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JOURNAL PURPOSE

The purpose of the *Ngenani - Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University Journal of Community Engagement and Societal Transformation Review and Advancement* is to provide a forum for community engagement and outreach.

CONTRIBUTION AND READERSHIP

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JOURNAL SPECIFICATIONS

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The journal is a forum for the discussion of ideas, scholarly opinions and case studies of community outreach and engagement. Communities are both defined in terms of people found in a given locale and defined cohorts, like the children, the youth, the elderly and those living with a disability. The strongest view is that getting to know each community or subcommunity is a function of their deliberate participation in

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PANDEMIC WITHIN A PANDEMIC: GENDERBASED VIOLENCE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN MARONDERA URBAN (2020/2021), MASHONALAND EAST, ZIMBABWE

PRINCE MUZUVA, NOMAGA MPOFU-HAMADZIRIPI AND PROMISE HLUNGWANI¹

Abstract

This article is a pilot study that is part of broader research on gender-based violence (GBV) during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Marondera Urban District. Women in Marondera Urban have been on the receiving end of GBV from time immemorial. However, the problem appears to have increased during the COVID-19-induced lockdown in Marondera from April 2020 to February 2021. Physical, social, sexual and economic abuse were the most common forms of violence in Marondera urban. Using the Broken Windows Theory, this study is premised on the sad reality that GBV continues unabated in the 21st century with the pandemic worsening the situation. This is a qualitative study where eight participants were purposively selected. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the eight participants. The findings indicated that before the COVID-19 pandemic, GBV was already high, however, the situation further deteriorated during the COVID-19-induced lockdowns as couples were confined at home most of the time.

Keywords: *sub-Saharan Africa, violence, pandemic, COVID-19, Broken Windows, development.*

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic is a name given by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on the 11th of February 2020 to the respiratory disease caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV2. It started in

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Wuhan, China, in late 2019 and has since spread worldwide (WHO, 2020). Gender-based violence (GBV) is referred to any harm or suffering that is perpetuated against anyone, regardless of sex, harming the physical, sexual or psychological health, development or identity of the victim (SIDA, 2015). Globally, during the COVID-19 induced lockdown, women were exposed to GBV- than men, and this was exacerbated by limited access to protective services (WHO, 2020). This shows that, generally, women were more likely to be victims of GBV than men across the world. In a document released on 26 March 2020, the WHO underlined that restrictive measures enacted to contain and manage COVID-19. such as isolation, quarantine and social distancing, could worsen the chance of violence against women (*ibid.*). Resultantly, in Sub-Saharan Africa, there was a record surge in GBV during this period (UN WOMEN, 2020). Africa, as a region, was not spared as it has been revealed that in developing countries, other forms of violence, such as arranged and forced marriages, have increased, along with an aggravation of marital violence, paralleling the resurgence and increased frequency of practices such as female genital mutilation (Grown, 2020).

Africa having many developing countries explains a general picture of GBV fuelled by the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe, GBV- was already an issue of concern. A survey by the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT) indicated that by 2019, 39.4% of women aged 15-49 had experienced violence, with 11% having experienced sexual violence, (ZIMSTAT, 2019). As the country introduced strict lockdowns, most stakeholders dealing with GBV recorded a 60% increase in GBV-related calls in comparison with the pre-lockdown period (OCHA, 2020). The Musasa Project hotline recorded a marked increase of 764 cases of GBV against an average of 550 cases a month before COVID-19 (Sachiti, 2020). It is of paramount importance to observe that of the total cases reported, about 94% were women victims (OCHA, 2020). This explains the extent to which women have been victims of GBV during the period under review.

Psychological/emotional, physical, economic and sexual violence are four of most frequently reported forms of violence (*ibid.*). This is in

tandem with evidence from the East and Southern Africa Region (ESAR) where a UN Women study found that intimate partner violence against women and girls is one of the forms of violence that increased sharply during the COVID-19 period (UN Women, 2020). This points to a consensus that women suffered the most during the period in Sub-Saharan Africa too. However, due to socio-economic disparities, their experiences cannot be homogenous, hence this study sought to understand the experiences of women in the Marondera Urban District of Zimbabwe in the face of GBV during the COVID-19 period. Further, measures put in place to contain the spread of COVID19, such as working from home, quarantines and restricted movement increased the risks of domestic violence (*ibid.*). This phenomenon is possibly explained by the fact that couples had to spend longer times together than before.

The drivers of GBV during the COVID-19 period exacerbated already existing ones such as patriarchy, socio-cultural religious practices, and the acceptance of violence as a mode of social interaction. One hundred and fifty-seven papers have been published on gender and COVID-19 in low- and middle-income countries so far (McDougal *et al.*, 2020). Of these papers, 41% (65) are from China, and only 14 articles are from Sub-Saharan Africa, limiting the literature base towards the understanding of COVID-19 and GBV in Marondera. Most peer-reviewed publications focus on health and medical aspects, with little attention on socio-economic dimensions, particularly GBV, a pandemic in a pandemic, a gap filled by this study. The study was guided by the following main research question: What are the insights on incidences of GBV in Marondera Urban during the lockdown period?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

THE BROKEN WINDOWS THEORY

This study applies the Broken Windows Theory to understand the GBV experiences of women in the Marondera Urban District during the COVID-19 lockdown period. The Broken Windows Theory is an approach developed to help understand and analyse the drivers of criminal activities (Childress, 2016). The theory was first coined by Kelling and Wilson (1982) and is based on the assumption that disorder

and crime are linked in a developmental sequence. To this end, disorder of extended periods of stay at home, limited travel and job losses, among other stresses brought about by COVID-19, can be linked to GBV crimes which have a huge impact on the development trajectory of the nation at large and Marondera Urban in particular. The theory further explains that vandalism on a window can occur anywhere once the sense of mutual regard and the obligations of civility are lowered by actions that seem to signal a lack of common concern to ensure conformity (Kelling and Catherine, 1997). This translates to the notion that GBV continued unabated during the COVID-19 lockdown period and women were victims daily. The theory is relevant in explaining the GBV experiences of women in Marondera Urban during the COVID-19 period under review, given that cases were increasing every day just like what happens when a window is left broken and no holistic action is taken to correct the anomaly.

The theory is premised on the understanding that if a window on a building has cracks and is left unrepaired, the rest of the windows will soon be broken. Since the unrepaired window is a signal that no one cares and so breaking more windows will not result in any official sanction. This can be contextualised to GBV criminal activities, where the perpetrators of violence commit the crimes against women due to factors such as culture, religion, patriarchy and poverty cases are not reported or not properly handled, hence motivating the perpetrator to go for the next victim (UN WOMEN, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The interpretivism paradigm was adopted and it provided the participants with room to tell their stories from their experiences about GBV against women during the COVID-19-induced lockdowns. The study was an exploratory case study. The design enabled the researchers to conduct a critical analysis of the GBV experiences of women in the Marondera Urban District in the face of COVID-19 lockdowns. The target population was estimated to be around 25 000, the estimated number of women in Marondera Urban during that time. (ZIMSTAT, 2012). The study used the purposive sampling technique. A sample of (eight) 8 participants was selected to represent the population of Marondera and, since this was a pilot study to the actual future research,

the sample was big enough to cover the town. Face-to-face interviews were used to collect data and the local Shona language was used and translated into English on the presentation of the data.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

Given that the participants were from different backgrounds, families and societies, they had different experiences of violence from the perpetrators. The demographic distribution of the participants exposed how GBV has been experienced differently. The variables accounting for the different experiences include age, levels of education and employment status, among other factors. This contributed to the disparities in the lived experiences of victims of violence during the period under review. Table 1 shows the participants' demographic distribution presentation.

AGE GROUPS OF PARTICIPANTS

Table 1: Age groups of participants

Age	Number
29 and below	2
30-39	2
40-49	2
50 and above	2

The data shows that all the groups were equally represented. There was need to include all age groups since GBV goes beyond age limits. Experiences and perspectives of various age groups, as far as GBV was critical in explaining the phenomenon in Marondera Urban District.

There was a balance in terms of representation of women participants employed and unemployed. Out of the eight participants, four were formally employed and four were unemployed. This selection was necessitated by the need to gather the experiences of these two groups of women. The statistics indicate that women are now well represented in the mainstream economy as their participation has improved.

Table 2: Participants' levels of education

Level of education	Number
Tertiary	2
Secondary	2
Primary	2
Non-formal	2

Table 2 indicates that there were eight participants in the study and all of them attained some form of education. There were four categories, namely tertiary, secondary, primary and non-formal with equal representation of two participants per each category. This enabled the researchers to widen their nets towards ensuring that the experiences of women with various education statuses were captured as they form the centre of the scope of this study.

INSIGHTS ON INCIDENCES OF GBV IN MARONDERA

Before COVID-19, women in Marondera were exposed to GBV, a situation worsened during the lockdowns. Various strategies were employed to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. Below are insights from the participants.

MANIFESTATIONS OF GBV IN MARONDERA URBAN DURING LOCKDOWNS.

ECONOMIC VIOLENCE

Economic incapacitation was pointed out by most participants as the major reason they were being abused economically by spouses. It was pointed out that in most cases women were economically dependent on spouses who, during in this period, became jobless and unable to provide for them as usual. One of the participants had this to say,

—Since the start of the lockdown, my husband stopped giving me money for domestic use, saying he is the best person to do budgets in the family and will do the shopping, a situation that is persisting up to now. I am

really worried about this development because he used to give me money and I don't know where he thinks I am now getting the money.¶

From the above excerpt the statement, *—I am really worried about this development because he used to give me money and I don't know where he thinks I am now getting the money¶* , indicates that participants were being economically deprived, particularly money wise. This could have been a consequence of low levels of education which resulted in unemployment of the participants and the closure of the informal sector, hence the depending on their husband's salaries. This is in line with OCHA (2020) which argued that economic violence is one of the most common forms of GBV recorded during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The Broken Windows Theory is applicable in this case given that just like when a window is left unattended, further damage will happen. When the husband began keeping the money to himself, he was not sanctioned for his behaviour, prompting him to continue with this behaviour even after the COVID lockdown period.

Almost all participants were in support of the comment above, with another participant commenting that,

—I learned the hard way, that as a woman, I should work on my own because my husband is in the informal sector and I thought all was well. During the lockdown period, the informal sector was immediately closed which made my spouse panic and took all the savings into his pocket and became very stingy. Despite that, I knew he was having money he could not give to me as usual and I suffered with children because we were no longer having access to the usual necessities¶ .

The above comment points to the fact that, generally, women were caught unaware, especially those who were economically dependent on spouses as the behaviour of the spouses changed due to the prevailing circumstances. The sudden turn of events resulting in a short supply of funds to the spouse as usual could also be linked to issues such as emotional violence, where the breadwinner, in most cases being the husband, would use harsh words to downplay the requests of the spouse.

However, there was one divergent view on this theme where one of the participants said,

—I am gainfully employed and my salary was coming with some additions during the lockdowns, so I didn't have any problem in that regard, but my problem was with my husband's family which expected a normal supply of groceries and money yet my husband was a taxi driver and his livelihood was cut off. We would argue with the spouse succumbing to his relatives' pressure and trying to force me to use my savings to keep his family which I could not.¶

The above excerpt indicates that there were different impacts of COVID-19 on those employed and those unemployed. However, this did not change GBV as one thing or something would lead to arguments resulting in physical, sexual or emotional violence. In this case, the welfare of the husband's family became the bone of *contention.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Physical violence relates to physical force to injure, abuse, damage or destroy. In this context, physical violence is violence perpetrated against women during the period under review. Physical violence results in injury, psychological harm or death (UN Women, 2020). Physical violence is directly linked to other forms of violence as after the physical violence, the victim or the perpetrator is likely to suffer emotional and psychological stress, which is another form of violence. Also, sexual violence is highly likely following physical violence or it can be the cause of physical violence when sex is denied among intimate partners. Some partners tend to punish each other economically as a way of protesting physical violence and, in some instances, such economic behaviour can instigate physical violence. This explanation is evidence of the notion that physical violence cannot be separated from most other forms of violence. Participants claimed that physical violence was the order of the day during the lockdown period. The Broken Windows Theory is relevant in this study as it is based on the assumption that disorder and crime are linked in a developmental sequence. The disorder created by COVID-19 resulted in crimes such as GBV in the form of physical violence and eventually affecting development. One of the participants stated,

—I realised that I didn't know him well, because since we started staying together, he never laid a hand on me but this time I learned the hard way

when I was beaten. Since we got married two years ago, everyone was busy at work, but because of spending time together, he exposed his true colours.¶

From the above excerpt the statement that *—but because of spending time together, it exposed his true colours*” indicates that some partners stayed for a long time together without realising the violent tendencies of the other which was exposed when partners were now spending more time together due to COVID-19 restrictions. This evidence is also shared in other sources where partners end up involved in physical violence because of spending a lot of time together. For example, a study by UN Women in 2020 indicated that stay-at-home and workfrom-home arrangements fuelled GBV as partners were now spending more time together.

All the participants agreed with the above participant on the issue of physical violence. However, the majority were of the view that physical violence was not because of COVID-19 but was, rather, worsened by the prevailing conditions during this period as women have been victims of GBV since time immemorial. One of the participants commented,

—I can confirm that during this period in Marondera, as women in general, we suffered a lot of physical violence and particularly myself. Sometimes I got assaulted for very trivial issues such as being accused of too much use of my phone instead of giving him attention, yet we were staying together from dawn to sunset, making it difficult to always be paying attention to him. However, what I want to emphasize here is that, yes, during this period, I saw increased violence against myself and others but this violence was not new and COVID-19 cannot be solely blamed for this predicament as physical violence against women can be traced back to many years ago.¶

The above comment shows that despite the effects of COVID-19 in fuelling physical violence among women in Marondera, physical abuse was not a new thing as they have been abused for a long time and this has become another feature of discordant marriages. This resonates well with the Broken Windows Theory applied in this study which suggests that when a cracked window is left unattended, there is the likelihood that the crack will expand, and other windows may crack.

EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE

Participants indicated that they experienced a lot during the lockdowns as far as GBV is concerned. They all agreed that emotional abuse was the order of the day as violent perpetrators used hurtful language and shouting at women as a way of expressing their frustrations and the stress brought on by the pandemic restrictions. It is key to observe that emotional abuse, in most cases, is related to other forms of violence such as physical violence and sexual violence. This comes with the understanding that when one is a victim of physical violence, this can eventually lead to the emotional instability of the victim as recovering from the effects and fear of future violence can be hounding the victim. In the context of this study, emotional violence was viewed from a perspective where women in Marondera Urban experienced it during the period of the COVID-19 lockdown. One of the participants indicated that,

—He would scold me time and again. Had he verbally abused only me, it was going to be better but he would include my mother in the insults, yet she had nothing to do with our differences. I would not sleep as I was reminded the whole night that it was a horrible mistake to marry a woman who can only rely on selling vegetables on a small table yet those working in government were earning monthly salaries despite the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. I would cry every day.¶

Further to the above comment, another participant weighed in when she indicated that she was emotionally suffering during this period as she was a victim of physical violence accompanied by further threats of violence and divorce. This explains the interplay and linkages amongst the forms of violence experienced by women in Marondera Urban during this period. One of the participants had this to say,

—Just for asking about money for food, I used to be assaulted physically with open hands and clenched fists all over the body, accompanied by emotionally impacting words like he would say I am just waiting for COVID-19 to end, and I am going to divorce you. These threats affected me emotionally to the extent that I ended up failing to fulfil all my obligations like offering conjugal rights which worsened the situation¶ .

Consequently, as indicated, emotional violence was rampant as women were blamed for being a liability to their spouses. This could have been

a trigger for some of the physical violence experienced by women. It is also noted that the women who were exposed to this gender-based violence could not answer back to these emotional assaults, leaving them between a rock and a hard place. This is in line with the Broken Windows Theory being employed in this study. The theory assumes that broken windows, likened to violence in this case, influence more breaking which is more violence in the context under study. In line with the assumptions of this theory preventing the breaking of the windows before the situation goes out of hand becomes critical, translating into the need to prevent all avenues that cause any form of GBV as it is likely to degenerate into multiple cases of violence which becomes difficult to control to the detriment of the community at large and women in particular. UN Women, (2020) in line with the above, argued that generally, emotional abuse was perpetuated by frustrations brought about by lost livelihoods and was common during the lockdowns.

GBV COPING STRATEGIES

As lockdowns were extended, there was more exposure to violence for most of the women in Marondera as explained by the participants. To this end, women ended up devising survival strategies to mitigate the impact of the GBV that was being perpetrated against them. The Broken Windows Theory assumes that the breaking of the windows continues when perpetrators have been left free. This then emphasises the need to address the plight of GBV victims as more violence is likely to take place. Indeed, punitive, deterrent and holistic measures are critical in ensuring GBV against women is avoided in the future. One of the participants said,

—The abuse was too much. At one time, I told him that I wanted to visit my mother who stays in Mutare because she is terminally sick. I was given a travelling letter by the police. I then lied to him that I had contracted the virus and hence could not come back early. This helped me in healing.¶

The above excerpt “*I lied to him that my mother was critically ill*” shows how innovative the women of Marondera ended up being in trying to ensure that they escaped from the violence that was being perpetrated against them. This strategy was one of the best since staying away

reduced daily confrontations but, still to some extent, the extended stay away perpetuated psychological stress because of being homesick.

In agreement with the above strategy, another participant said that she survived economic violence by engaging in transactional sexual encounters as a way of raising funds. However, it can be noted that in return in most cases, this was also the cause of physical violence when the transaction went wrong. Interestingly, married women were also engaging in this illicit strategy.

—I survived economic deprivation by my husband through engaging in prostitution. I can call it prostitution but it was transactional sex, where I was doing it for the sole purpose of getting money and meeting the daily needs which my husband was no longer providing. This method worked wonders for me and I don't regret it although I make sure that my husband does not know the issue because I don't want my marriage to collapse.¶

The above excerpt indicates how some women ended up engaging in unorthodox acts to survive. Despite this being a solution in the circumstances, it was a risky strategy as it exposed the spouse to the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases and the risk of physical violence and divorce.

Some women resorted to borrowing as a survival strategy to supplement their income through outsourcing from other colleagues who were better off. Such initiatives were meant to save families from the possibility of starvation. However, this behaviour is inseparable from psychological and emotional dissonance which came because of the COVID-19 pandemic induced lockdowns. One of the participants intimated,

—For me to survive through this difficult time, I ended up adopting the borrow-Peter-to-pay-John style where I could borrow from another person so that I could pay the other because I had no savings at all. It worked so much but the only challenge was that the debts continued with me months after the relaxation of the lockdown which had a huge negative bearing on my social life.¶

From the above comment, it is evident that the strategy worked for some of the women in Marondera Urban. However, the challenge with this

strategy is that when debts continue to accumulate one can be trapped in a debt cycle. This comes with the understanding that some women ended up being emotionally abused, and sometimes physically abused, due to over-borrowing and failing to service debts in time, creating further altercations in the family.

A different approach was raised by one of the participants who was sure that her strategy of fighting back as she was being assaulted was a game-changer in stopping the physical violence tendencies which were increasing every day. She disclosed,

—When the physical violence was increasing on me during this period, I devised a way of survival since I realised that he could kill me. One day I fought him back with strong intent, although I didn't cause grievous bodily harm. I assaulted him enough to the extent that he surrendered, and from that incident, he no longer attempted such moves.¶

The above comment points to the picture that during this time, women were being abused to the extent of employing desperate measures to save themselves from brutal physical violence. While it is commonly upheld that women are weak and are always on the receiving end of physical abuse from men, their abuse during the COVID-19 period changed the narrative as some women began to defend themselves. This strategy was effective in deterring some violent partners constantly abusing their spouses. However, the challenge with this approach is that it further stretches the relationship, which is not ideal for a healthy family setup as children can be directly affected by the fights.

CONCLUSION

The lockdown that was imposed to curtail the spread of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe was a necessary evil, given that in as much as it was necessary medically, socially and economically, it brought misery to women. This can be evidenced by the drastic increase in gender-based violence cases, as partners were staying together for longer periods than before. The major forms of violence experienced by the participants included physical, emotional, economic and sexual violence. Participants ended up employing survival strategies which worked to some extent, but came with some drawbacks. State institutions with the

mandate of protecting citizens from these perpetrators of violence must be capacitated enough to deal with the GBV pandemic holistically.

Physical violence is the major form of violence that manifested in Marondera Urban. Women were exposed to physical abuse by their partners for various reasons, ranging from very trivial to mere abuse of women just to demonstrate masculine power. Physical violence is hugely interlinked with other forms of violence such as sexual, emotional and economic violence. Physical violence tends to ignite these other forms of violence and, at times, violence is a result of the triggers emanating from the environment or circumstances being experienced. In this study, it is argued that the lockdown restrictions accompanied by the storm and stress of boredom, and inadequate resources complicated relations in the families.

Sexual violence was common among intimate partners during the period of COVID-19 lockdowns in Marondera Urban. On the receiving end in most cases were women, who were often forcibly raped by their partners. Staying together for a long time, coupled with frustrations from prevailing socio-economic challenges during that time, contributed to the wayward behaviour exhibited as partners were using sex as punishment for failing to provide for the family, among other contributing factors.

Emotional violence was rampant during the period of COVID-19 in Marondera Urban as fear of the unknown and stress of thinking about how to provide for the family were weighing on the emotional state of the people. Further to the above, emotional violence was influenced by physical violence, common during the time.

There is an interlink between and among the various forms of violence which were perpetrated against women in Marondera Urban. There is a relationship between physical violence, emotional violence, economic violence and sexual violence which is very difficult to separate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that in times of similar disaster situations and other cases of emergencies, women should be treated differently compared to their male counterparts, particularly in the economic sphere. This comes with the understanding that women are naturally weak and unable to engage in difficult ways of sourcing funds, hence suffering more compared to the males. Further, there is need to offer social grants specifically towards alleviating women economically in situations like this.

Governments must have a proactive approach towards effects of disaster situations so that funds and other resources such as food and other amenities are made available and easily accessible to avoid desperate situations which breed all forms of violence. Women should compete for available economic opportunities so that they are not solely and economically dependent on their male counterparts for sustenance as that over-dependence results in them being exposed to GBV.

People should employ alternative dispute resolution methods amid disasters. This approach is essential given that violent approaches are destructive physically, mentally and socially. Development is also affected when partners are employing violent ways of solving disputes as it is characterised by sickness, poverty or even death.

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