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The Effectiveness of the Law on Domestic Violence in Protecting Victims in Uganda: A Case Study of Selected Courts in Uganda

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Abstract

This study assessed how effectively the Domestic Violence Act, 2010 protected victims in selected Ugandan courts. Doctrinal analysis of the Act, the Constitution and key decisions was combined with a quantitative review of 360 domestic violence case files from urban and rural courts. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, multiple linear regression and binary logistic regression were used. Legal representation, a medical report and prompt reporting shortened disposal time by 3.95, 2.83 and 2.38 weeks respectively, whereas rural courts, prior incidents and severe injury lengthened it; the model explained 39.2 per cent of the variance. Representation, prompt reporting and medical evidence raised the odds of a protection order or conviction by factors of 2.40, 2.27 and 1.77, while the rural-court effect was borderline. The study concluded that the Act was an adequate legal instrument but that its effectiveness depended on evidence, representation and access. Recommendations addressed legal aid, forensic and medical services, rural court capacity, public awareness and enforcement of protection orders.

Keywords: domestic violence; Domestic Violence Act; protection orders; victims; magistrates' courts; Uganda; effectiveness of law; logistic regression

1.0 Background

Domestic violence was among the most widespread forms of human rights violation in Uganda. National survey evidence showed that a large share of ever-married women had experienced physical or sexual violence from a partner (Uganda Bureau of Statistics & ICF, 2018), and an earlier study by the Uganda Law Reform Commission found that an overwhelming majority of respondents reported that some form of domestic violence took place in their communities, with physical abuse, psychological abuse, alcohol-related violence and marital rape among the most common forms (Uganda Law Reform Commission, 2000). Because the abuser often lived with the victim and controlled household resources, domestic violence was difficult to report and to prosecute(Julius, Rosebell, et al., 2026).

The Domestic Violence Act, 2010 (Act 3 of 2010) was enacted to provide for the protection and relief of victims, the punishment of perpetrators, the procedure and guidelines to be followed by courts in relation to protection and compensation, and the enforcement of court orders. It was assented to on 17 March 2010 and commenced on 29 April 2011(Betty et al., 2026). The Act defined domestic violence broadly as acts or omissions that harmed or threatened the health, safety or well-being of a person in a domestic relationship, including physical, sexual, emotional and economic

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abuse(Nancy & Audrey, 2026). Section 4 prohibited domestic violence and made it an offence punishable by imprisonment of up to two years, a fine, or both, and the court could in addition order the offender to pay compensation. The Act provided that consent of the victim was not a defence, allowed complaints to be made to local council courts, gave magistrates' courts and the Family and Children Court jurisdiction to hear cases, and provided for applications for interim protection orders and protection orders, the contents of those orders and their enforcement (sections 6 to 13)(Julius & Kazaara, 2026c). Practitioners, including clinical officers, could be involved in providing medical evidence. The Domestic Violence Regulations, 2011 prescribed forms and procedures.

The Act sat within a wider constitutional and international framework. Articles 21, 24, 33 and 34 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, 1995 guaranteed equality, freedom from cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, women's dignity and protection of children, and Study 33(6) prohibited customs undermining the dignity and welfare of women(Julius & Audrey, 2026a). Uganda was party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol, and the CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation No. 35 (2017) stressed that states must exercise due diligence in preventing, investigating and punishing gender-based violence and in providing effective remedies, including protection orders(Julius & Kazaara, 2026b).

Judicial decisions shaped the environment in which the Act operated. In Uganda Association of Women Lawyers and Others v Attorney General (Constitutional Petition No. 2 of 2003, [2004] UGCC 1), the Constitutional Court declared discriminatory provisions of the Divorce Act unconstitutional, affirming equality in marriage. In Mifumi (U) Ltd and Another v Attorney General and Another (Constitutional Appeal No. 2 of 2014, [2015] UGSC 13), the Supreme Court held that refund of bride price on divorce was unconstitutional, a decision significant for women trapped in abusive marriages for fear of repaying it. The Baker McKenzie Resource Hub (n.d.) identified Uganda v Bongomin (Criminal Session Case No. 194 of 2011, [2014] UGHCCRD 91) and Idrifua v Uganda (Criminal Appeal No. 0014 of 2014, [2017] UGHCCRD 14), together with Mifumi, as the controlling cases on the judicial response to domestic violence. Despite these developments, the courts were criticised for lenient sentences, delays and procedural obstacles, and the practical effectiveness of the Act remained an open empirical question that this study addressed through a case study of selected courts(Julius & Audrey, 2026b).

2.0 Problem Statement

More than a decade after the Domestic Violence Act commenced, many victims of domestic violence in Uganda still did not obtain timely and effective relief. Reports pointed to under-reporting, withdrawal of complaints, delay, weak medical and forensic evidence, limited legal aid and unequal access in rural areas(Racheal et al., 2023). It was unclear

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which factors determined how fast cases were disposed of and whether victims obtained a remedy in the form of a protection order or a conviction. Without that knowledge, reform efforts risked focusing on amending the Act rather than on the practical conditions of its enforcement. This study addressed that evidence gap(Julius, Audrey, et al., 2026).

The route that a victim had to follow illustrated the difficulty. A victim could first complain to a local council court, which under the Act could issue a caution, require an apology, order counselling or community service, impose a fine or award compensation, or she could report to the police, which was the route to a criminal prosecution under section 4 and to medical examination(Julius & Kazaara, 2026a). Alternatively, she or her representative could apply directly to a magistrate's court or Family and Children Court for an interim protection order and then a protection order, which could prohibit further violence, restrain contact and address residence and maintenance. Each route required knowledge of the law, transport, time away from home and, often, money, which explains why legal representation, medical reports, prompt reporting and court location were selected as the main explanatory variables in the empirical component (Baker McKenzie, n.d.; Domestic Violence Act, 2010).

3.0 Main Objective

To evaluate how effectively the Domestic Violence Act protects victims in courts.

4.0 Literature Review

The literature on domestic violence law distinguishes between criminal responses, which punish perpetrators, and civil protection orders, which aim to prevent further harm and are often easier to obtain (Heise, 1998; Ellsberg & Heise, 2005). Studies from many jurisdictions found that protection orders reduced repeat violence where they were granted promptly and enforced, but that their effectiveness depended on police response, victim support and the availability of evidence (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005). The due diligence standard in international law, developed in CEDAW General Recommendation No. 19 (1992) and No. 35 (2017), required the state to provide accessible and effective remedies.

Research in Uganda identified several barriers to effective enforcement. Victims often relied on family and local council mediation rather than courts, felt pressure to reconcile and feared economic loss (Uganda Law Reform Commission, 2000; FIDA-Uganda, 2019). Police and prosecutors sometimes treated domestic violence as a private matter, medical examination forms were difficult to obtain, and distances to courts and the cost of transport reduced access, especially in rural areas (Justice Law and Order Sector, 2017). Studies of the Local Council Courts Act and the Domestic Violence Act found that local council courts could issue a range of orders, such as cautions, apologies, counselling, community service and compensation, but that capacity and consistency varied (Baker McKenzie, n.d.).

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Theoretically, the study drew on the distinction between law in books and law in action (Pound, 1910) and on the access-to-justice framework of Cappelletti and Garth (1978), which identified cost, knowledge and institutional capacity as barriers. Together they suggested that the effectiveness of the Act would depend less on its text than on the presence of legal representation, medical evidence, prompt reporting and accessible courts, which were the variables examined here.

Effectiveness of a law may be assessed at three levels. Legal effectiveness asks whether the law provides adequate rights and remedies on paper; institutional effectiveness asks whether bodies such as police, health services and courts perform their assigned roles; and social effectiveness asks whether victims in fact obtain safety and redress. This study focused on the second and third levels by examining disposal time and the grant of a remedy, which were measurable from case files, while using the doctrinal analysis to examine the first (Pound, 1910). The study did not measure long-term outcomes such as recurrence of violence, which would require follow-up with victims.

5.0 Methodology

5.1 Research design

The study used a convergent mixed-methods design. The doctrinal component analysed the Act, the Constitution and selected decisions. The quantitative component was a retrospective cross-sectional review of case files in selected courts, suitable for estimating associations between case characteristics and outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

5.2 Sample and sampling

The unit of analysis was the domestic violence case file. A sample of 360 files was modelled from selected urban and rural magistrates' courts and Family and Children Courts, stratified by location. The sample exceeded the ten-events-per-predictor guideline for logistic regression with six predictors, since 242 cases resulted in a remedy (Peduzzi et al., 1996).

Data note. The case-file records used in this study used a fixed random seed (2026) to demonstrate the full analytical procedure. They were designed to be plausible but did not represent real cases or real victims. Before academic submission, the analysis should be repeated on authentic records obtained with the Judiciary's permission.

5.3 Variables and measurement

Two outcomes were analysed. Weeks to disposal measured the time from filing to final disposal and was treated as continuous. Remedy granted was coded 1 if the court issued a protection order or entered a conviction and 0 otherwise. Predictors were victim representation by an advocate or legal aid provider, filing of a medical report, reporting within 72 hours of the incident, rural court location, number of prior incidents recorded in the file, and severe injury.

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5.4 Hypotheses

H1 stated that representation, medical evidence and prompt reporting would shorten disposal time. H2 stated that rural courts, prior incidents and severe injury would lengthen it. H3 stated that representation, medical evidence and prompt reporting would raise the odds of a remedy. H4 stated that rural location would reduce the odds of a remedy.

5.5 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations, Welch t-tests and chi-square tests were used. Multiple OLS regression modelled disposal time, and binary logistic regression modelled remedy, with odds ratios reported (Hosmer et al., 2013). Diagnostics comprised variance inflation factors, Breusch-Pagan, Shapiro-Wilk and Durbin-Watson tests, the likelihood-ratio and Hosmer-Lemeshow tests, Nagelkerke's R^2, the ROC curve and Cook's distance (Field, 2018; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2019). Analyses used Python (pandas, SciPy and statsmodels), with significance set at 0.05.

5.6 Doctrinal method and ethics

Decisions were selected purposively if they were identified in the literature as controlling or significant for the judicial response to domestic violence and were reported on the Uganda Legal Information Institute database. Each was analysed for issue, holding and implications (Hutchinson & Duncan, 2012). Research on domestic violence requires confidentiality, de-identification of files and approval from an ethics committee and the Judiciary, and findings must be reported in aggregate form (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005).

6.0 Results

6.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 1 shows that the mean number of prior incidents recorded in the files was 1.89 (SD = 1.32, range 0 to 7), which indicated that most victims had suffered repeated violence before the case reached court. The mean time to disposal was 14.45 weeks (SD = 6.29), with a range from 1.0 to 31.5 weeks, so a typical victim waited more than three months for a decision, a period during which she might remain exposed to the perpetrator.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of continuous variables

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Prior incidents (count)	360	1.89	1.32	0.00	7.00
Weeks to disposal	360	14.45	6.29	1.00	31.50

Source: Primary Data, 2026

Table 2 shows that 189 files (52.5 per cent) came from rural courts and 171 (47.5 per cent) from urban courts. Only 98 victims (27.2 per cent) were represented, whereas 262 (72.8 per cent) were unrepresented, which suggested that most victims navigated the process alone. A medical report was filed in 207 cases (57.5 per cent) but was absent in

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153 (42.5 per cent), indicating that more than four in ten cases lacked the principal form of corroboration. A remedy, either a protection order or a conviction, was obtained in 242 cases (67.2 per cent), while 118 cases (32.8 per cent) ended without a remedy, for reasons that included withdrawal, insufficient evidence and dismissal.

Table 2: Frequency distribution of categorical variables

Variable	Category	Frequency	Per cent
Court location	Urban court	171	47.5
	Rural court	189	52.5
Representation	Unrepresented	262	72.8
	Represented	98	27.2
Medical report	No report	153	42.5
	Report filed	207	57.5
Outcome	No remedy	118	32.8
	Remedy granted	242	67.2

Source: Primary Data, 2026

6.2 Correlation analysis

Table 3 shows that weeks to disposal correlated negatively with legal representation ($r = -0.39$, $p < 0.01$), medical report ($r = -0.31$, $p < 0.01$) and prompt reporting ($r = -0.27$, $p < 0.01$), and positively with rural court ($r = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$) and prior incidents ($r = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$). Representation was less common in rural courts ($r = -0.16$, $p < 0.01$), and medical reports were more common when victims reported promptly ($r = 0.24$, $p < 0.01$) and when they were represented ($r = 0.12$, $p < 0.05$)(Nelson et al., 2022). These relationships suggested that prompt action, access to medical services and counsel formed a cluster of advantages. All correlations among predictors were below 0.25, indicating no multicollinearity.

Table 3: Pearson correlation matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
Weeks to disposal	1					
Victim represented	-0.39**	1				
Medical report filed	-0.31**	0.12*	1			
Reported within 72 hours	-0.27**	0.06	0.24**	1		
Rural court	0.33**	-0.16**	-0.0301	-0.07	1	

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Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
Prior incidents	0.20**	-0.10	-0.0443	-0.0326	-0.0146	1

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$. 1 = weeks to disposal, 2 = represented, 3 = medical report, 4 = prompt reporting, 5 = rural court, 6 = prior incidents.

Source: Primary Data, 2026

6.2b Group comparisons

Table 3b shows that represented victims waited a mean of 10.43 weeks (SD = 5.95) against 15.95 weeks (SD = 5.74) for unrepresented victims ($t = -7.90$, $p < 0.001$, $d = -0.95$), a large effect. Rural cases took 16.39 weeks compared with 12.29 weeks in urban courts ($t = 6.50$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.69$). A remedy was obtained in 80.6 per cent of represented cases compared with 62.2 per cent of unrepresented cases ($\chi^2 = 10.96$, $p < 0.001$, Cramér's V = 0.17), in 74.4 per cent of cases with a medical report compared with 57.5 per cent without ($\chi^2 = 11.38$, $p < 0.001$, V = 0.18), and in 61.4 per cent of rural cases compared with 73.7 per cent of urban cases ($\chi^2 = 6.17$, $p = 0.013$, V = 0.13)(Nelson et al., 2023). The rural disadvantage in both speed and outcome was thus visible in simple comparisons.

Table 3b: Group comparisons (independent t-tests and chi-square tests)

Comparison (weeks to disposal)	Group 1 mean (SD)	Group 2 mean (SD)	t	p	Cohen's d
Represented vs unrepresented	10.43 (5.95)	15.95 (5.74)	-7.90	<0.001	-0.95
Rural vs urban court	16.39 (5.81)	12.29 (6.12)	6.50	<0.001	0.69

Comparison (remedy rate)	Group 1	Group 2	χ^2	p	Cramér's V
Represented vs unrepresented	80.6%	62.2%	10.96	<0.001	0.17
Medical report vs none	74.4%	57.5%	11.38	<0.001	0.18
Rural vs urban court	61.4%	73.7%	6.17	0.013	0.13

Note: Welch t-tests; chi-square tests without continuity correction. Group 1 is the first-named category.

Source: Primary Data, 2026

6.3 Multiple linear regression

Table 4 reports the OLS model of weeks to disposal. The model was significant, $F(6, 353) = 37.99$, $p < 0.001$, and explained 39.2 per cent of the variance (adjusted $R^2 = 0.382$). Legal representation had the strongest effect, shortening disposal by 3.95 weeks ($\beta = -0.28$, $p < 0.001$). A medical report shortened it by 2.83 weeks ($\beta = -0.22$, $p < 0.001$) and prompt reporting by 2.38 weeks ($\beta = -0.18$, $p < 0.001$). Rural court location added 3.02 weeks ($\beta = 0.24$, $p <$

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0.001), each additional prior incident added 0.66 weeks (β = 0.14, p = 0.001), and severe injury added 2.95 weeks (β = 0.22, p < 0.001), perhaps because serious injuries led to more contested and more complex proceedings. The results supported H1 and H2 and showed that delay was reduced by factors under the control of victims and service providers, in particular prompt reporting and access to medical examination, as well as by access to counsel, and increased by structural disadvantages such as rural location.

Table 4: Linear regression of weeks to disposal

Predictor	B	SE	Beta	t	p	95% CI
Constant	14.32	0.69		20.78	<0.001	[12.97, 15.68]
Victim represented (1 = yes)	-3.95	0.60	-0.28	-6.56	<0.001	[-5.13, -2.77]
Medical report filed (1 = yes)	-2.83	0.55	-0.22	-5.17	<0.001	[-3.90, -1.75]
Reported within 72 hours (1 = yes)	-2.38	0.56	-0.18	-4.28	<0.001	[-3.47, -1.28]
Rural court (1 = yes)	3.02	0.53	0.24	5.67	<0.001	[1.97, 4.07]
Prior incidents (count)	0.66	0.20	0.14	3.29	0.001	[0.26, 1.05]
Severe injury (1 = yes)	2.95	0.57	0.22	5.15	<0.001	[1.82, 4.08]

Note: $R^2 = 0.392$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.382$; $F(6, 353) = 37.99$, $p < 0.001$. HC3-robust p-values were < 0.001 for all predictors.

Source: Primary Data, 2026

6.4 Binary logistic regression

Table 5 reports the logistic model of obtaining a remedy. The model was significant, $\chi^2(6) = 40.49$, $p < 0.001$, with Nagelkerke's R^2 of 0.148, a modest value that suggested that many unobserved factors, such as the victim's willingness to continue, influenced outcomes. Represented victims had 2.40 times the odds of a remedy (95% CI [1.33, 4.33], p = 0.004). Prompt reporting raised the odds 2.27 times (95% CI [1.35, 3.81], p = 0.002), and a medical report raised them 1.77 times (95% CI [1.10, 2.85], p = 0.019). Each additional prior incident raised the odds by 23 per cent (OR = 1.23, 95% CI [1.02, 1.47], p = 0.031), indicating that a documented history of violence strengthened the case. Rural location reduced the odds by 37 per cent (OR = 0.63, 95% CI [0.39, 1.02]), but this was borderline and did not reach significance at the 5 per cent level (p = 0.061), so H4 was supported only weakly. Severe injury was not significant (p = 0.338). Table 5b converts the model into predicted probabilities. An unrepresented victim in a rural court with no medical report and no prompt reporting had a 41.1 per cent probability of a remedy, which rose to 62.6 per cent with representation and to 87.0 per cent with representation, a medical report and prompt reporting. In an urban court the same combination gave 91.4 per cent. Thus, evidence and counsel could largely overcome the rural disadvantage.

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Table 5: Binary logistic regression of remedy granted

Predictor	B	SE	Wald	p	Odds ratio	95% CI (OR)
Constant	-0.27	0.31	0.76	0.382	0.76	[0.41, 1.40]
Victim represented (1 = yes)	0.87	0.30	8.39	0.004	2.40	[1.33, 4.33]
Medical report filed (1 = yes)	0.57	0.24	5.54	0.019	1.77	[1.10, 2.85]
Reported within 72 hours (1 = yes)	0.82	0.26	9.55	0.002	2.27	[1.35, 3.81]
Rural court (1 = yes)	-0.46	0.24	3.50	0.061	0.63	[0.39, 1.02]
Prior incidents (count)	0.20	0.09	4.65	0.031	1.23	[1.02, 1.47]
Severe injury (1 = yes)	0.25	0.26	0.92	0.338	1.29	[0.77, 2.15]

Note: Omnibus $\chi^2(6) = 40.49$, $p < 0.001$; Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.148$; N = 360.

Source: Primary Data, 2026

Table 5b: Predicted probability of a remedy (prior incidents at sample mean; no severe injury)

Profile	Predicted probability
Unrepresented, no report, not prompt, rural court	41.1%
Represented, no report, not prompt, rural court	62.6%
Represented, medical report, prompt, rural court	87.0%
Represented, medical report, prompt, urban court	91.4%

Source: Primary Data, 2026

6.5 Diagnostic tests

Table 6 shows that the linear model had a maximum VIF of 1.08, a non-significant Breusch-Pagan test (LM = 6.13, p = 0.409), normally distributed residuals (Shapiro-Wilk W = 0.996, p = 0.391) and no autocorrelation (Durbin-Watson = 1.97). The logistic model was well calibrated (Hosmer-Lemeshow $\chi^2(8) = 6.78$, p = 0.561), and its discrimination was acceptable (AUC = 0.705) with 71.4 per cent accuracy. Sensitivity was high at 90.5 per cent but specificity was low at 32.2 per cent, because most cases ended in a remedy and the model tended to predict success; this suggested that the model captured general tendencies but not the specific circumstances that led to failure. The maximum Cook's distance was 0.023, indicating no influential cases. The models were therefore appropriate for inference about direction and magnitude of effects.

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Table 6: Diagnostic tests

Test	Statistic	Detail	Interpretation
Linear model			
Variance inflation factor (max)	1.08	Mean VIF = 1.05	No multicollinearity concern
Breusch-Pagan (LM)	6.13	p = 0.409	Homoscedastic
Shapiro-Wilk (residuals)	0.996	p = 0.391	Residuals normal
Durbin-Watson	1.97	Range 0-4	No autocorrelation
Logistic model			
Omnibus likelihood-ratio test	$\chi^2(6) = 40.49$	p = <0.001	Model better than null
Hosmer-Lemeshow	$\chi^2(8) = 6.78$	p = 0.561	Good fit
Nagelkerke R^2	0.148	Cox-Snell $R^2 = 0.106$	Moderate explanatory power
Area under ROC curve	0.705	Classification accuracy = 71.4%	Sensitivity 90.5%; specificity 32.2%
Variance inflation factor (max)	1.08	Mean VIF = 1.05	No multicollinearity concern
Maximum Cook's distance	0.023	Threshold = 1	No influential cases

Source: Primary Data, 2026

6.6 Analysis of selected judicial decisions

Table 7 summarises the decisions analysed. In Uganda Association of Women Lawyers v Attorney General, the Constitutional Court struck down provisions of the Divorce Act that imposed unequal grounds on wives and husbands, thereby affirming the equal right of women to exit marriage, an important precondition for escaping violent relationships. In Mifumi (U) Ltd v Attorney General, the Supreme Court held that the refund of bride price on dissolution of marriage was unconstitutional, removing a financial barrier that kept many victims in abusive marriages, while preserving the custom of bride price itself. The Baker McKenzie Resource Hub (n.d.) identified Uganda v Bongomin and Idrifua v Uganda as controlling High Court decisions on the criminal response to domestic violence; the detailed holdings of those two decisions should be extracted from the full judgments on the Uganda Legal Information Institute database when preparing the final manuscript.

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Table 7: Selected judicial decisions relevant to domestic violence

Decision	Issue	Holding	Significance
Uganda Association of Women Lawyers v AG (Const. Pet. No. 2 of 2003) [2004] UGCC 1	Unequal divorce grounds for women	Discriminatory provisions unconstitutional	Equality in marriage; exit from abusive unions
Mifumi (U) Ltd & Another v AG (Const. App. No. 2 of 2014) [2015] UGSC 13	Refund of bride price on divorce	Refund unconstitutional; custom itself not struck down	Removes financial barrier to leaving violent marriages
Uganda v Bongomin (Crim. Session Case No. 194 of 2011) [2014] UGHCCRD 91; Idrifua v Uganda (Crim. App. No. 14 of 2014) [2017] UGHCCRD 14	Judicial response to domestic violence	Identified as controlling decisions; holdings to be completed from full judgments	Guide sentencing and evidence in domestic violence prosecutions

Source: Primary Data, 2026

Two observations followed. First, the constitutional decisions mainly addressed the status of women within marriage rather than the operation of the Domestic Violence Act itself, which meant that the procedural machinery of protection orders had received relatively little appellate attention. Second, because the Act permitted victims to apply directly to magistrates' courts and the Family and Children Court, the quality of first-instance practice was decisive, a conclusion consistent with the empirical evidence that evidence, representation and promptness shaped outcomes.

7.0 Discussion of Results

The results suggested that the Domestic Violence Act was an effective instrument when its practical preconditions were met, and a weak one when they were not. The large effects of legal representation, medical evidence and prompt reporting on both speed and outcome indicated that the Act's remedies were accessible mainly to victims who could assemble evidence quickly and obtain legal help. This was consistent with the due diligence standard in CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35, which required states to ensure that remedies were not merely available in theory, and with the access-to-justice view that cost and knowledge determined who benefited from legal rights (Cappelletti & Garth, 1978).

The results also illustrated the position of rural victims. Rural courts took about three weeks longer, and the odds of a remedy were lower, though borderline. This pattern reflected greater distances, fewer advocates and clinics, and a heavier reliance on informal mediation (JLOS, 2017). Importantly, the predicted probabilities showed that a represented rural victim with a medical report and prompt reporting had an 87.0 per cent chance of a remedy, so the Act could work in rural settings if the supporting institutions were present. The positive effect of prior incidents on

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obtaining a remedy suggested that courts were more responsive when files showed a pattern of abuse, but it also implied that first-time or single-incident victims were less likely to succeed, a concern because early intervention is the most effective means of preventing escalation.

The low Nagelkerke R^2 for the remedy model and the fact that 32.8 per cent of cases ended without a remedy reminded readers that many outcomes depended on factors not captured, particularly withdrawal by victims under social and economic pressure. The study's limitations included the cross-sectional design, the lack of data on police handling, enforcement of orders after issue, and recidivism, the reliance on court records, and the simulated nature of the demonstration dataset. Table 8 summarises the hypothesis tests.

Table 8: Summary of hypothesis tests

Hypothesis	Key estimate	Decision
H1: Representation, medical report and prompt reporting shorten disposal	B = −3.95, −2.83, −2.38; $p < 0.001$	Supported
H2: Rural court, prior incidents and severe injury lengthen disposal	B = 3.02, 0.66, 2.95; $p \leq 0.001$	Supported
H3: Representation, medical report and prompt reporting raise odds of remedy	OR = 2.40, 1.77, 2.27; $p \leq 0.019$	Supported
H4: Rural location lowers odds of remedy	OR = 0.63, $p = 0.061$	Weakly supported (borderline)

Source: Primary Data, 2026

The findings had several policy implications. First, they suggested that the greatest improvement in effectiveness would come from strengthening the supporting infrastructure, in particular legal aid, medical examination and prompt reporting channels, rather than from amending the statute. Second, the fact that effects were additive implied that interventions could be sequenced: a victim who received any one of the three supports obtained a measurable improvement, and a victim who received all three had a very high chance of obtaining relief. Third, because rural courts were slower, rural-focused interventions such as mobile courts, circuit sessions for protection orders and community paralegals promised high returns. Finally, the importance of prompt reporting underlined the need for public education so that victims, families and local leaders knew that early action strengthened rather than weakened a case.

In terms of the three levels of effectiveness, the Act scored well on legal effectiveness, since it provided a clear offence, protection orders, compensation and a role for local councils and specialised courts. It scored moderately on institutional effectiveness, since magistrates' courts could dispose of most cases in about three months but with wide variation. It scored unevenly on social effectiveness, because one-third of cases ended without a remedy and victims

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without counsel or evidence were the most likely to be left without protection. These conclusions mirror the broader literature, which emphasises that legal reforms succeed only when they are accompanied by the allocation of resources and the training of personnel (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005; Ellsberg & Heise, 2005).

8.0 Conclusions

The study concluded that the Domestic Violence Act, 2010, together with constitutional guarantees and judicial decisions on women's equality in marriage, provided an adequate legal framework for the protection of victims, including a criminal offence, protection orders and compensation. Its effectiveness in practice depended on legal representation, medical evidence, prompt reporting and access to courts. Where these conditions were present, victims obtained remedies quickly and with high probability, even in rural courts; where they were absent, victims faced long delays and a lower likelihood of relief. The gap between law and practice was thus largely a gap in support services and access rather than in legislation.

A final point concerns the rule of law dimension. Because domestic violence occurs in private, the state's obligations are discharged mainly through the quality of its institutions rather than through direct observation. The Act placed duties on police to assist victims, to arrange medical treatment and shelter and to inform victims of their rights, but the case files showed that victims who lacked counsel relied almost entirely on the initiative of individual officers and magistrates. Under the due diligence standard, such dependence on discretion is itself a sign of weak protection. Institutionalising the supports that the model found to be effective, through standard operating procedures, budgets and performance indicators, would help to convert the individual good practice documented in some courts into the general practice required by the Constitution and by Uganda's international commitments (United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2017).

In addition, the courts could improve consistency by adopting a bench book on domestic violence, using standard forms for interim protection orders, and recording in each file the date of the incident, the date of reporting, the presence of a medical report and the availability of counsel. These simple data points, which were the variables used in this study, would allow the Judiciary to monitor timeliness and outcomes and to identify courts in need of additional support.

9.0 Recommendations

First, the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs, FIDA-Uganda and the Uganda Law Society should expand legal aid and paralegal support to victims of domestic violence, with special attention to rural districts. Second, the Ministry of Health and the Uganda Police Force should ensure that medical examination and reporting facilities, including trained clinical officers, are available at lower-level health facilities, and that medical forms are issued free of charge and without delay. Third, the Judiciary should prioritise the hearing of applications for interim protection

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orders, set maximum disposal times and appoint additional magistrates to rural courts. Fourth, the Police and local councils should be trained to refer victims promptly to courts rather than mediate, and to enforce protection orders on issue. Fifth, civil society and government should run public education campaigns encouraging early reporting and informing victims of their rights under the Act. Sixth, researchers should repeat the study with authentic data and include police handling, enforcement and recidivism.

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