

## Definitions, Prevalence and Ways to Curb Gender Based Violence: Empirical Findings from Police and Public in Bindura, Zimbabwe

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### Abstract

*There is a general upsurge of gender based violence cases at national level in Zimbabwe albeit the existence of measures and structures to reduce them. Against this background, this study examined public and police's perceptions of gender based violence (GBV) in Bindura town, Mashonaland Central Province, Zimbabwe. The study sought to improve knowledge on (GBV) through identifying the meaning, forms, prevalence and possible solutions to end GBV in Bindura. A survey was conducted where 76 questionnaires were completed by 32 police officers and 44 members of the public selected through purposive sampling. Results indicate that the public and police are well versed with GBV issues. Nonetheless, cultural and religious beliefs perpetuate the existing beliefs and skewed power relations which justify, enhance and conceal GBV cases. The prevalent forms of violence are physical and sexual. There is need to reshape cultural scripts of assertive masculinity and permissive femininity to end GBV.*

**Keywords:** definitions, gender based violence, increase, curb, police, public

### 1. Introduction

The unprecedented rise in women rights violations has witnessed the emergence of an opposite tide of activism trying to raise awareness and curb this menace. This has culminated in various movements and some days being set aside such as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Human Rights Day. Gender Based Violence (GBV) in all its forms is an on-going problem in Bindura (ZDHS, 2015). Seba-Collett (2007), notes that domestic violence, a form of GBV, is a pervasive human rights challenge. Physical violence, intimate partner violence and sexual coercion are amongst the most common forms of GBV (ZDHS, 2015). As a construct, GBV is an elusive term that transcends gender. It is contextual and cultural specific. Terry and Hoare (2007) define GBV as violence that targets individuals or groups on the basis of their gender; be it male or female. Comparatively, men commit GBV more than women (Makahamadze et al., 2012). Violence against women denies them access to basic rights, derails the socio-economic development of communities and impedes women's empowerment and poverty eradication (Allwood, 2016; Hayes, 2007). Despite policy makers' recognition of the need to tackle gender based violence and the enactment of several legislative tools, women still suffer violence in all spheres of lives with devastating physical, emotional and psychological effects (Divon and Boas 2017; Gouws, 2016). In Zimbabwe GBV, remains a salient issue and a major stumbling block to women's active participation in development. The government has ratified its laws to be in tandem with international instruments that condemn violence for example the Domestic Violence Act of 2007 (DVA). However, the implementation of these instruments remains a far cry due to undeniable preponderance of women as GBV victims in both the private and public sphere. There seems to be a vast chasm between the rights of women enshrined in constitutions together with gender based violence laws and the everyday life of the majority of women across the globe. This study unravels the contextual manifestations of GBV drawing societal perceptions about it from the police and general public. This is done to enable local understanding of the contexts of GBV as postulated by Gouws (2016: 401). Possible measures to address this social evil are proffered towards the end of this paper.

## **1.2 Literature Review**

### **1.2.1 Theoretical Underpinnings**

The current study used a combination of Feminist Criminology and the Feminist Victimology theories to illuminate gender-based violence and how it is perceived in Bindura community by the public and police. Feminist Victimology argues that sexual violence against women is not primarily motivated by sexual desire but by a need for dominance and power shaped by sex and gender (Newburn, 2007). Therefore discourses of gender based violence may appear skewed in favour of women because of women's vulnerability and reported incidents (Campbell, 2009, Gonzalez 2016). Feminist Victimology also explains victimization as a result of power disparities between victims and offenders. Domination and control evolve from broad structural inequalities based on gender and societal values (Brownmiller, 1975; Allwood, 2016). According to the Human Rights bulletin of (2011) on GBV in Zimbabwe, GBV is particularly seen in acts of DV where rights are violated because of physiological make up (sex) and gender roles. Spousal violence is the most common form of GBV in Zimbabwe. The patriarchal nature of the Zimbabwean society contributes to women suffering GBV more than men in their home contrary to the view that depicts the home as a safe haven.

### **1.2.2 Conceptualization of Gender Based Violence**

In the formative stages of women activism against GBV, GBV was primarily conceptualized as men's violence against women and girls. This definition emphasised the structured nature of male violence against women and exposes the gendered power relations between men and women (Hamilton, 2014). Alternatively, as the concept continues to evolve, GBV can also be referred to as violence used by men against women, other males and children. Hamilton's (2014) definition is more holistic and appealing as she conceptualised GBV as violence directed at either a male or female based on their specific position in society, to assert and reproduce gender roles and norms. Hence, GBV is faceless and can equally occur to a person of either sex to reinforce conformity to gender roles (Allwood, 2016; Hamilton; 2014). The multiple definitions lead to healthy and rigorous debates but raises analytical drawbacks in problematizing GBV as a concept as scholars lump everything under a gender based violence framework. As such, for the purpose of this study, GBV is any form of harmful violent act inflicted on either a female or male based on gender and class.

### **1.2.3 Forms, Prevalence of and Ways to Curb GBV.**

The prevalent forms of GBV differ from country to country. In Namibia, Seeking Safety Namibia (2006) notes rape as the most common form of GBV amounting to 60% of the GBV issues. Women account for 92-94% of the complainants in reported cases, while just over one third of all victims of reported cases of rape and attempted rape were minors which included boys under the age of 18 (Seeking Safety Namibia 2006). Hence GBV is not solely tied to females as victims (Divon and Boas, 2017). In Tanzania GBV is widespread and 20% of women aged between 15-49 years reported having experienced sexual violence in their life time and nearly 40% reported experiencing physical violence (Bott et al. 2005). However the data is not always conclusive due to the reporting trends (Bott et al. 2005). Sexual and physical violence forms dominate GBV cases possibly because these are the most reported and criminalised forms of GBV (Mashenberg 2009). Davies et al., (2016) and Jewkes (2011) observed a multiplicity of factors that drive GBV and questioned the over reliance of ongoing interventions on the criminal justice system, arguing that changing behaviour requires early interventions like good parenting skills, that encourage young men to respect their female counterparts. The Institute of Development Studies (2013) prescribes community based behavioural approaches engaging men and boys to reduce and prevent GBV can be collectively employed to end GBV. Mhaka (2014) and Gouws (2016), contend that there is need for multipronged approaches in addressing GBV as it is diverse in manifestation. It is from this background that this study aimed at finding out the local dynamics on the meaning and prevalent forms of GBV in Bindura. The study brings together the views of would be victims and the police who are the custodians of the law.

### **1.3 Purpose of Research**

- To ascertain community and police awareness of GBV in Bindura.
- To examine the perceptions of the police and public on GBV.
- To establish the prevalent forms of GBV in Bindura.
- To find possible solutions to curb GBV.

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1 Participants**

A survey was conducted with members of the public and police officers during an awareness march to commemorate 16 days of activism against gender based violence in the central business district of Bindura. The study was an opportunity to relate activism with scholarly research. A sample of 50 participants was purposively selected for the study. Fifty participants were given questionnaires to complete during the march, and a return rate of 88% (44 participants) was witnessed. Likewise 40 questionnaires were distributed to police officers with a response rate of 80% (32 police officers) return rate. A total of 46 males and 30 females participated in the study.

### **2.2 Instruments**

Uniform questionnaires were used for both the public and police officers. A two step sampling strategy was used for police officers in the study. Firstly, police officers who were present during the awareness march were given questionnaires to complete and hand them in. Since the police sample was not representative enough, some questionnaires were sent to different police stations in Bindura with a covering letter from the researcher's institution asking officers to voluntarily cooperate. The covering note also assured respondents of anonymity and confidentiality. The researcher went to collect the remaining questionnaires from the police stations after a week.

### **2.3 Measures**

The SPSS version 20.0 was used to analyze quantitative data where frequency tables and graphs were expressed in percentages with the aid of excel spreadsheet to make data manageable and easy to interpret. The instrument was subjected to internal validity testing using Cronbach's Alpha, 1951 before it was used. A reliability coefficient constant of 0.73 implied that the instrument was highly reliable and entails that the data collected was valid. According to Cronbach, a questionnaire is considered reliable if the coefficient is 0.7 or more.

## **3. Findings and Discussion.**

### **3.1 Police and Public Definitions of GBV**

The general public offered splintered definitions of GBV, some of which made little reference to key constituents of the concept. However, they seemed to be aware that GBV infringes upon their rights and capabilities. There was general bias towards conceptualising GBV as predominantly perpetrated by men towards women. This reveals the cultural stereotypes that influence the lens through which the public views GBV. The one sided view of GBV leads men who are victimised to put under the carpet their pleas for fear of being looked down upon (Gonzalez, 2016). Thus, the current prevalence statistics of GBV may not be reflective enough of all the issues because of underreporting. Furthermore the public confused DV (Domestic violence) with GBV, but the same could not be said of the police who seem well versed with nuances that are there. This entails that there is need for public awareness for them to fully appreciate the difference between DV and GBV and that domestic violence is a form of GBV. The police understandably defined GBV better, chiefly because of their expertise and knowledge in the areas. They defined GBV as any form of violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, children or men. It is an all-encompassing definition and it is in line with the Domestic Violence Act passed in 2007 and the contemporary definitions. Thus the police seemed to have an advantage when it comes to awareness and understanding GBV issues. Expertise in the subject, places them at an advantage to know and understand GBV in its entirety and even perpetrate it against unsuspecting victims (Hamilton, 2014).

### **3.2 Common Forms of GBV**

Figure 1 shows that the most common form of GBV is verbal violence (57%), in Bindura followed by physical violence (54%). Sexual violence (35%) was the third most common whilst emotional (20%) and economic violence (12, 5%) were fourth and fifth respectively, hence the influence of culture in perpetuating GBV as noted by (Gouws, 2016). Emotional and economic violence were trivialised as forms of violence maybe because of the way people are socialized in this society. The results revealed a cycle of violence as verbal violence usually precedes other forms of GBV. Intimate partner violence was also the most prevalent in the study and it manifested itself through rape. In a culture where men's rights are prioritized over women's, there is bound to be GBV due to gender inequality (Gonzalez, 2016).

Figure and Tables

Fig 1: Forms of Gender Based Violence common in Bindura (n=76)

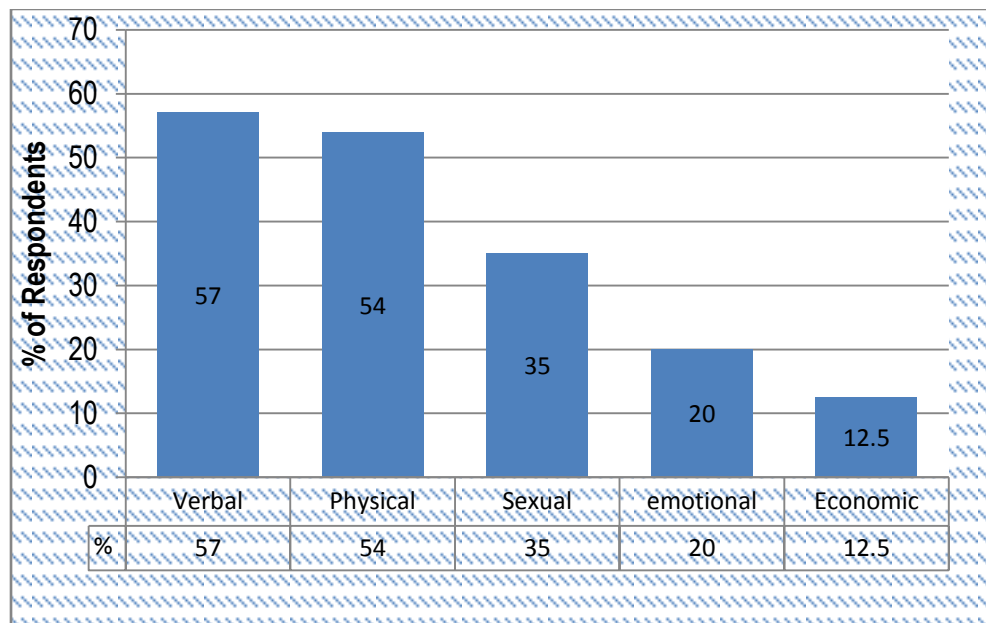


Table 1: Ever Experienced Any Form of GBV at Home by Sex (Male n=46, Female, n=30)

	Yes	No
Male	14 (30%)	32 (70%)
Female	18 (60 %)	12 (40%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>32 (42%)</b>	<b>44 (58%)</b>

Table 2: Ever Experienced Violence by Status

Status	Yes	No
Police	14 (44%)	18 (56%)
Public	21 (47%)	23 (53%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>35 (46%)</b>	<b>41(54%)</b>

Table 3 Ever Reported the Case(s) to the Police by Sex

Gender	Yes	No
Male	3(13%)	17(87%)
Female	6(24%)	18(76%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>9(20%)</b>	<b>35(80%)</b>

3.3 Domestic Violence

Sixty percent of the female respondents confessed that they had experienced some form of violence one time or another in the home, compared to 30% males as shown in table 1. Forty four percent of members of the police service and 47% members of the public professed to having experienced violence in the home one time or the other as shown in table 2. Only 13% males and 24% females reported the cases as shown in table 3. There is marked difference between the characteristics of violence most commonly committed against women and men. Women have a greater risk of sexual assault. Domestic violence is fuelled by asymmetrical power relations and misguided masculinities and femininities (Gonzalez 2016). This study replicated the same results as most females experience violence in the home as compared to 30% of men. Men are also victimized just as women. One male responded, “*tiri kurohwa mudzimba umu,*” (we are being beaten in these homes). Another interesting finding was that even though the police professed knowing DV, they were not immune from the menace. Forty four percent of police officers confessed that they once became victims to GBV. This statistic is slightly lower than 47% for members of the public who have experienced gender based violence at any one time in their lifetime. These figures reveal that indeed gender based violence knows no status (Police Family Violence Fact Sheet, 2009).

### 3.4 Reasons why these violations are most common

Culture is the major culprit for the proliferation of GBV in Bindura as it venerates patriarchy which subjugates women. Patriarchal structures sacrifice women's rights as men to trample on their cause backed by cultural ideology (Davies et al., 2016, Gonzalez 2016; Gouws, 2016). Women become objects of power exercise, leading to sexual and physical abuse. Some women in Bindura even confessed tolerating their spouses' beatings assuming it was natural. This reveals the dangers of cultural blinkers on interpretation of reality. Lack of knowledge has mainly been seen in rural areas where information is not readily available thus victims' rights are violated without them being aware. Disagreements and cheating between partners was also seen to contribute to violence as statistics show most of the passion killings are due to this reason. High prevalence of GBV can also be explained by a country's economic development (Belhorma, 2016). Mhaka, (2014) notes that the level of development of a community is correlated to the level of abuse cases occurring in it. This was attested to by a majority of respondents who cited that unemployed youths have resorted to sex as a form of entertainment hence committing crime. Sexual harassment of desperate women seeking employment and promotional opportunities is also prevalent in Bindura. Belhorma, (2016) concurs that women's economic dependence on men exposes them to GBV. Case withdrawal is cited in the study as one of the key reasons for continuing GBV as pressure from relatives, persuasion of reform from spouses and the need to protect marriages rises above the need to get legal recourse for female victims (Davies et al., 2016). This is especially true in cases of domestic violence against women and children as this is deemed as either acceptable or private matter to be handled by society in the African context.

### 3.5 Is Gender Based Violence on the Increase and Why?

**Table 4: Perception on Whether GBV is Increasing by Gender (Male, n=46 and Female n=30)**

Gender	Yes	No
Male	31(67%)	15(33%)
Female	19(64%)	11(36%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>50(66%)</b>	<b>26(34%)</b>

**Table 5: Gender Based Violence is on The Increase by Status (Police n=32 and public, n=44)**

Status	Yes	No
Public	23(53%)	21(47%)
Police	25(79%)	7 (21%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>48(63%)</b>	<b>28(37%)</b>

In table 4, there is a small difference between female and males in the study confirming that GBV is increasing with 64% and 67% respectively. From the study, 79% of the police officers compared to 53% members of the public indicated that gender based violence was on the increase as shown in table 5. These statistics reveal that only a fraction of what actually goes on is reported. The reasons given were that of underreporting of cases because of the victims' social ties with the perpetrator similar to what Davies et al., (2016) found out in a study on sexual and gender based violence in a conflict zone. In concurrence to Belhorma, (2016)'s findings, this study highlights that poverty is another reason for an upsurge in GBV using the frustration excitation hypothesis as people vent off their anger to innocent victims be it spouses or children. Some respondents reasoned that GBV is increasing because men also feel left out in the legal apparatuses but this is much as a matter of ignorance on the part of the men than negligence and marginalisation on the part of the various laws and acts enacted. Thus, there is need to educate the public on the neutrality of the legal frameworks in addressing GBV issues. More so the home is regarded as a private sphere in African contexts. Thus, some men feel affronted as they argued that issues such as DV should not involve the public as their power to lead homes is being taken away. Although activism against GBV has increased, men view this as a form of disrespect from their spouses and hence violence increases.

### 3.6 Nature, trends and prevalence of GBV

The study indicates that 47% of police officers and 21% of the members of the public indicated that GBV was not increasing as shown in table 5. The respondents attributed the reduction of reported GBV cases to the increasing efficiency of law enforcement and institution of legal apparatuses such as the DVA of 2007. This may be justifiable but open to criticism since not everyone is aware of the laws and most people do not understand them.

Other respondents attributed the awareness of women to their rights as a causal link to general decline in GBV. Although this might be the case, the economic dependence of women on men impinges on full realisation of the benefits of favourable laws due to underreporting especially for DV (Gonzalez, 2016; Gouws, 2016). An interesting view was that the society has become more capitalist and individuals are now more concerned about personal financial gain than family fights. It is not quite clear how this is so but the responses seem to imply that people are now more focused on gainful activities and hardly have time to be beating, shouting or abusing each other. This reveals changing social trends and conceptualisation of masculinities as financial muscle matters more than physical muscle.

### **3.7 Ways to end GBV**

Empowerment of women and equality were highlighted as critical to end GBV as this reduces women's dependence on men. Thus women need to be educated (Divon and Boas, 2017) as they represent a hidden resource as this can enhance their economic opportunities and widen their awareness on issues affecting their rights. However empowerment needs to be coupled with re-socialization as culture impedes inroads made in addressing GBV. Divon and Boas (2017), while agreeing to this further emphasize the need for place-specific solutions as some GBV related problems are unique to certain areas. National awareness campaigns can also help in fighting GBV. Most women respondents called for stiffer sentences to deter potential offenders from committing GBV. Male respondents noted that family values and ethics have not been put into perspective as these could be important in curbing GBV. A respectable proportion proposed the power of the Christian religion in fighting violence. Churches were urged to adhere to and propagate the Pauline doctrine in relation to the family unit so as to maintain peace and love. This viewpoint shows that the fight of GBV needs eclectic measures that are holistic and multipronged (Allwood 2016; Gouws, 2016). Police were encouraged not to be corrupt because corruption impedes the course of justice, leading to more violent cases of GBV by the affluent.

### **3.8 Best Form of Punishment for GBV Perpetrators**

Incarceration of perpetrators was the most frequent response from women. The majority of men perceived that community service was dissuading enough for would be perpetrators of GBV. They were reasoning that the severity of punishment does not matter what matters is to format the mind-set through moderate punishments. A few respondents said that existing punishments were acceptable. Women were more inclined towards fine payment. They even advocated shorter incarceration periods so as not to short change the person especially first time offenders. Males were steeped towards humiliating methods such as community service in areas in which the perpetrator is well known. There was consensus on need for life imprisonment, 90 % for perpetrators of rape implying that there are pardonable forms of GBVs but rape is unforgivable.

## **4. Conclusion**

This paper used the Feminist Criminology and Victimology as frameworks for analysis of police and public perceptions of GBV in Bindura. The study established that the chief cause of GBV lies in cultural and religious norms that exonerate patriarchy and that women experience more violence in the home than men as men are victimised only in rare cases of sexual deviance. The prevalence of GBV is difficult to ascertain chiefly because many cases go unreported. There is a nexus between different forms of GBV that it is difficult to separate them. GBV manifests itself in both private and public spheres. However, most cases go unreported because of the violence that occurs in 'private' spheres. A cycle of violence is discernible as one form of violence is subsequently followed by other forms. Thus, there is need for gender inclusivity in addressing GBV as male study participants argued for empowerment of women as a plausible measure in fighting GBV as it gives them the power to voice their concerns. There is need to reshape cultural scripts of assertive masculinity and permissive femininity. Couples should receive regular counselling on how to make their marriages work. The law needs to be supported by other social institutions like the church to achieve better the eradication of GBV. Activism should target the youth for sustainable progress in eradicating GBV. Awareness campaigns and community mobilisation in both rural and urban areas through the media and social networks are important components for strategically fighting GBV.

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