

# Etiological Exploration of Gender-Based Violence against Male Survivors in Chongwe District, Zambia

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## ABSTRACT

Gender-based violence has for a long time been considered as a women's issue. For over three decades now, the 16 days of activism against Gender based violence which is commemorated worldwide has been on ending violence against women and girls. Recent studies, however, reveal that men too are victims of Gender based violence and they have continued to suffer in silence. Studies have further revealed that men usually do not report cases of Gender based violence which makes the statistics to be very low and attract little or no attention from stakeholders. GBV against men is largely overlooked and trivialized. It is not an issue that is talked about, yet men continue to suffer from multiple forms of GBV which are physical, sexual, psychological and emotional abuses. These forms of GBV have long lasting effects on male survivors yet very little attention has been directed towards establishing the causes of these abuses against men. Thus, the objective of this study was to establish the causes of Gender based violence against male survivors in Chongwe District. The study used a Phenomenological approach with a sample of 9 male survivors. Data was generated through individual interviews, observations, and focused group discussions. The study findings revealed the following causes: Failing to provide for the family, alcohol abuse, infidelity, and desire for women to dominate. It is therefore, recommended that stakeholders mandated to deal with issues of Gender based Violence adequately respond to male violence and abuse as opposed to trivializing their reports.

**Keywords:** gender-based violence, male survivors, phenomenology Zambia.

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## INTRODUCTION

Gender based Violence (GBV) is defined as any physical, mental, social or economic abuse against a person because of that person's gender and includes: (a) Violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to the person, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life; and (b) Actual or threatened physical, mental, social or economic abuse that occurs in a domestic relationship; (Anti-GBV Act of 2011). Other researchers like (Coomarswamy, 2014) describes GBV against men as behavior where women use violence to control men, a control to which they feel they are entitled and that is supported by their culture and likely to cause physical and mental health problems, which include chronic pain, physical disability, drug and alcohol abuse, depression and lower self-esteem forms and dimensions of violence that is aimed at a person by virtue of their gender. Broadly, there is a consensus that the concept includes any physical, sexual, or emotional abuse perpetrated against an individual based on their gender or gender identity.

For the purpose of this study, GBV has to do with abuse or violence that is suffered by partners who are in relationships (Thobejane *et al.*, 2018). These relationships include past and present ones. GBV comes in different forms namely physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, and psychological abuse, economic abuse, intimidation, harassment, as well as stalking. GBV can also manifest in the perpetrator damaging the property of the victim and aggressively forcing him/herself into the house or residence of the victim (Thobejane *et al.*, 2018).

GBV perpetrated by females against their male partners is trivialized by communities where this GBV occurs and by other stakeholders mandated to deal with issues of GBV. Male victims of violence usually face ridicule and blame for being victims of the violence due to cultural expectations that men should be the dominant party in the relationship. They are seen as having failed to be in charge as expected of men and therefore deserving of the abuse that they experience (Lisulo, 2019). A study conducted by Thobejane, *et al.* (2018), on GBV against men in Vuwani (Limpopo Province) South Africa found that abused men are reluctant to report the abuse out of fear of being ridiculed.

This has contributed to the low statistics that are recorded worldwide making GBV to be a women's

issue. The underreporting of men's abusive experiences in the hands of their female partners contributes to this problem not been addressed. Men's silence contributes to lack of support, shelters, and education on men's abuse (Thobejane & Luthada, 2019). Staying silent perpetuates this crisis. Supporting all survivors and helping them report GBV assists in breaking the legacy and cycle of GBV for generations to come (Durham, 2020). Wherever GBV occurs, it is a major obstacle for the achievement of gender justice, posing a serious threat to democratic development and public health and is a critical barrier to achieving sustainable development, economic growth, and peace. If women, girls, men, and boys are not safe, they cannot be full citizens nor fully participate in the development of their own society.

Globally, in light of statistics provided by the Mankind Initiative, 13.8 percent of men (2.9 million) and 27.4 percent of women (5.9 million) between the ages of 16 to 74 have suffered some form of domestic abuse (2019/2020). Moreover, domestic abuse affects one in four women and one in six to seven men in their lifetime. Further, 576,000 men (2.5% men) and 1.2 million (4.8% women) were victim of partner abuse in 2018/19 equating to a ratio of two female victims to every one male victim.

Zambia is one of the countries in Southern Africa with the highest GBV occurrence (SADC Barometer, 2015). Men are not excluded as the number being exposed to GBV has continued to rise (Mulenga, 2020). Zambia Police spokesperson Mr Ray Hamoonga disclosed that in the third quarter of 2022, 1,646 men were abused countrywide representing 18.7%. In the 2019 annual report undertaken by Young Women Christian Association and GIZ in Ngombe and mtendere, the two community paralegal desks recorded a total number of 2,292 GBV cases in which 1837 were females and 445 were males. These statistics are not a true reflection of the cases on the ground as underreporting has been observed from male survivors. It is against this background that the study sought to establish the causes of GBV against male survivors in Chongwe District.

#### A. Problem Statement

In Zambia currently, the causes of GBV against male survivors have been under researched (Lisulo, 2019). While few studies have been conducted with a focus on men's experiences of abuse from their female partners, there is now a growing body of literature highlighting a knowledge gap and the need for more research on the causes of GBV against men. GBV is viewed as violence against women and children and a few cases have been reported about men's abuse and the cause of this abuse. From literature reviewed and recent studies conducted by (Nekhavambe, 2021; Agbulos, 2017; Durham, 2020; Mokebo, 2018; Esaaba, 2019; Medzani, 2019; Mulenga, 2020; Thobejane *et al.*, 2018), findings have revealed that male survivors experience multiple forms of abuse from the hands of their female partners. However, there seems to be limited literature on the causes of these forms of violence. This violence includes, but is not limited to physical, sexual, psychological, economic harm and includes actions such as threats and coercion (Thobejane *et al.*, 2018). Hence the importance of this study as it helped to establish some of the causes of GBV against males.

#### B. Specific Objective

This study sought to establish the etiological factors of GBV against males in Chongwe District.

#### C. Significance of the Study

There have been reports of men experiencing various forms of abuse and violence from their female partners on Television, Newspapers, and close family members in communities where this violence usually takes place. The identification of the major causes of GBV may be helpful in knowing prevention measures of violence against men by their female partners (Uwayisaba, 2018). It may also help policymakers to come up with policies that will not ignore men as survivors of GBV and may contribute positively towards empowering service providers such as health care workers, law enforcement officers and NGOs among others, who should now address GBV holistically without attaching a gender. Further, the study may add to a few existing academic literatures on causes of GBV against men.

#### D. Theoretical Framework (Structuralist Theory)

The structuralist theory was propounded by Wilhem Wundt and his student Edward Bradford Titchener in the 1960s. Structuralist theory focuses on violence as an intrinsic and endemic part of social structure. Structuralist theories locate the social problem in the real or concrete social world or in social structures, that is, beyond the individual, establishing that these external factors have an effect or impact on social life and social relations (Johnson, 2000). This theory was chosen because the study focuses on the causes of GBV against male survivors. The theory in this case is ideal because it looks at GBV cases as stress reactions to problems in families, relationships, or circumstances (Stern, 2014). It is also impartial on the gender that perpetuates the violence.

The theory considers poverty, unemployment, isolation, and loss of the male status as the causal factors in domestic violence. It is seen to be a result of modern families being affected by the social stresses of unemployment, poverty, homelessness and isolation (Jenkins, 1990).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Causes of GBV against Male Survivors

Several studies have attributed the change in the rate of domestic violence to changes in gender dynamics within the household. Modernization and education in favor of women have shifted these gender notions in most of our societies (Kwabena, 2020). Some women are now abusers and are ready to fight back because of the social, formal, financial, and legal support they have received over the years. Phionah (2021), highlighted that woman who had well-paying jobs treated their husbands badly to the extent of disarranging their matrimonial beds.

Male victims observed patriarchy power in Rwanda and culture that were identified as the root causes of GBV against men in Rwanda. Patriarchy describes the social relations of power between men and women. It is a system for maintaining class, gender, racial and heterosexual privilege relying both on crude forms of oppression, like violence and subtle ones like laws to perpetuate inequality. In their views, women abuse men in Rwandan families because of patriarchy power (Uwayisaba, 2018). This contradicts Phionah (2021) who argues that the causes of GBV in family life were rooted in patriarchal cultural systems of Rwanda where men dominated women and girls in society where superiority give them false confidence of exercising their power over women and girls. But from studies that have been reviewed, men and women, boys and girls can be survivors and victims' at the same time. Muwanigwa (2017) also argues that in almost all descriptions of GBV the underpinning consensus is that GBV affects both men and women, although many men may feel uncomfortable discussing it, which at times seem to reflect on men in general, portraying all of them as aggressive, violent, irresponsible, wife beaters or sexual predators.

Lisulo, (2019) study revealed the following causes of female perpetrated GBV against men: lack of financial support which included non-provision of food and rent or shelter for the family, alcohol abuse, emotional neglect and betrayal or termination of romantic relationship. Others were self-defense demanding respect, jealousy and infidelity, trust issues, failing to satisfy the woman's sexual desire and desire to teach the man a lesson and fighting back after being tired of being abused all the time.

The most common reasons for violence against men seemed to relate to issues of infidelity by men, failure of the man to provide for his family financially and materially, retaliation or revenge after being abused by the woman for a long time and the desire for women to have recognition and respect as equal partners in their homes (Lisulo, 2019). Issues of infidelity triggered emotional imbalance in some women who could not stand the sight of a cheating husband. Emotional imbalance is also seen as a cause of GBV against males. Some women are known to be too emotional to settle marital issues through dialogue, hence their emotions supersede reasoning and opt to use violence as a form of communication or rather as a way of teaching a man a lesson, so that they (man) may not repeat an act deemed unfit by the female counterparts (Katongo, 2017).

Obeji *et al.* (2017) and Mongare *et al.* (2018) documented in their studies that men of low socio-economic status were prone to female perpetrated abuse in Western and central Kenya. Another study in Kenya by (Karimi *et al.*, 2021) made similar observations as it investigated the drivers of domestic violence against men in Kirinyaga County Kenya. It utilized a qualitative research design, and 30 victimized men were interviewed between March and May 2018. Supplementary data were gathered from key informants. The study was guided by social learning theory and field data was subjected to thematic and content analysis. Findings revealed that perpetrator-related and victim-related characteristics were the main triggers of domestic violence against men. These included the desire of women to dominate; emotional dissonance; peer influence; men's infidelity, drunkenness, and failure to shoulder family responsibilities. The study concluded that there was an urgent need to increase awareness and develop innovative strategies to prevent and respond to domestic violence.

Another study conducted by (Mukulu, 2019) revealed that the main causes of GBV among men are unequal power sharing between men and women, alcohol consumption, unemployment, lack of awareness of men's rights and income disparity. He stated that if there was equal power sharing, individuals would understand each other's value and they would also learn to appreciate the value in each other. In an event where participants did not have an understanding of equal power sharing in a relationship, it led to GBV. Additionally, participants stated that men who were in relationships with women who abuse alcohol and drugs are mostly abused especially when these parties are under the influence of such substances. Unemployment was often blamed on GBV that took place in various homes. Unemployed men are disempowered and employed women felt empowered in most circumstances. This made some wives see their husbands as poor and insult them for failure to provide for the family. In some cases, the violence started when wives proposed to sleep in a separate room and in most cases the wives threatened a divorce (Mukulu, 2019).

Further, participants indicated that lack of awareness of their rights caused GBV in most of the communities. Some men opted to commit suicide because they thought that the law and policies put in place only favored women. On income disparity, the general assumption was that men should be providers

of their families and that the man's salary should generally be higher than that of their wives and in an event where it was not so GBV was the result. He noted that abused husbands cut across all ages, educational levels, and socio-economic classes. Male victims of domestic violence therefore, deserved the same recognition, sympathy, support and services as female victims (Mukulu, 2019).

In South Africa, Mukwevho (2021), reported the following as the root causes of GBV among men in Limpopo district as follows; infidelity, lack of patience in relationships, irresponsibility among men, and gender stereotypes that men are more superior and are expected to be strong. It was apparent that failed expectations in marriage by wives also triggered GBV against men. Recent studies by Uwayisaba (2018), Phionah (2021), Mpampi (2020), Nyeleti (2018), Mokebo (2018), Nekhavhambe (2021), Esaaba,(2019), Medzani (2019), Mulenga (2020), and Thobejane *et al.* ( 2018) reported similar causes among them where; alcohol and drug abuse or drunkenness, cultural factors or beliefs, infidelity among men, economic factors associated with unemployment which leads to failure to provide for the family. On the other hand, Phionah, (2021) & Mokebo (2018), established that men in polygamous unions were most likely to suffer from GBV as compared to those married to one woman. About 65% experienced violence from their wives on a weekly basis.

#### METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research methodology with a hermeneutic phenomenological approach guided the study. Hermeneutics Phenomenology research design was applied to study the causes of GBV against male survivors as postulated by Martin Heidegger's thesis on 'Being and Time' expanded by van Manen's four reflective thematic areas on lived experiences as follows: (a) Lived space- Spatiality; (b) Lived body- Corporeality; (c) lived time- Temporality; and (d) lived human relation- Relationality, (van Manen, 2007).The design was chosen because it strives to explain human experiences as described by individuals who lived the experiences under investigation (Simui, 2018; Simwatachela *et al.*, 2020). In addition, reflection upon the phenomenon allows an intuitive insight into the experience being studied.

Nine participants were purposively sampled based on van Manen's (2007) inclusion and exclusion criteria as follows:

- 1) Lived with injuries or scars (Corporeality)
- 2) Lived with the perpetrator for not less than a year (Temporality)
- 3) Lived with the perpetrator in some house or are still living together (Spatiality)
- 4) Lived with the perpetrator as a wife, girlfriend or any other intimate relationship that existed between the two (Relationality).

Table I summarizes profiles of nine participants whose real names are replaced with pseudonyms for ethical reasons.

TABLE I: PROFILES OF PARTICIPANTS

Name	Age	Marital Status	Education	Employment
Able	48	Separated	College	Businessman
Bell	55	Married	College	Clerk
Can	30	Married	Grade 9	Photographer
Dan	58	Married	Grade 9	Businessman
Een	63	Divorced	Grade 9	Electrician
Fari	43	Married	College	Teacher
Gogi	57	Divorced	Grade 12	Farmer
Hagi	49	Married	Grade 12	Mechanic
Ian	34	Married	Grade 12	Mechanic

To achieve triangulation in data collection methods and instruments, the researcher combined Individual Interviews, Observations and Focus group discussions. Using multiple tools strengthens the validity and reliability of the study as evidence was collaborated and triangulated from different viewpoints.

Data analysis is raw data management process which incorporates transcription, translation (where necessary), text coding and meaning making (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Thematic data analysis was adopted in this study. This method of analysis entails the examination of data to extract main ideas which are distinguishable across transcripts (Bryman, 2012). According to Smith (2007) analysis is "an iterative and inductive cycle." It is a reflexive process that sparks insight and develops meaning and goes back and forth, enabling the researcher to establish patterns or themes. Identified themes were cross-checked by the participants for validation purposes.

In this study Guba's (1981) four criteria of Trustworthiness were applied. The four elements are: (a) Credibility, (b) Transferability, (c) Dependability, and (d) Confirmability. For instance, to enhance rigor and enrich the analysis, a variety of strategies were employed including critical reflexivity, attention to negative (exceptional) cases, communicative validation, and peer review (Charmaz, 2006). Ethical issues as guided by Cohen *et al.* (2000), such as written consents from all prospective participants were followed.

To assure confidentiality and privacy, pseudonyms were assigned in place of actual names as follows: Able, Bell, Can, Dan, Een, Fari, Gogi, Hagi, Ian, FGD1 and FGD2.

#### A. Ethical Considerations

In conducting the study, clearance was obtained from the University of Zambia. Permission to reach out the sampled male survivors was obtained from Chongwe District Hospital Management. Further, the researcher explained to the participants the purpose of the research both in the invitation letters and before the start of each interview.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Emergent from this study are the following findings: Failure to provide for the family, Alcohol abuse, infidelity, and the desire to dominate by women. The findings are in line with the theoretical framework used in the study which looks at GBV as stress reactions to problems in families, relationships, or circumstances (Stern, 2014). The theory considers poverty, unemployment, isolation, and loss of the male status as the causal factors in domestic violence. It is seen to be a result of modern families being affected by the social stress of unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and isolation (Jenkins, 1990). The findings and implications are now discussed as follows:

#### A. Failure to Provide for the Family

The study found that lack of employment or failure to provide for the family increased men's vulnerability to violence. Economic dependence on women made it difficult for them to escape violent relationships. Participants reported that wives behaved abusively towards them because they believed that men should provide for the family. This is in harmony with Monde (2019), who's study revealed that lack of financial support which included non-provision of food and rent or shelter for the family was among the most common reasons for male victimization. Earning less than a man was unacceptable. One of the comments that came from FGD1 was that:

*The economy is bad with rising prices of commodities every day and COVID 19 worsened the situation. Even if you find a piece of work you will just be paid little and sometimes you are not paid immediately. People like me staying at my wives' plot have nowhere to go for now I just have to endure the insults. Sometimes my wife will eat chicken with my children, and they will give me beans. If I say anything, she will just say buy chicken I shall cook for you.*

Some men who claimed to have been abused by their wives claimed that the reason why their wives abused them was either they lost their jobs or businesses. Their explanations revealed that there is a link between violence, lack of economic resources and dependency which are circular. One of the participants Een had this to say:

*When I lost my job, I also lost respect from my wife. She started throwing my underwear and clothes outside in the presence of my children. I endured insults and sometimes was locked out of the house.*

The implication is that psychologically, there was an attack on their ego as they were constantly reminded of how worthless they were. The failure to shoulder family responsibilities had a negative impact on the male survivors and mostly opted to suffer in silence. Similar findings were documented by (Mokebo, 2018; Mukulu, 2019; Nyeleti, 2018; Mpampi, 2020). Some survivors developed suicidal ideations that lead to dissatisfaction and lack of self-worth. Suicidal ideations were also captured (Mukulu, 2019). This could be an indication of lack of civic awareness on the right to life as a sacred treasure Muleya *et al.* (2019), Mupeta *et al.* (2020), and Muntengwa *et al.* (2020).

#### B. Alcohol Abuse

Abuse of alcohol was a trigger to violence against men as women took advantage of their weak state. Mpampi (2020), documented alcoholism as the major cause of male violence from their spouses. Some participants would not remember anything when they got drunk so their wives stole whatever money they had in their pockets and would beat them up sometimes, especially when they had fallen into a deep sleep. They admitted that excessive use of alcohol lead to the abuse they went through. Hagi narrated the following:

*I have two wives and been a mechanic, I lift heavy metals and I get tired. I feel better when*

*I drink alcohol and go home but my wives would search for me and beat me while asleep thinking that maybe have given the other wife more money. This makes me drink more and more because have no peace and all my wives are talking machines.*

Most of the participants admitted that alcohol consumption triggered the violence they went through. Researchers like Nyeleti (2018), Mukulu (2019), Phionah (2021) and Karimi, *et al.* (2021), Mwase, *et al.* (2020) reported alcohol abuse or drunkenness as one of the leading causes of female perpetrated violence against men. This often leads to reduced productivity and poverty-related situations as money that would have been used on essential things is spent on alcohol. Additionally, because of alcohol and a repeated circle of violence and arguments in the home, social and economic engagements are suspended leading to non-productivity.

### C. Infidelity

Literature reviewed and findings from recent studies are in line with this finding which is among the major causes of violence against male survivors. Issues of infidelity triggered emotional imbalance in some women who could not stand the sight of a cheating husband. Some women were too emotional to settle marital issues through dialogue. Participants experienced GBV deal to extra marital affairs. Ian had this to say:

*It's true I have another woman but whenever my wife asked me, I used to refuse. One day I bought condoms after using some I forgot to remove them from my pocket. My wife found them when she was washing my clothes. She first threw the condoms at me then started throwing objects like pans, plates, and containers at me. I just saw the situation and ran away.*

From FGD2:

*You see we are men, and we usually have girlfriends, but this is not received well by our wives didn't you hear of a man whose manhood was cut off here in Chongwe due to infidelity? It was headline and the woman was arrested, surely these affairs bring so much violence and unending arguments in our homes.*

A few studies that have been conducted on the causes of GBV against male survivors have revealed infidelity that is been unfaithful and engaging in extra marital affairs as the cause of the violence they suffered. Studies by (Thobejane *et al.*, 2018; Mokebo, 2018; Monde, 2019; Medzani, 2019; Karimi *et al.*, 2021; Mwanangombe, Mundende *et al.*, 2020; Mukwevho, 2021; Nekhavhambe, 2021) documented this finding. Even thou participants admitted to having been engaged in extra marital affairs with no desire to stop, they lived in fear, confusion, and self-blame. They are mistrusted by their wives and the fear of having their genitals cut off lives with them after the incident that happened were a man had his manhood cut off deal to infidelity.

### D. Desire of Women to Dominate

With the current policies and laws which seem to work in favor of women, men have found themselves into what they called the “under pant government” meaning they had no influence or control on what their wives were doing. Women who seemed to be doing better than their husbands financially have come up to dominate the relationship as head of the house. Kwabena (2020), cited modernization and education in favor of women to have shifted these gender norms in most of our societies. Some women are now abusers and ready to fight back because of the social, formal, financial, and legal support they have received over the years. Most of the participants explained that their wives decided who visited them, they had an upper hand on their property and finances, they would not cook on time as some of them resorted to beer drinking and just working at their own time. Able had this to say:

*As we speak right now my case is before court. My wife's behavior was bad, wanting to control me like a child and her eyes have just been on the property that we should divorce and share the property. She tortures me mentally demeaning me that am not man enough for her and uses bad language on me in the presence of our children.*

Comments from FGD2 Participants had this to say.

*We are losing control over our wives, most of whom have resorted to beer drinking and they don't want to be controlled. They cook in their own time, sometimes they don't wash our clothes and they have an upper hand on the use of money. If you try to control them, it triggers violence and insults.*

Karimi *et al.*, (2021) conducted a qualitative study on 30 victimized men on the drivers of domestic

violence in Kirinyaga County, Kenya. Findings revealed that perpetrator-related and victim related characteristics were the main triggers of domestic violence against men. These included the desire of women to dominate; emotional dissonance; peer influence; men's infidelity, drunkenness, and failure to shoulder family responsibilities. Most of her findings have been reported in this study. The desire for women to have recognition and respect as equal partners in their homes was also revealed by Monde (2019). The effect of such dominance leads to broken marriages, emotional trauma, and depression as men are labeled weak. Their masculinity is questioned by family, friends and society as most African countries have patriarchal structures which demands those men exercise dominance over women especially in marriages.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. Conclusion

In conclusion, male survivors are faced with multiple abuses and violence from their female partners. The need for support cannot be overemphasized. The role and status of women has changed overtime due to women empowerment programs such as free education, small and medium-term business loans, skills training in different fields such as tailoring, hospitality and catering among others and various appointments in positions of influence making it easy for them to perpetuate violence. This, therefore, calls on stakeholders to respond positively to reports of abuse and violence against men as opposed to trivializing them.

Additionally, male victimization is not something that anyone would like to disclose publicly. Therefore, confidentiality when attending to these reports is of great importance if men are to come forward and report. This will in turn give us some level of accuracy on the cases on the ground as opposed to the current situation where most cases of GBV against men go unreported.

### B. Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings of this study:

- 1) There is need to respond adequately to the abuses and violence that male survivors go through by relevant stakeholders.
- 2) There is need to build capacity among stakeholders and the community as GBV has to be fought from the grassroots and is everyone's responsibility.
- 3) Social groups such as the men's network must be adequately funded and supported as most of the male survivors found these networks helpful.
- 4) There is need for massive campaigns and awareness using social media, print media and other platforms to encourage male survivors to report GBV cases so as to reflect the true picture on the ground.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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