia \(usembassy.gov\)](https://www.usembassy.gov/zambia-launches-four-new-one-stop-centers-providing-essential-services-for-gender-based-violence-survivors/).

a doctor, a social worker, and a psychosocial counsellor. Even if fully staffed, OSCs will only have one member of staff in each category, which results in partial coverage during annual leave, court hearings, and trainings.

There also appears to be confusion around the medical examination forms for sexual assault in terms of admissibility and who can sign it. Form 32 must be completed by a doctor (but they are not routinely available in local hospitals/rural areas), while Form 32B can be completed by clinical officers or nurses. According to our interviews, Form 32B is admissible in court, but both providers and prosecutors are often unaware of that and non-doctors are not keen to sign, as they must then appear in court.



Paralegal Brian Masiye of WiLDAF at the

The GRZ is working in partnership with civil society partners and mobile phone operators to co-sponsor a toll-free national child helpline and a GBV line (Childline/Lifeline) and encouraging the public to make use of them to report incidents of violence.⁵² We understand, however, that questions over future funding may put the lines at risk, as they are supported by development partners whose programmes are scheduled to close.

More can also be done to inform those working within this space of existing policies and legal frameworks, as only 26 (56%) of the NGOs and CSOs who participated in this report were aware of these policies and laws that guide the management and handling of VAWC cases in Zambia.

Police

VAWC survivors should be supported through the Victim Support Unit (VSU) of the Zambia Police where⁵³, “officers receive reports on violence, follow gender-sensitive and child-friendly protocols, and ensure referrals to needed services and specialists.”⁵⁴ Unfortunately, the reality is that VSUs are only found in larger police stations, are closed at night, and absent in rural police posts.

Due to the size of the country, many rural areas have no police posts at all. Survivors of VAWC then report to the neighbourhood watch, which is selected by the whole village, and act as the local ‘police’ force. Women in the village can have a say in who is selected, but no women are represented in the ‘force’ of six men. When there is an incident of rape or serious assault, they will then take the survivor to the police and/or hospital if transport is available. For other cases, they report them to the Chairman who then reports them to the Village Headman who reports to the Paramount Chief. From there, if the victim is lucky, they will go to the police.⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ U.S. Embassy in Zambia. “Gender-Based Violence,” [Gender-Based Violence: 16 Days of Activism Against VAWC National Launch | U.S. Embassy in Zambia \(usembassy.gov\)](https://usembassy.gov/gender-based-violence-16-days-of-activism-against-vawc-national-launch/).

⁵⁴ World Vision International. “Zambia: Policy Progress,” 5.

⁵⁵ Interview with the local CSO. March 1, 2022.

The structure of VSU proposed in the Police Act is that every police post should have a VSU officer. But in practice, most police stations do not have sufficient space for a VSU and certainly not appropriate space for trauma-informed engagement with survivors. VSU shared that their main challenges were:

- A lack of transport for officers and for victims.
- A lack of victim-friendly safe spaces in police units and shelters for victims.
- A lack of training, which the Auditor General flagged as a major issue in 2021.
- Weak relationships with prosecutors – relations are strong at national level, but not always at provincial level, which means cases fail.
- Victim's preference for compensation rather than punishment for offenders due to frequent reliance on the earning power of the perpetrator.
- High caseload, high stress, and limited recognition/career advancement for VSU officers, which deters long term service and/or new recruits from joining.

NGOs and CSOs interviewed confirmed these challenges, adding to this list a lack of resources for capacity building, limited financial resources to execute their duties, limited technical expertise among police, vacant police posts, inadequate number of police at police stations or no VSUs, corruption (police tipping off perpetrators or accepting money to negotiate a financial settlement), substandard evidence collection and poor case investigation, police compromising the confidentiality of victims, police engaging in victim-blaming, instances of police officers raping survivors, and a lack of training in how to respond in a trauma-informed way to survivors. The general experience was that survivors who are escorted by NGOs or paralegals generally get good service from the police, but if a survivor attends alone, the response is often poor.

From those interviewed for this report, 52% of respondents thought the police used a victim-centred approach and 33% said that police had poor attitudes in handling SVAWC cases reported by women and girls. Respondents also said many factors prevent victims from reporting to the police at all, include the distance to the nearest police post – especially in rural areas – cases taking too long in court and frequent adjournments, courts being too far away for survivors to travel to, a sense of apathy towards victims from police officers, victims being forced to settle matters through the village heads or local chiefs, and families discouraging victims from reporting to avoid stigma and shame. Withdrawal rates are also very high, with respondents reporting that most cases end at the police station. The most quoted reasons for this from police, prosecutors, and NGOs was survivors' economic dependency on the perpetrator and the distance survivors had to travel to report and follow up cases, often without transport options.

Prosecutors

Zambia traditionally had police prosecutors and is still in the process of increasing the role of the National Prosecution Authority (NPA). Former police prosecutors were integrated into the NPA where possible, which now has over 600 prosecutors. The NPA and the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) belong in the Executive rather than Judicial branch of the GRZ.

The NPA has a Sexual Violence Handbook, launched in December 2021 with UNICEF, but they have been unable to fully disseminate that due to limited resources for the training. They have also developed Child Victims and Witness Guidelines with the Ministry of Gender, which is currently being rolled out. In 16 out of the 116 Districts nationwide, the NPA has multi-disciplinary committees on child sexual abuse, which meet monthly and include OSC representatives, YWCA, Ministry of Health, and others. The NPA noted that there was an increase in VAWC cases reported to OSCs during the COVID-19 pandemic, but fewer cases made it to the NPA. As a general rule, only 14% of cases reported to the police make it to court in Zambia.

The assessment team met with the Director of Public Prosecutions and her team who shared the challenges that they face in tackling VAWC:

- The GBV team at the NPA consists of one member and they lack sufficient funding to increase the team.
- Parents often doubt children when they report to them and thus take no action. By the time they do report to police, medical and/or DNA evidence is not available.
- The investigative capacity of the police is limited so that information is often missing in dockets. Many officers lack understanding of key elements, such as circumstantial evidence, cell phone analysis, etc.
- There is a lack of DNA testing capacity – Zambia has only one machine and the cost of the reagents is prohibitive for GRZ.
- There are no guidelines on how to manage cases before the GBV Fast Track court, or rules of procedure for GBV Act criminal cases.
- There is no system to trigger the engagement of the social welfare department when a VAWC case is reported resulting in a lack of assistance for survivors.
- NPA witness liaison officers provide transport funds and information to survivors and witnesses, but are overwhelmed and only operate in Lusaka and other urban centres.
- There is no follow-up for survivors outside OSCs due to lack of resources.

Additionally, the NPA identified that they need:

- A system to collect VAWC data
- Logistical support for prosecutors in rural areas (transport, computers, printers, etc.)
- Child-friendly spaces for court
- A repository of VAWC information for prosecutors

Several major issues were also highlighted by other interviewees, including significant gaps in legal representation and court preparation for VAWC survivors – most of which is handled by NGOs and CBOs – limited resources, corruption in the court system, survivors not knowing their rights and therefore being unable to demand them, survivors not having the resources to reach courts, inadequate capacity of prosecutors to handle cases, limited number of prosecutors, challenges of summoning witnesses, and the lengthy paperwork and processes in courts. Only 2% of those interviewed thought that the prosecution service used a victim-centred approach.

Judiciary

The majority of sexual violence cases go to magistrates' courts, where skills training is required and sentencing was described to us as 'atrocious' (although certain cases such as defilement are referred to the High Court for sentencing). All cases are heard in open court except defilement. GBV fast track courts now exist in 6 out of 10 provinces and are seen by many as a game-changer. However, some of those we interviewed questioned the sustainability of those courts due to their expense and the impact of removing resources for them from a wider justice system that is already struggling.

Magistrates shared with us that the major challenge they faced was the withdrawal of cases after reporting to the police. Where possible, they work with the Court Coordination Communication Initiative (CCCI) – a country-wide programme that enables judges, NGOs, police, and prosecutors to coordinate together on VAWC cases. Unfortunately, the CCCI is not always able to meet due to resourcing challenges – even remote meetings require facilitation for internet bundles. The principal reason for acquittals in court was said to be lack of evidence gathering by the police. The

issue specifically is not that evidence is not there, nor that officers lack the knowledge or expertise, but rather that the police lacked the resources to gather it.

When asked to identify the major challenges and gaps in Zambia's judiciary response to VAWC, respondents shared that:

- Court processes were too lengthy
- Accused are too easily granted bail
- Specialised courts for VAWC do not exist in all districts
- There are insufficient screens and separate rooms for victims in courts
- Inadequate time is given to prosecutors to find witnesses
- Some magistrates take SVAWC offences lightly
- Some courts demand money for SVAWC protection orders
- There is inadequate sentencing on conviction
- Medical personnel fear being witnesses in court as customary law creates grey areas
- Courts are not survivor-centric or trauma-informed
- Magistrates routinely adjourn cases causing inconvenience for victims who frequently travel long distances

When asked what was working well, interviewees reported that some cases do finish in a reasonable amount of time, there are attempts to prioritise cases involving children, more fast-track courts have been established, there are some very supportive and empathetic judges, some magistrates courts have adopted trauma-friendly practices and that the increasing use of the video system in court hearings allows survivors to testify from outside the courtroom. 56% of those interviewed thought that the judiciary used victim-centred approaches.

Social services

NGOs and CSOs interviewed highlighted the following gaps and issues in the provision of social services:

- A lack of adequate counselling for victims
- A lack of adequate shelters and/or safehouses for victims
- Inadequate distribution of medical services in all districts and inadequate medical personnel trained to handle SVAWC cases
- Limited or inadequate OSCs
- Delayed medical examinations
- A lack of victim-sensitive, trauma-informed care
- Limited accessibility and availability of social services to survivors

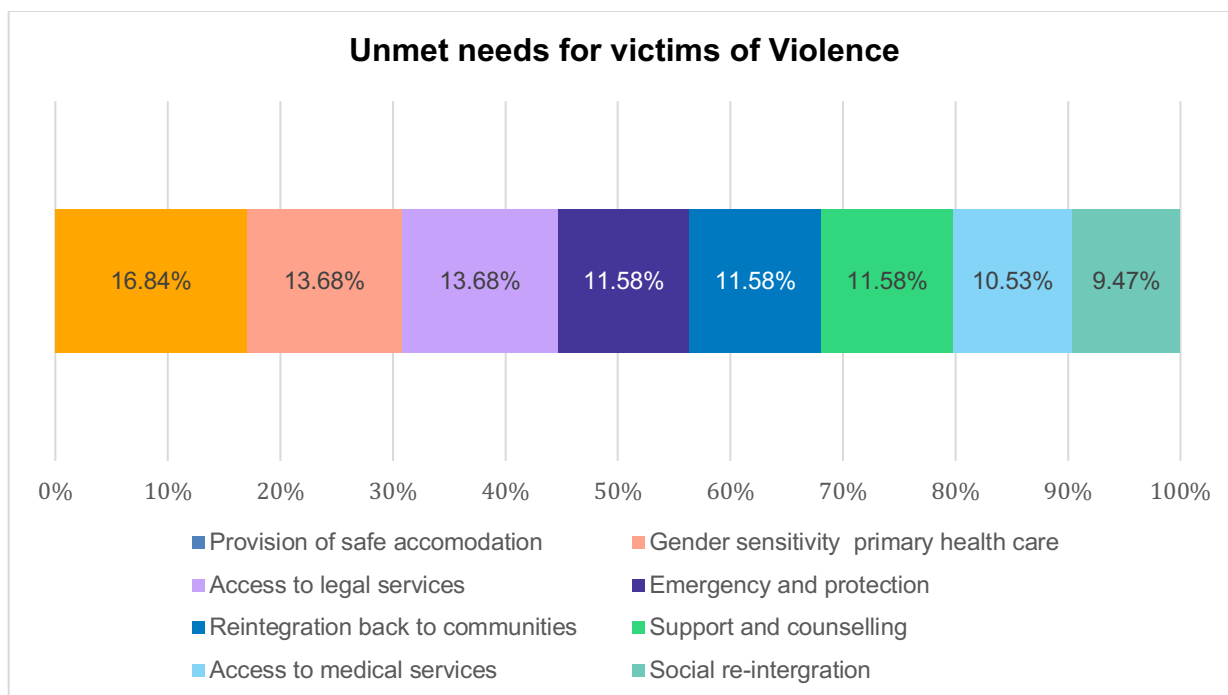


Figure 2: Unmet needs for victims of Violence
(Source: Online Survey)

While the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services is responsible for these services, most survivor services are delivered in practice by NGOs. For example, YWCA runs drop-in centres staffed by paralegals and volunteer psychosocial counsellors, nine shelters for women survivors of VAWC and their children, and one shelter for SVAC survivors, which is usually filled beyond capacity.

The Ministry of Health leads a multi-sectoral technical working group to address SVAWC issues and are in the process of developing clinical guidelines for handling and managing SVAWC cases. GRZ has prioritised the development of OSCs to offer quality and standardised services to survivors of violence, but budgeting for those is limited and a plan for their effective sustainability is required – particularly once funding from development partners or NGOs runs out. Additionally, social workers do provide counselling to survivors of violence, but those services are only available in urban courts.

Local leaders & the Church

Traditional chiefs and local leaders are critical in the fight against VAWC in Zambia because of the significant power they hold, which is constitutionally mandated and because people feel more comfortable seeking justice from the local leaders in their communities (56% of interviewees affirmed this). The Ministry of Traditional Affairs originally represented Chiefs and was very influential, but it was abolished in 2021 and it is not yet clear what, if any, vehicle chiefs have now to make a collective impact and to access government resources.

One example of active leadership in this space is Senior Chief Gogo Madzimawe in Eastern Province. Under his leadership, community initiatives, implemented collaboratively with local leaders, have contributed to a huge decrease in maternal mortality as families were sensitised

(and incentivised) to use existing health services. VAWC cases involving physical violence have also greatly reduced with participatory sensitisation programmes that ensure every family member is involved. The Chieftdom created a referral mechanism to make sure all cases of defilement, early marriage, rape, and teen pregnancy are reported to the local VSU and OSC and established a feedback tool to get updates on how the justice system handles those cases. Community sensitisation programmes have helped lower the number of school dropouts, increased the number of girls going to and staying in school, and decreased the number of girls getting married at an early age.

In addition, bylaws – aligned with the Constitution – were also established in Madzimawe Chieftdom for local leaders to guide the management of SVAWC issues, and these are understood by everyone in the community. The assessment team were told that several NGOs are engaged in similar projects on local bylaws and were also told that the role of traditional leaders under the Constitution needs to be clarified so there is clear policy on what Chiefs should and should not do in their communities.

The Zambian Constitution declares the country to be a Christian nation. An estimated 95% of the country identify as Christian, making the Church an influential actor in national life. The assessment team met various faith-based organisations implementing diverse, donor-funded programmes to protect children from violence and in community awareness forums to address VAWC. There is a lot of scope for the Church to take a stand, alongside traditional leaders, in addressing the harmful norms which facilitate VAWC.

Public confidence in the justice system & survivor reliance

Several organisations and individuals working with survivors of violence reported deteriorating trust in the public justice system over the last 10 years because survivors feel re-victimised by the system. More specifically, survivors reported feeling intimidated by the way that police questioned them and unprotected due to the extensive delays in their cases.

Only 4% of those interviewed agreed that stakeholders had confidence in the public justice system and that survivors relied on the system. In contrast, 45% of respondents who completed an online survey agreed that survivors relied on the current justice system, while 65.2% believed that survivors had confidence in the justice system.

Survey respondents were also asked to rank what worked well in the justice system, with availability, accessibility, and coordination coming out the highest. These results stand somewhat in contrast, however, to the detailed qualitative input provided during interviews with police, prosecutors, and judges.

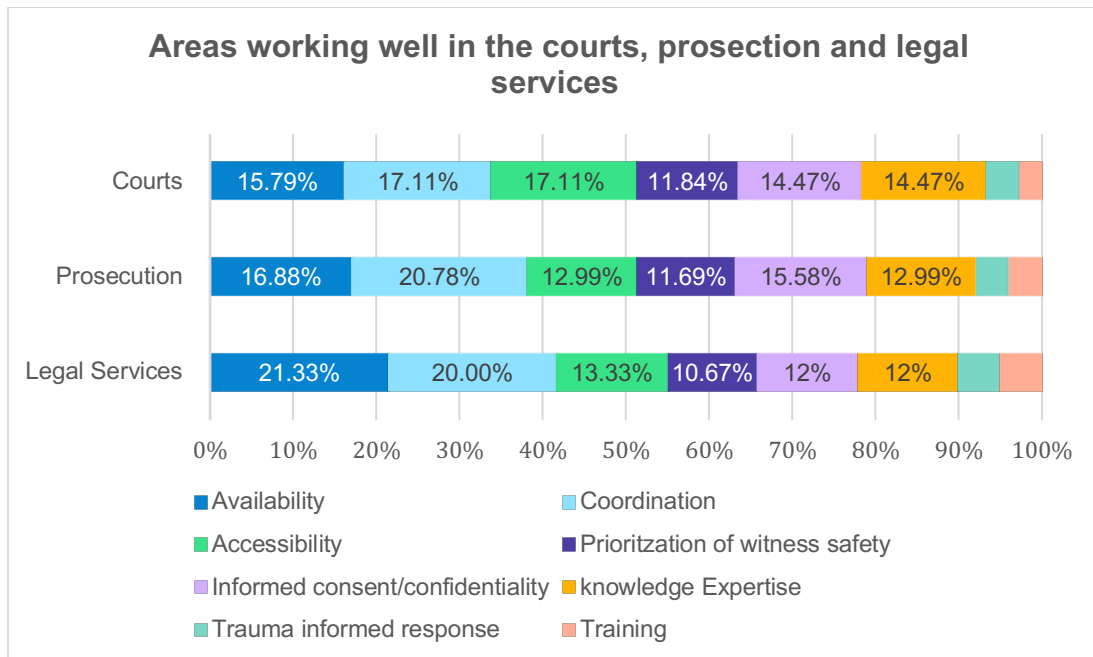


Figure 3: *Victims reliance and stakeholders’ confidence in the public justice system*
 (Source: Online Survey)

Government engagement & data collection

The GRZ stated in 2019 that responding to the prevalence of VAWC in Zambia was a ‘key priority’ for the government.⁵⁶ As a result, the Ministry of Gender focused on promoting gender equality and ensuring women’s rights through protective legislation with a specific strategy of, “advocating for funds to expand and strengthen VAWC prevention and response, encouraging stakeholders to recommit to national zero tolerance of VAWC, improving the quality of and accessibility to VAWC response services, and establishing more robust data collection.”⁵⁷

However, in late 2021, the Ministry of Gender and Child Development – which implementers reported was historically underfunded and seen as lacking in power to deliver its mandate – was dismantled. Responsibility for VAWC was moved to a Gender Desk/Division in the Office of the President. NGOs and CSOs interviewed stated that it was not yet clear what priority GRZ now places on addressing VAWC and other gender-related issues, although the Division was given authority to recruit 50 gender officers in 2022.

⁵⁶ Oxford Policy Management. “Combatting gender-based violence in Zambia,” Oxford Policy Management Blog, June 2019, [Combatting gender based violence in Zambia | Oxford Policy Management \(opml.co.uk\)](https://opml.co.uk/blog/2019/06/20/combatting-gender-based-violence-in-zambia/).

⁵⁷ Extract from original Ministry of Gender website – now no longer operational. The current Gender Division includes in its focus ‘Curbing Gender Based Violence’, [About Us – Gender Division](#).



The National VSU Headquarters in Lusaka

GRZ has previously formulated strategies to address the protection of children including the National Child Policy (2015), National Youth Policy (2015), National Strategy to End Child Marriage (2016-2020), and the National Action Plan on Ending Child Marriage (2016-2021).⁵⁸ Zambia also developed a National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence (NAP-GBV) from 2008 to 2013.⁵⁹ Additionally, there was a joint programme between the UN and the Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) from 2012 to 2015⁶⁰ aimed at bolstering the effective implementation of the 2011 Anti-Gender Based Violence Act with a second phase (2019-2022) focused on scaling up key interventions.⁶¹

More recent plans to address VAWC include reference to the issue in Zambia's Vision 2030 national development plan⁶² and a Regional Strategy and Framework of Action for Addressing Gender-Based Violence 2018-2030, developed and published by the Southern African Development Community (SADC).⁶³ The solution to VAWC must be a whole government approach, but to date National Plans have not been funded or operationalised.

In terms of data, the Zambia Demographic and Health Survey also includes child marriage and SVAWC data each year, which comes largely from health and social services. Police Victim Support Units (VSU) collect VAWC data in Zambia, which is then passed to the Zambia Statistics Agency. Unfortunately, much of the data reported by police is not entirely accurate because VAWC is significantly under-reported and officers have not changed their approach to collecting data since 2010, even though the 2011 GBV Act details a broader definition of these crimes. They also get no data from health clinics. There is a need for capacity building and training on how to record and report VAWC statistics accurately.

Among those interviewed, only 10% agreed that the GRZ had the capacity to handle and manage VAWC. 16% agreed that the government had the will to address VAWC and 39% believed the government was generally willing to receive capacity building and assistance from CSOs and NGOs. All respondents to the online survey believe the government is willing to engage in partnership, and 85.7% felt it was willing to receive capacity building on handling SVAWC from

⁵⁸ World Vision International. "Zambia: Policy Progress," 9.

⁵⁹ Republic of Zambia Gender in Development Division. "National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence (NAP-VAWC) 2008-2013," Sexual Violence Research Initiative, April 2008. 1-71, [1 \(svri.org\)](http://1(svri.org)).

⁶⁰ *See Appendix for implementation results of this programme.

⁶¹ [Joint Programme on Gender-Based Violence Zambia | MPTF Office \(undp.org\)](#)

⁶² Republic of Zambia. "Zambia Vision 2030," Government of Zambia, December 2006, 22 & 35, [Vision 2030 For Zambia \(zambiaembassy.org\)](#).

⁶³ Southern African Development Community. "Regional Strategy and Framework of Action for Addressing Gender Based Violence 2018 – 2030," SADC, July 2018, 1-53.

[SADC Regional Strategy and Framework for Action on VAWC - FINAL September 2018 - ENGLISH VERSION.pdf \(unodc.org\)](#).

CSOs and NGOs. The majority of those surveyed (76.6%) already had partnerships with both central and local governments.

The areas where the government was experiencing most challenges were said to be in providing adequate shelters and/or alternative housing, allocating adequate funding, resourcing and training.

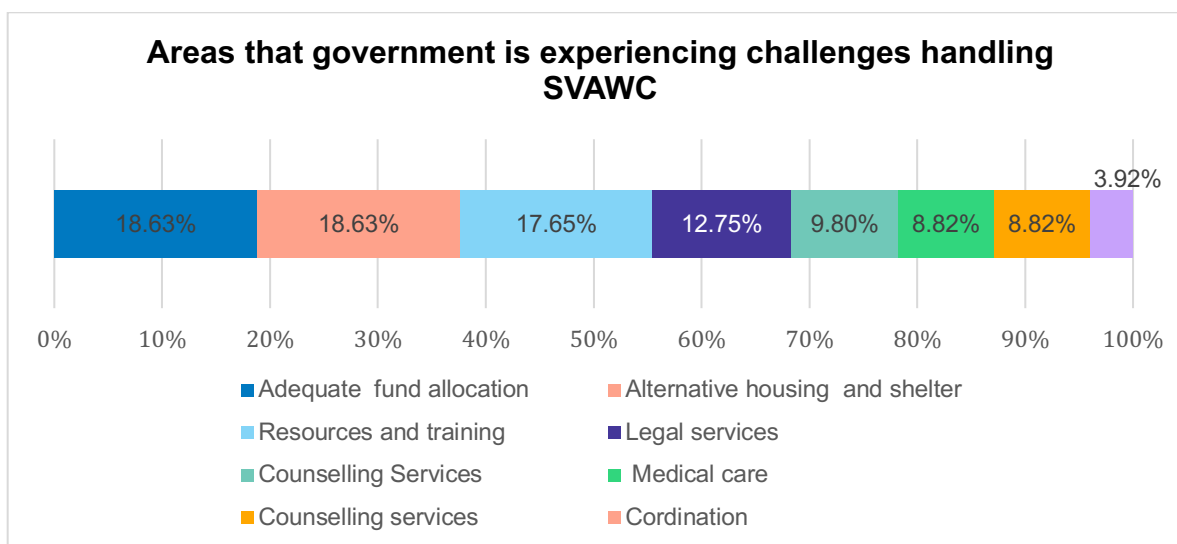


Figure 4: Areas that the government is experiencing challenges in response to SVAWC

(Source: Online Survey)

Civil Society

Engagement from national civil society

There is a vibrant national civil society space in Zambia and many organisations are active in VAWC prevention and response. Paralegals are commonly used, especially in rural areas, and are now required by law to be formally trained. This has increased the quality of services but is not without its challenges. For example, the Legal Aid Fund is not accessible to paralegals and organisations are required to have their staff trained but have no funds for that.

When asked about the current involvement and capacity of NGOs and CSOs working to address VAWC, 95% of organisations interviewed were engaged in programming geared towards ending VAWC – largely in the prevention space or responsive social services. This included programmes on gender education, intimate partner violence and domestic violence prevention, teenage pregnancies, menstrual hygiene, VAWC, SVAC, women’s and children’s health, and legal and policy reforms. There were also some organisations engaged in providing legal services for criminal and civil matters.

Collaboration with like-minded organisations was evident among all those interviewed, as 87.5% are already working with others to implement their programmes, and 73% are actively building the capacity of government agencies around VAWC.

The programme strengths of those interviewed are outlined in the figure below:

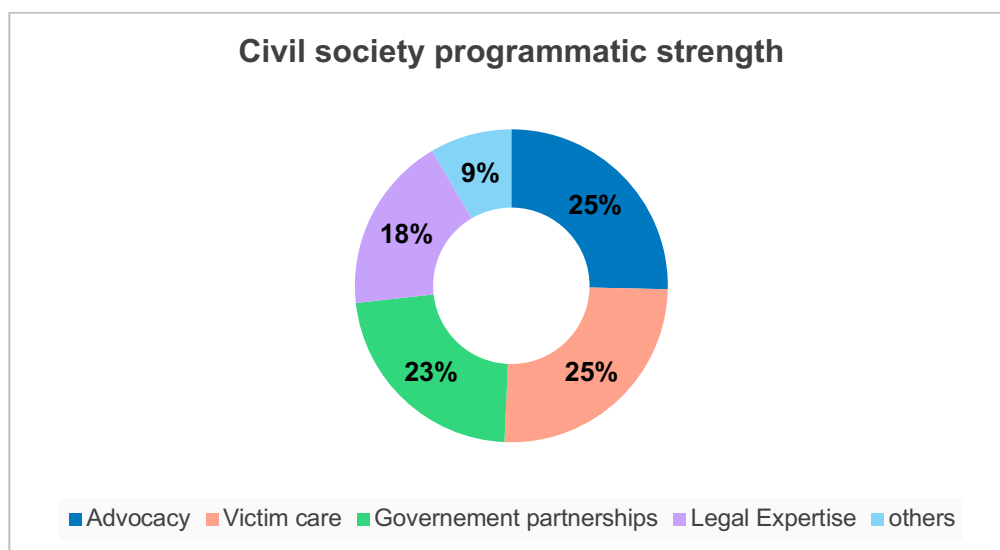


Figure 5: *Civil society programmatic strengths*

(Source: online survey)

Of those who responded to the online survey, 61.9% stated that they were managing a high number of VAWC cases and 42.9% already had formal partnerships with like-minded NGOs/CSOs to address VAWC.

Engagement from international agencies

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Resident Coordinator for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human rights (OHCHR), and the European Union (EU) are all working to tackle VAWC in Zambia.

UNDP developed the fast track GBV courts. Phase 1 of their programme from 2012-2017 focused on the implementation of the GBV Act 2011. Phase 2 now focuses on prevention and response. They primarily work to develop OSCs, shelters and economic empowerment, and to establish additional fast track courts. The programme is implemented by five UN agencies (UNICEF, UNFP, ILO, IOM, and UNDP) with each bringing their own expertise to complement each other. So far, six fast track courts have been set up in six provinces and the remaining four provinces (Luapula, Northern, Northwestern and Muchinga) are targeted for courts by the end of 2022. Survivors have a separate witness room from which they testify, and they are able to identify the accused via video link. Court proceedings are recorded and judges can listen to the recordings later. To reduce trauma for victims, the court uses pre-recorded interviews to decrease the number of times she/he will need to testify.

UNDP is due to launch a pilot village OSC in Chipata as a response to access challenges from rural areas to the district OSCs, and has worked to strengthen security in shelters and safe houses by developing standard operating procedures (SOPs). They work with the Gender Division and have developed capacity building plans to reduce the amount of duplicated work by NGOs. Monthly and quarterly Technical Working Group meetings are held with GRZ. UNDP shared that the

current greatest needs it sees are to strengthen systems, build capacity, create better coordination mechanisms, and above all, ensure that VAWC response mechanisms are sustainable.

The United Nations Resident Coordinator (UNRCO) noted that there are four UN reports outstanding from GRZ including the report on The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which has been pending since 2015. Zambia has been through three cycles of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and received a number of recommendations on VAWC. The reports for the fourth cycle of review were due to be submitted (late) in October 2022.

The European Union (EU) and **GIZ** are Zambia's main international donors. While not currently a part of the Spotlight Initiative, Zambia is on the "waitlist". The EU is funding the ENACT programme (Enhancing Africa's Response to Transnational Organised Crime) for three years, starting from August 2021. GIZ is funding four years of programming too, with the project likely to scale up in late 2022. A key pillar is improving access to justice with a focus on expanding the provision of paralegals in court and legal aid desks in police stations.

The EU-funded Natwampane programme focuses on SVAWC in Northern and Luapula Provinces and is being delivered by World Vision (WV), Norwegian Church Aid, BBC Media Action and Childline/Lifeline. There is funding for OSCs in each of the 24 Districts in these two provinces, along with District Child Protection Committees and Zonal Child Protection Committees. The Ministry of Health coordinates all of the work being done on OSCs and provides the physical locations, which can range from an established building to a foundation slab of concrete.

Existing gaps and issues highlighted by the EU on VAWC included the need for technical skill building at the National Prosecution Authority (NPA), increased sentencing by the judiciary for VAWC crimes, limited resources for the criminal justice system, and building sustainability for the new fast track courts and paralegal desks – particularly in terms of funding and personnel.

SADEC is also very active in the fight against VAWC in Zambia and has provided funding, developed SOPs, and delivered training for the police.

Final Summary

The prevalence of VAWC in Zambia – particularly SVAC and IPV – is high and the response from the formal justice system and local communities needs to be strengthened. There is low confidence in the justice system from stakeholders and limited reliance upon the system by survivors. Whilst there are positive aspects to current engagements in VAWC – fast track GBV courts, OSCs, the long-term strategy of building specialised prosecutors, VSUs – there are still significant gaps, which must be addressed in order to provide protection to those vulnerable to VAWC.

The public justice system lacks capacity in terms of financial resources, sufficient staffing, and technical skills, and processes are not survivor-focused nor trauma-informed. Of the limited resources and capacity that is available, there is a significant divide in making these services equally available to urban and rural dwellers. OSCs are not available in every District and are under-funded and under-staffed. A different or adapted model is needed to supplement this for remote rural areas.

Transport is a significant barrier to the accessibility of services as Zambia is an enormous country and the distances in which survivors in rural areas must travel in order to seek help – even where there is an operational District OSC or the VSU – can be vast. Transport needs – for survivors, police, social services, prosecutors, and judges – must be addressed for any response to VAWC to be successful. Economic empowerment for survivors is also critical since financial dependence on the abuser is a key reason for survivors failing to report violence or withdrawing VAWC cases.

Data on VAWC is available, but it is inadequate and there is a clear need to support and work collaboratively with government agencies to strengthen their capacity to measure and collect data. Corruption is also a real problem, mentioned by many interviewees.

Despite significant funds flowing into VAWC programming in Zambia for decades, there has been limited sustainable progress. The laws governing VAWC are reasonably strong, but the lack of awareness of them – both in the justice system and communities – their ineffective enforcement, and insufficient funding from GRZ rather than donors all require attention. Leadership and accountability from GRZ will be critical to move the needle in the right direction.

Traditional chiefs will also play a huge role in transforming communities and ensuring the road to justice is straightforward for victims of VAWC. It is essential to train, equip, and empower tribal chiefs, leaders and village heads to work alongside the existing formal justice system as a referral network, as well as lead necessary culture changes over the long term.

All the excitement and motivation needed to forge successful collective action to protect women and children better in Zambia are present. With the right resourcing, capacity building, and partnerships, stakeholders from the international to community level alike have the potential to forge a better future for women and children in Zambia – one in which they are equally protected and free from violence.

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Any errors or misrepresentations of data are the responsibility of IJM.