

Original Research Article

## Effects of Domestic Violence: The Zimbabwean Experience

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### ABSTRACT

It leaves some with broken limbs, some with swollen eyes and some with unforgettable memories. It knows no gender, age, race and time. It is perpetrated by a physically stronger member of the family over other members. It is perpetrated in order to control the other partner or in other cases it is done out of jealous. It can be seen as a set of behaviours abusers deliberately use to maintain power and control over them and the relationship. Family harmony is crucial and people should treat each other with respect and care. Healthy relationships should not include abusive behavior, such as name-calling or physical injuries. The victims of domestic violence can be male, female, children or a domestic worker. This paper is confined to cases of domestic violence in Zimbabwe. The paper highlights the effects of domestic violence. The paper will also conclude by giving some recommendations on how to reduce cases of domestic violence.

### Introduction

According to Hellary (2000), domestic violence occurs in stages and it moves from verbal to physical and may result in loss of life. Domestic violence in Zimbabwe is mainly a symptom of an unbalanced situation in the homes. The unbalanced situations have been in existence since time immemorial. The major imbalance is that of failure to recognise that both spouses are equal in the house. Prevailing harsh economic conditions currently experienced by people are also resulting in tensions which end up in domestic violence.

Barely a day passes without a report of murder or serious assault of married couples or a member of the family in all the provinces of Zimbabwe. Weapons used include axes, hoes, axe or hoe handle, knives, electric cables, acid or anything that the perpetrator can come across. Some victims remain in the abusive relationships simply because they are economically incapacitated. According to Coutinho (2015), the core characteristic of domestic violence victims and perpetrators detected by many researchers is that they have low level of education and have low participation in income generating activities.

The violence can be in the form of assault, insult, ridicule, isolation and withdrawal of financial support in other instances. The blame on the patriarchal structure of the Zimbabwean society and adherence to religious, societal and cultural norms without looking at the positive side of the Traditional culture is militating against the implementation of the Anti Domestic violence laws in Zimbabwe. If allowed to go unchecked, the number of psychological patients who are victims of domestic violence will increase to unprecedented level.

### Definition of Domestic Violence

According to Liness (2013) the 2005 cross-government definition stated: 'Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or

family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. This includes issues of concern to black and minority ethnic (BME) communities such as so called 'honour based violence', female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage.'

According to Orr (2007) the explanatory text that accompanied the definition defined an adult as any person aged 18 years or over. Family members were referred to as mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister and grandparents, whether directly related, in-laws or step family. Ibid (2007) stated that the definition failed to recognise the patterns of coercive and controlling behaviours that function to intimidate, humiliate, isolate, exhaust, disable, punish and reward the partner in order to demonstrate power.

There are a number of acts by the perpetrator that constitute controlling behaviour and cause the victim to submit. Such acts include depriving the victims means required for one to be independent, isolating from source of support, and even exploiting the victims resources. Frightening, humiliating and intimidating are also some of the acts employed by the perpetrators of domestic violence.

### **Concept of Domestic Violence**

According to Victor (2000) domestic violence has so many devastating effects. The effects affect mainly women and to some extent men also are affected. It usually occurs in the form of sexual violence, physical violence, emotional violence, economic violence and can also be done in the form of humiliating or intimidating. A victim may suffer repeated violence and the violence maybe in an escalating manner.

According to the Domestic Violence Act Chapter 5 16," domestic violence means any unlawful act, omission or behaviour which results in death or the direct infliction of physical, sexual or mental injury to any complainant by a respondent....". Also according to Zoe (1999), domestic violence has been widely recognized as a violation of human rights and a crime against humanity. Ibid (1999) further stated that despite this realization it has been vastly noted that this phenomenon of domestic violence, is on the increase globally.

The patriarchal structure of the African society at large and of the Zimbabwe community in particular and the traditional culture are being blamed for the suffering of women under their spouses. This is the same structure that in the yesteryear period before introduction of the Roman Dutch Law, formed the basis of the family fabric and rubric that kept families intact. Thus, there is a symbiotic relationship between traditional culture and the family in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe National Gender Policy 2017 however, posits that culture, beliefs and religion shape gender relations. It is also assumed that culture, beliefs and religion have been invoked to legitimise differences in gender status, values and roles and that they are responsible for the elevation of men to higher status than women in society.

Domestic violence increases women's economic dependence and less control over economy and resources. An important factor that comes out of the above facts is that domestic violence is perpetrated due to cultural and traditional practices and can also be considered necessary and accepted in a certain culture or tradition. The patriarchal setup of African societies is presumed to be the backbone of domestic violence in Africa. It is therefore clear from this assertion that there are those things that initiate and perpetrate domestic violence. However, the actual act of committing the act of violence is by choice because there are several options to resort to others than resorting to violence.

### **Causes of Domestic Violence**

Causes of domestic violence are many and some of the common causes are:

#### ***Cultural Beliefs***

Some men with very traditional beliefs may think they have the right to control women, and that women are not equal to men. Chirume (1998) asserted that in Shona and Ndebele cultures wife-beating has been considered an appropriate way of correcting a women's behaviour. Moderate beating of a wife is not considered wrong or actionable under customary law. The wife is seen as belonging to the husband and as the head of the family he controls her and the family.

#### ***Environmental Factors***

According to Lewin (1947) an environment where violence is either taught, by example as normal will imprint upon a child's psyche. This leads the child in developing his or her own ideas about violence. The child will internalise wrong information,

with regards to solving problems using violence. A child growing up in a violent family is likely to have little self-esteem and may be engaged in a pattern of negative self –talk and anger will be a major source of fuel that will fan the flames of domestic violence to his or her own family.

### **Drug and or Alcohol Abuse**

It is true that drug and or alcohol abuse are common causes of domestic violence. Their use leads to out-of-control behaviour and it damages family structure by causing a breakdown of values and lowering inhibitions of the members. Jaricha (2000) asserted that family members of substance abusers are more likely to become victims of family violence than members of non-abusing family. In times when some members of the family engage in drugs, this is the time when all members should unite and show love to one another by working together to fight drug abuse.

### **Economic Factors**

According to Kabudi (1985) domestic violence is more frequent where individuals experience loss of physical health and or wage-earning power. The frustration of the inability to 'make ends meet' increases conflicts in the home. Feelings of helplessness mount. Anger flares and violence erupts. Family members need not give up. They must not embrace poverty. Instead they must disown it and work hard to end the poverty.

### **Who are the perpetrators of domestic violence?**

The perpetrators of violence include spouses, parents, relatives, family friends and some of these perpetrators are custodians of the law who include lawyers and police officers and at times politicians. The majority of the perpetrators are however males. According to Chikara (2013), domestic violence by its complex nature, affects both males and females. Also, according to Shuler (2010), a certain research has found that approximately 3.8 women and 1.3 men per 1000 are victims of domestic violence each year.

From a distance it appears that females are the majority of victims of domestic violence. However, it is clear that domestic violence is also not blind to gender. Domestic violence is both symmetric and asymmetric. The former refers to a situation where both men and women perpetrate domestic violence in equal proportions whilst the latter refers to a situation whereby men overwhelmingly subject their partners to domestic violence, respectively. Therefore, domestic violence is characterised by both female and male victimhood and female and male as perpetration. However, it is not yet balanced on a fifty- fifty scale.

It is the writer's assertion that domestic violence in Zimbabwe is asymmetric given the statistics that are available at the Police and the civil courts. Zimbabwean men are stronger than women as they are expected to do all the necessary work that brings food on the table while women do the light domestic chores including minding of the children.

### **What actions are considered domestic violence?**

Several violent actions or threats comprise behaviors often associated with domestic violence. Abusers will use these maneuvers:

- Intimidate
- Manipulate
- Humiliate
- Isolate
- Frighten
- Terrorize
- Blame
- Hurt
- Injure

### **Why doesn't a victim just leave the abuser?**

While domestic violence victims may deal with severe abuse from their partners, they may still remain in the relationship. This can be confusing to family and friends who want their loved ones to be safe and have a violence-free life. It isn't always easy to escape the abuse and remove the perpetrator from their lives. It is an individual decision.

- Established connection

The pattern of abusive behavior may begin well into a relationship after a strong attachment has formed and partners have experienced major life events together. The victim may have been in the relationship for a long time, may live with the perpetrator, and may be married and share children. These factors can become challenges to face when deciding to leave a relationship.

- Love

A victim may be in love with the abuser despite the unhealthy relationship. The offender could have been affectionate at some point, which can make a partner hold onto hope that the behavior will change.

- Denial

Domestic violence can sometimes be hard to recognize. Victims may not realize they are experiencing abuse, especially when it can be subtle like intimidation or acting jealous. It can also be hard to grasp that someone they love can be hurting them. Some may also think they did something wrong to cause the abuse even though **it is never a victim's fault**.

- Children

A parent may remain with a partner for the sake of their children. It may seem like the best option for children is to have a two-part household. Victims may also depend financially on the abusers causing concern that they won't be able to care for their children on their own. It can, however, be more harmful to keep children exposed to such abuse, as they are vulnerable to being hurt themselves and can experience trauma.

- Money and finances

Abusers may prevent their partners from working or they may control bank accounts and how money is spent. This can result in victims being unable to support themselves if they leave the relationship.

- Shame

It isn't easy to admit to being abused. If a partner leaves a relationship, other people in their lives may ask questions about the circumstances of the separation. This can make a survivor feel embarrassed and judged. Although this can cause worry, survivors should know there isn't anything to be ashamed of and they did nothing wrong.

While addressing this pain can be overwhelming, the healing process can help survivors develop inner strengths and lessen their fear of safety for themselves and their families. On the journey to recovery, survivors and those who support them should understand that healing takes time. The effects of this trauma can vary widely person to person due to individuals' responses to stress, age, and the frequency and severity of abuse.

### What are common physical effects of domestic violence?

- Bruises
- Bruises on or around the eyes
- Red or purple marks at the neck
- Sprained or broken wrists
- Chronic fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Muscle tension
- Involuntary shaking
- Changes in eating and sleeping patterns
- Sexual dysfunction
- Menstrual cycle or fertility issues in women

Domestic violence survivors can face ongoing and challenging effects after enduring physical, mental, and emotional abuse. It can take time for a survivor to adjust to living in a safe environment, especially if a perpetrator was severely violent and/or committed the actions over an extended period of time.

## **What are the effects of domestic violence to the victims?**

### ***Mental effects***

- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, and uncontrollable thoughts
- Depression, including prolonged sadness
- Anxiety
- Low self-esteem and questioning sense of self
- Suicidal thoughts or attempts.
- Alcohol and drug abuse

### ***Emotional and spiritual effects***

- Hopelessness
- Feeling unworthy
- Apprehensive and discouraged about the future
- Inability to trust
- Questioning and doubting spiritual faith
- Unmotivated

## ***What are common effects on children who witness domestic violence?***

Whether children witness or experience abuse, it can take a toll on their development.

Domestic violence victims are not isolated to intimate partners. Children are at an increased risk for emotional behavioral problems regardless if they were directly abused or not. The effects include:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Academic problems
- Fearful

The effects of domestic violence to the victims constitute a violation of human rights. A human right by definition is the entitlements to any human being regardless of colour, race creed or affiliation. In a family set up any member of the family has the right to disobey any instruction which is against his or her rights. In most cases, the father must be obeyed without any further questioning. Any decision that is made in the family, it is the father who has the final say. This set up grossly violates the rights of the wife and children and they end up having limited thinking because they are not allowed to contribute much in the home. The effects of domestic violence impact directly on the victim as well as on the children who witness the violence.

If a woman does something perceived to be wrong, the husband has the right to punish her and the converse is not possible. While there is nothing wrong for a woman to submit to her husband, the act of punishing a woman shows little respect for her and it degrades her to a mere person in the house. The husband decides the extent of the punishment and this can result in the inflictment of permanent injuries and the development of psychological problems.

Physical effects of domestic violence include, death, permanent disability such as blindness, deafness seizures, loss of mobility, hospitalisation for broken bones, concussions, head or spinal injuries, gynaecological problems including losing an unborn baby, or births defects ,Violence Against Women(VAW) Baseline Study(2013).Many women allow to be beaten by their spouses because they think it is a way of showing love and concern for them. When a woman wears a mini skirt the husband will say she is soliciting for men to follow her and that she is asking to be raped.

On the contrary, a man wears a short and moves around the yard without even putting on a shirt and nobody questions him. How does a woman feel when she sees her husband in that short with a naked big belly? It puts the woman in the position of someone in captivity. Society and culture appear to be discouraging women from raising voices against domestic violence. Cultural norms and fear do prevent women from testifying against perpetrators of domestic violence and thus, preventing them from justice.

There are social problems that are associated with leaving an abusive marriage. The society always blames the woman for having failed the marriage. The woman is in some situations, not socially accepted as she will be referred to a bad influence on other women. Most societies tend to blame the victim in especially in cases of sexual violence which increases psychological harm Guidelines for Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings [2005].

Women are the ones who carry pregnancy and should be given the opportunity to terminate the pregnancy in the first three months of her pregnancy but this decision lies with the husband. Any termination of pregnancy without the consent of the husband attracts a divorce or thorough beating. Every woman knows her health and to be forced to carry an unwanted baby for nine months is a real violation of the woman's right. According to The Barometer Zimbabwe [2012], through acts of violence, women's and girls' rights to bodily integrity, security of person and right to life are violated.

The maternity mortality of women who are forced to have too many children is shocking. Some women give up their employment because they are forced to surrender their wages to the husband. Some women are denied the chance to further their education and the result is that these women will stay in perpetual poverty and never enjoy marriage and life in general and life expectancy shortened. The women's subordinate status in society increases their vulnerability to domestic violence.

By nature, men say that they are more prone to be promiscuous than women. Which nature are they talking about? If a man suspects his wife to be cheating on him the attack on her is brutal. Men are cheating with impunity. Even the children in the home will never be happy. The only way a man can show love to his children is to love their mother. Domestic violence affects everybody in the home when it is perpetrated. Most learning takes place through seeing. Boys who grow witnessing the father physically abusing their mother and seeing the mother complying with the father's demands will grow to become violent because they think that violence pays. It makes people comply. Domestic violence is forcing children into the streets.

#### ***Effects of domestic violence on children***

In some instances, domestic violence results in divorce or death of the mother of children. The surviving father will not be able to look after the children as when the mother was there. The children will have to fund themselves by working for other people either as cattle keepers or as cheap labour providers. Their education will be affected. Some will join street kids and others will join criminal gangs. In most cases the society will not be willing to assist the children especially in cases where the children are said to have contributed to the death of the mother or father. As if it was their fault, the children will be stigmatise and rejected by the society. Most children have very limited ability to protect themselves and they also play minimum roles in decision making and thus they become the proverbial grass that suffers when two bulls are fighting. Some parents attack their children when they are angered by the other spouse. Coohy (2004) suggests that victims of domestic violence often respond to their being battered by in turn hitting their children. The situation will become dire when the family will be headed by the elder child.

violence is believed to also negatively affect the children. As a matter of fact, children involved may also directly and indirectly suffer because of domestic violence and may develop wayward behaviours. Unborn children may also be at risk of harm since in the mother's womb. The female victims may feel to be powerless in protecting their unborn child. Subsequently, the victim's sense of powerlessness continually hampers the attempts to safeguard the children from the perpetrator. As the children grow up with the exposure to violence at home, many of those children have reflected their dissatisfaction, retaliation as well as self-rebelliousness in terms of emotional and behavioural difficulties. Holden (2003) who found that maternal stress and depression among mothers may severely compromise their emotional energy and the time they had available for their children.

#### ***Unnecessary suffering of victims of domestic violence***

Most victims of domestic violence have low levels of education, are unemployed and one hundred percent dependent on the husbands. After having been beaten and humiliated, the victim of domestic violence end up at the civil courts seeking a protection order. The process is cumbersome .The complainant is given the protection order forms. The protection order form is written in the legal language which is not easily understood by a person with a lower level of education. In most cases it requires the assistance of a lawyer.

Most victims do not afford the services of lawyers due to non availability of funds owing to non employment status. To make the situation more complicated, the protection order form has seventeen pages. The seventeen page form needs to be

photocopied to make four copies. In economics, he who uses a facility must pay for it. Now here we have got a poor and battered woman with no nothing on her except tears on the cheeks. She kneels down to anyone who can offer her a cent. She starts begging in order to get the protection order. To go back home without the protection order, she fears repeated attack by the perpetrator. Why allow this unnecessary suffering of the victims of domestic violence. Some women end up prostituting in order to get the money. What is being portrayed by this situation shows that while the legal framework in Zimbabwe to reduce domestic violence is somewhat firm, the implementation of the legal framework is not robust. There is need for a holistic approach and commitment to dedicate financial resources towards implementation.

### ***Effects of domestic violence on men***

The change in economic independence, control over economy and resources and changing power dynamics is slowly and surely causing the increase in violence against men by women. The change in power dynamics is inevitably disturbing the current or prevailing relationship between women and men. Women are now excited about their situation which is now empowered. Thus, the number of females constituting the majority of victims of domestic violence has now changed following an increase in the number of males who are under siege from females in cases of domestic violence. This is attributed to modernisation which has seen a number of women being gainfully employed rather than being a house wife only.

According to Honey (2010), the above scenario has brought about a power struggle in the family which often leads to domestic violence. At the same time, some men with very traditional beliefs still think they have the right to control women, and that women are not equal to men, while women on the other hand, are vying for power and control.

In an article published in the Herald of 09 April 2019 the Anti- Domestic Violence Council gave an impetus to this latest development when they noted that the number of males who reported cases of domestic violence has been on the increase since 2016. According to the Council, in 2017, alone the figures rose to 2 461 from the previous 1 993 that was tabulated in 2016.

A number of men are withdrawing into the shells. Public appearance is now minimised or reduced to zero. The vengeful wrath of an aggrieved woman will now torment the unfortunate men. Just like men, Women are physically aggressive Dobash & Dobash [2004]. Men suffer in silence since it is widely believed that men are powerful and oppressors of women. For a man, going to report domestic violence to the Police, it is considered unusual and embarrassing.

However, where a man is emotionally abused by the wife, he can end up committing suicide. He is put under numerous emotional, cognitive and mental disorders including self isolation. There will be no more time to relax for the man. If the man is employed, performance will decline as the man's thoughts will always be at home.

### ***The effects of domestic violence in the workplace include:***

- i. Reduced employee productivity;
- ii. Increased absenteeism;
- iii. Replacement, recruitment and training costs when victims are injured or dismissed for poor performance;
- iv. Higher company health expenses;
- v. Decreased employee morale;
- vi. Strained relations among co-workers;
- vii. Potential harm to employees, co-workers and/or customers when violent abusers enter the workplace; and
- viii. Liability costs if someone at the workplace is harmed

The effects of domestic violence are also manifesting by the increase in street kids. The kids are running away from their homes because of domestic violence perpetrated against them or because of the fact that their parents are always engaged in domestic violence.

The increase in commercial sex workers is to some extent as a result of domestic violence. The commercial sex workers are increasing all most every day on the streets and in places where alcohol is consumed especially at night. Some commercial sex workers are leaving their homes because of their abusive partners and some will be facing financial abuse from their partners and they venture into commercial sex work in order to supplement their incomes.

Some single parents are a creation of domestic violence. Parents end up divorcing because of domestic violence. Where domestic violence persists and increases in gravity the victim, will decide that it is rather safe to divorce than to continue staying in an abusive relationship where the health and life will be at risk.

The saddest moments are when Child headed families emerge. This is another serious effect of domestic violence. Parents would be experiencing domestic violence and they end up divorcing, leaving the children to look after them or staying with an incapable parent

### ***Suggestions on how to reduce cases of domestic violence***

A wrong done by a human is always corrected by a human. There is nothing on earth that is done by a human being that cannot be overpowered by the combined effort of people. Domestic violence is now a menace the world over. People need to come together as families and communities in order to fight domestic violence. No single perpetrator of domestic violence should be allowed to do it with impunity no matter what the degree of provocation as togetherness congers domestic violence. Zimbabweans must develop the spirit of love of one another and this will foster peace and destroy domestic violence.

Responses to domestic violence must include the aid and any other available services so as to prevent any further injury and harm to the victim.

Gacaca, the Rwanda's traditional, community-based conflict resolution system was employed and it adjudicated local property crimes and civil disputes although it was controversial in that it did not meet international legal standards but was necessary to respond to the challenges of post-genocide transitional justice Progress of The World's Woman [2008/2009]

In line with the route taken by Rwanda after the 1994 genocide, it sounds prudent for the Government of Zimbabwe to consider involvement of Traditional leaders and the co-opting of cultural values and norms in tackling domestic violence. The African Traditional Culture uses restorative justice to address issues of domestic violence. According to Richard (2010) restorative justice involves a range of informal methods for addressing domestic violence based on dialogue involving victims, offenders, family members and communities. The practice focuses on repairing harm, rather than punishment. The process also promotes healing and rehabilitation of the offender. If the offender is rehabilitated, the victim will be relieved as fears of repeated attacks will be allayed.

Family members stay together but they are not used to be together twenty four hours a day and seven days a week. During the lockdown period, cases of domestic violence rose significantly. Instead of families utilising the opportunity to strengthen family ties, they started fighting. When families are together, they should share whatever is available from love, information, food and educating one another on the importance of unity of purpose in a family. The quality time that the family is supposed to spend is often limited by disputes, arguments as well as quarrels.

Improving communication in the family is very important as any misconception on any issue is dealt with them and then Good communication reduces conflict in the family. Helping victims of domestic violence under the capacity of a neighbour (i.e. community) requires awareness as well as alertness to domestic violence signs. Although many people are vaguely aware of domestic violence when it comes to people that are close to us, neighbours can be of much of help in this particular situation. Neighbours should always be available to save the victim than the victim's relatives.

### **What are treatment options for domestic violence?**

#### ***Share Your Story***

Getting and keeping the victim of domestic violence safe is an essential part of treating domestic abuse. Many legal and mental health professionals who work with victims recommend the development of safety plans, both for home and in the workplace. Such a plan includes encouraging the victim to keep a charged cell phone in his or her possession at all times, maintaining active peace, protective, or restraining orders against the batterer, keeping a copy of the order at all times, along with distributing copies of the order to the victim's supervisor, workplace reception area, and security, as well as to schools and day care providers for children.

It is important for battered men and women to realize that abusers sometimes escalate in their abusiveness when first served with a protective order and to take appropriately heightened safety precautions. Other elements of a safety plan may include the victim changing his or her work site, parking, or work schedule, having an emergency contact person, and establishing danger signals to alert neighbors or co-workers that the victim is in immediate danger.

One well-known approach to treating domestic abuse families is the Duluth Model. It is also called the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) and focuses on women as the victims and men as the perpetrators of intimate partner violence. This treatment model takes the approach of empowering women by providing them information, resources, and support, which significantly decreases the violence in victims' lives over time. It also uses legal resources as a means of keeping women safe and holding males who engage in battering accountable for their actions. Regarding specific treatment for batterers, compliance with multiple counseling sessions may decrease the likelihood that domestic violence perpetrators repeat the behavior, but the Duluth Model has not demonstrated a clear decrease in perpetrator behaviors.

Having professionals provide victims of domestic violence with information about domestic-violence shelters and other housing, financial, and other service supports in the community has been found to greatly decrease the amount of violence that victims of intimate partner abuse experience after leaving the abuser. For couples with whom alcoholism or other excessive alcohol use is an issue, diagnosis of that illness and marital therapy that has alcoholism as a focus has also been found to be effective.

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