'Tragedy within the new normal': Catechizing the surge in intimate partner violence in Zimbabwe during the Covid 19 pandemic. Is home a safe haven?

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ARTICLE HISTORY

ABSTRACT

This paper explores dynamics surrounding the Covid 19 pandemic which triggered a surge in cases of intimate partner violence. In the wake of the Covid 19 pandemic, Zimbabwe enacted a national lockdown and various protocols to contain the spread of the lethal virus. The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic was felt by many as the national lockdowns embroiled people's lives socially and economically. Using a descriptive interpretive design, the study reviewed reports on gender-based violence from the media and organisations dealing with gender-based violence pre and during the Covid 19 pandemic to gather data. The paper examines violence in intimate relationships from an intersectional feminist perspective which views gender-based violence as twofold and caused by patriarchy together with other repressive factors. The study revealed that economic challenges, limited access to support services and prolonged enclosure at home experienced during the Covid 19 pandemic were key factors fuelling relational violence amongst intimate partners. Therefore, the paper proposes vigorous campaign strategies against intimate partner violence and an increase in socio-economic support services for citizens during the Covid 19 pandemic to curtail intimate partner violence.

Key terms: gender-based violence, intimate partner violence, Covid 19 pandemic, lockdown, Zimbabwe

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Introduction and background

Zimbabwe recorded a spike in the pattern of cases of gender-based violence which coincided with the plague of the Covid 19 pandemic worldwide. Zimbabwe reported its first Covid 19 case in March 2020 which was followed by a national lockdown as the government, in line with the recommendations from the World Health Organisation sought to contain the surge of the novel virus (Nyabunze and Siavhundu, 2020). The Covid 19 protocols affected business operations, educational institutions and movement of people among other things. The impact of the Covid 19 pandemic was felt in almost each and every aspect of life including issues of human rights and gender relations. Prior to the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic, gender-based violence was a persistent issue in Zimbabwe with 39.4% women aged 15-49 having experienced violence since the age of 15 by 2019 (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2019). The Covid 19 pandemic created ideal conditions which fuelled rampant incidents of various forms of gender-based violence. According to the SAFE (2020) analysis on gender-based violence from March to May 2020, intimate partner violence has been identified as one of the frequently reported forms of gender-based violence with intimate partners representing 69.5% of identifiable perpetrators. Organisations offering gender-based violence services witnessed a sharp increase in reported cases of gender-based violence compared to the pre-Covid 19 pandemic era with Musasa declaring that 94% of the calls they received on their hotline were from women (OCHA, 2020a). At the peak of cases recorded by Musasa by October 2020 is intimate partner violence which was at 90% (OCHA, 2020a) which is a concern for this study. This pattern substantiates findings from East and Southern Africa where intimate partner violence against women and girls rocketed during the Covid 19 pandemic (UN Women 2020). OCHA (2020b) further reports that in December 2020, gender-based violence cases recorded by the National GBV Hotline increased by 175% compared to cases reported in December 2019. These figures reflect an underlying relational crisis in Zimbabwe which needs to be catechized and addressed. While gender-based violence is two-fold, women, due to different economic, social and cultural factors and long held stereotypical beliefs, are the worst affected victims of intimate partner violence. With these background factors in mind, this study interrogates how dynamics of the Covid 19 pandemic stirred relational violence in Zimbabwe.

Unpacking intimate partner violence

Intimate partner violence is a form of gender-based violence which is prevalent in different nations and communities in the world. It is a pervasive and eminent form of violence where mostly women are victims (WHO, 2013). Intimate partner violence is viewed as a pattern of abusive and imposed behavior which include physical, sexual, and psychological attacks as well as economic coercion that adults or adolescents use against their intimate partners (Julia, Watts & Hargreaves, 2011). Intimate partner violence can also be viewed as both physical and psychological violence amongst romantic or intimate partners (Modi, Palmer & Armstrong, 2014). It is crystal clear that intimate partner violence is a combination of emotional, psychological, economic and physical abuse inflicted or perpetrated by people within an intimate relationship. The United Nations Women (UNW, 2018) declares that intimate partner violence remains a global challenge prevalent in both developed and underdeveloped nations. Responding to dire situation of gender-based violence during the Covid 19 pandemic, the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres appealed for a "cease fire" to avert the "horrific global surge" in intimate partner violence. (United Nations, 2020)

Intimate partner violence has attracted the attention of individual researchers, local and international civic and human rights organisations. In 2010, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2010) reported that 13%-61% people have experienced physical violence, 4%-49% have been exposed to severe physical violence, 6%-59% have experienced sexual violence while 20%-75% have once been subjected to an emotionally abusing act; all these have been from an intimate partner. While intimate partner violence cuts across all genders, women are the most affected. About 36% of women and 29% of men globally have experienced intimate partner violence (Bogat, Levendosky & Garcia, 2016). Intimate partner violence is an offensive practice which violates individual rights and can give rise to adverse short and long term health conditions. Intimate partner violence can erode one's confidence and self-esteem thereby creating a negative perception of one's self. It can also affect intra and inter personal social relations among people. Researchers have noted that intimate partner violence tends to escalate during pandemics, for example, during the HIV and Ebola pandemics (Campbell, 2020, Singh & Mittal, 2020). The Covid 19 pandemic created various socio-economic conditions which triggered and exacerbated the frequency and intensity of intimate partner violence in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe declared Covid 19 a national emergency and enacted a phased national lockdown in 30 March

2020. The lockdown came with travel restrictions, banning of huge gatherings, closure of borders for non-essential travel as well as closure of entertainment facilities (Nyabunze & Siavhundu, 2020). Only businesses classified as essential were allowed to operate(i.e agriculture, health, security) during the tighter levels of lockdown and people were encouraged to stay indoors unless in search for essentials (Nyabunze & Siavhundu, 2020). These Covid 19 pandemic protocols gazetted in Zimbabwe and the world over to curb the spread of the novel virus, created a volatile environment which propagated potential abuse amongst intimate partners. While some of the causes of intimate partner violence are known, there is need for an exploration and critical analysis of the nexus between the dynamics surrounding the Covid 19 pandemic and the surge in intimate partner violence, which is a prevalent form of gender-based violence in the wake of the pandemic in Zimbabwe. The researcher posits that in Zimbabwe, not so many studies have examined intimate partner violence as a profound crisis within the new normal.

Methodology and theoretical framework

The study utilised a qualitative approach in disentangling the nature and extent of intimate partner violence in Zimbabwe following a descriptive interpretive design. This design was preferred for its emphasis on understanding phenomena in their own right through exploratory questions (Robert and Timulak, 2005). Documents such as media reports and records from organisations dealing with gender-based violence as well as government communiqués were reviewed to generate data. These sources of data provided an insight on the national statistics and trends of intimate partner violence pre and during the Covid pandemic in Zimbabwe. A meaning-based approach was employed to analyze data according to emerging themes. The study period is from the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic in Zimbabwe (March 2020) to July 2021.

The study explored intimate partner violence from an intersectional feminist perspective, which is a multidimensional approach that assumes that the symmetric relationship between patriarchy and other identity makers (race, gender, sexuality) play a complimentary role to breed violence in relationships (Narayan, 2000, Dutton, 2006). For Collin (2000), using this approach to examine violence in relationships creates an anti-oppression perception leading to social justice. More so, in Zimbabwe gender based violence "thrives on societal and cultural practices that accept the domination of women by men…, intimate partner violence is the most common and is fuelled by practices entrenched

in patriarchal societal relations." (ZIMRIGHTS, 2020: p33). This motivated the study to interrogate a plethora of complex factors triggering a surge in intimate partner violence during the Covid 19 pandemic in Zimbabwe. The intersectional feminist approach also influenced the proposed assorted intervention strategies to avert relational violence during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Covid 19 induced causes of Intimate Partner Violence in Zimbabwe

The surge in intimate partner violence cases amidst the Covid 19 pandemic was not just by sheer coincidence but a product of enacted protocols implemented to contain the lethal virus and other pre-existing factors. From the standpoint of intersectional feminists, this paper argues that intimate partner violence is twofold and patriarchy, alongside other repressive factors (Dutton, 2006) caused an upsurge in intimate partner violence witnessed during the Covid 19 pandemic. The following are some of the emerging issues associated with the spike in intimate partner violence in Zimbabwe exacerbated by the Covid 19 pandemic:

Economic challenges

The Covid-19 induced restrictions and lockdowns reduced employment and income-generating opportunities for the majority of Zimbabweans. This in turn increased the risk of relational conflicts in households as families struggled to make ends meet. Lamenting the adverse economic effects of the Covid 19 pandemic, the director of the Zimbabwe Gender Commission indicated that most cases of gender-based violence were linked to depletion of income which could not be replenished as most companies struggled to pay employees (Nkwe, 2020). Some breadwinners succumbed to Covid-19 induced socio-economic pressure in the diaspora and returned home without alternative income generating strategies. As revealed by Buttell & Carney (2009) and First, First & Houston (2017), the economic challenges caused by disasters such as pandemics, tend to increase both frequency and intensity of intimate partner violence. In Zimbabwe, unemployment became widespread during the Covid 19 pandemic as some people lost their jobs due to the Covid 19 lockdown restrictions (Rapid Poverty, Income, Consumption and Expenditure Surveys (PICES), 2020). Amidst the fight against the virus, Zimbabwe swiftly recorded a surge in intimate partner violence cases as families struggled to deal with the economic dilemma inflicted by the pandemic. Sourcing and provision of basic needs became a headache with the dwindling of sources of income. A study conducted by Mackworth-Young et al (2020) in three provinces in Zimbabwe

discovered that some people struggled to get the staple food and other basic needs during the first national lockdown. As such, biting economic and financial conditions in various households during the Covid 19 lockdowns propagated frustration and annoyance to many people especially the male bread winners which stimulated intimate partner violence. Mittal & Singh (2020) intone that loss of income breed feelings of emasculation and guilty of failing to provide for the family amongst men which fuel relational violence. Thus economic insecurity became a determinant which triggered intimate partner violence.

Those surviving on a hand to mouth basis also had their fair share of the economic quagmire as the Covid 19 lockdown protocols confined them to their homes thereby crippling vending and other income generating activities. The attempt to contain the spread of Covid 19 severely impacted many Zimbabweans who were making a living through the informal sector (Institute of Development Studies, 2020). The situation was further worsened by closure of borders which eroded income opportunities for informal cross border traders, over 65% of whom are estimated to be women (Bouet, Pace & Glauber, 2018). Women appear to be more economically disempowered by the dynamics of the Covid 19 pandemic as business sectors which were severely crippled by the lockdown restrictions were dominated by women. These were mainly cross border trade and vending among others (Labour and Economic Development Research Institute of Zimbabwe (LERDRIZ), 2017). On the other hand, areas such as agriculture and mining which were male dominated were exempted from stringent Covid 19 lockdown restrictions. This disparity financially privileged men over women which created a leeway for economic and social bulling and abuse. Women had to endure the suffering in order to appease and protect the "hand that feeds" to ensure survival during the hard times. Arthur & Clark (2009) assert that economic dependence upon men by women during pandemics was a major trigger of intimate-partner violence. Most women were economically disempowered which made them vulnerable to gender-based violence. This is substantiated by rising incidents of intimate partner violence during the Covid 19 pandemic in Zimbabwe.

Poor Stress Management

People experience stress for different reasons. However, the unsettling impact of change, feeling threatened by an outside force as well as failure of personal control are critical factors that breed stress (Mendonca, 2008). The complications associated with the Covid 19 pandemic undoubtedly triggered and in some

instances increased stress levels amongst the Zimbabwean population. People were overwhelmed by the raging catastrophe and struggled to adjust to the "new normal'. The CARE Rapid Response Gender Analysis in five provinces in Zimbabwe in April (2020) noted that there were indications of rising cases of stress due to disruption of livelihoods which affected both the urban and rural population. Loss of jobs, restricted movement and other Covid 19 restrictions during the national lockdown stimulated and intensified stress echelons amongst individuals. Such unsettling socio-economic conditions called for robust stress management practices amongst intimate partners and families in general. Pawelek & Jeanise (2004) emphasise that people cannot avoid stress but learning to manage and develop effective skills to cope with stressful events and situations are of paramount importance. However, many people were caught off-guard by the raging virus and were plunged into mentally and emotionally strenuous environments as they grappled to cope with the pandemic situation as well as adhere to the preventive measures put forward by the health department. With poor stress management measures in place, the plight of women in various households worsened as intimate partners ventured into gender-based violence. Kobrosly & Van (2010) argue that uncontrolled stress can manifest through violent and harsh treatment of others. High levels of stress became one of the driving forces intensifying intimate partner violence recorded and experienced during the Covid 19 pandemic. Bhalotra etal (2019) reported that the growth of unemployment amongst males was connected with an increase in interpersonal violence against women. While it is advised to share problems, some people prefer outdoor activities to ease stress. Most of these areas such as churches, parks and movie houses were a no go area during the intense levels of the Covid 19 pandemic lockdown. Thus as people harbored depression, trivial misunderstandings could easily escalate into a full blown conflict where intimate partners subjected each other to either physical or emotional abuse.

Intense anxiety

The Covid 19 pandemic stirred immense anxiety amongst people as they struggled to cope with the various protocols to contain the surge of the virus. Salari et al (2020) argue that the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic, as a global crisis aggravated, anxiety globally culminating to mental health disorders. Fear of the unknown and uncertainty engulfed people as the future looked bleak due to the novel virus. While Swift, Cyhlarova, Goldie & O'Sullivan (2014), acknowledge that anxiety is a natural human state which is vital in human life,

too much anxiety is a threat to life. This may deny people the ability to find inner peace through mental and emotional wellbeing. The Covid 19 pandemic is a precarious source of intense anxiety as it is a unique and unexplored virus with a rapid transmission and massive mortality rate (Barnejee, 2020). Many people are victims of life threatening anxiety because they are unsettled by the uncertainty of their jobs and business security (Smith, 2013).

Another possible source of anxiety during the pandemic was the fear of being caught on the wrong side of the law. Breaching the Covid 19 restrictions could attract heavy penalties and clashes with law enforcement agents. Some individuals dreaded contracting the virus, being sick and or dying and being labeled by others (Hall, Hall& Champman, 2020). Since intense anxiety is being linked to mental disorders, it becomes a threat to relationships. It rears frustration, irritation and bitterness which may initiate or pave way for the emergence of many relational misunderstandings during the Covid 19 pandemic. The end product is strained relations which culminate into violent eruptions targeted towards intimate partners. As such, cases of intimate partner violence in Zimbabwe soared as people experienced and reacted to various psychological constraints emanating from the detrimental effects of Covid 19 pandemic induced anxiety.

Limited access to support services

The human movement restrictions imposed to curtail the spread of the Covid 19 virus were a major blow and setback to easy access to support services in cases of exposure to violence by an intimate partner. CARE International (2020) reported that access to gender-based violence facilities became more challenging in Zimbabwe during Covid 19 conditions. JohnBosco & Ggoobi, (2020) observe that disruption of protective structures which support people during the Covid 19 pandemic exacerbated violence. JohnBosco & Ggoobi (2020) further highlight that the pandemic made it quite difficult for women to seek help as government and non-governmental organisations had their resources strained to meet the needs of all the victims of abuse. Moreover, the restrictions largely minimized contact between the victims of intimate partner violence and sources of help. Similar researches on social impacts of pandemics discovered that violence against women and girls increased during the Ebola outbreak in West Africa (Yasmin, 2016). Ebola was an almost equally devastating pandemic whose impact was similar to what was witnessed due to COVID 19. In Zimbabwe, there are several support services offered by the police, government organisations as

well as non-governmental organisations to victims and survivors of gender-based violence. Victims of intimate partner violence can physically visit these institutions to report abuse but these organisations became inaccessible due to travel restrictions. OCHA (2020b) reports that reduced public transport availability is a big challenge for victims of gender-based violence in both urban and rural areas to access timely multi sectorial services. Some of these centers are found in the central business district in urban areas and entrance to the central business center during the intensified national lockdowns was a mammoth task which required a process of official clearance. This on its own was a demotivating factor for the abused person. Hence some cases of intimate partner violence were not reported thereby multiplying the chances of continued abuse of women at home without any fear of being reprimanded on the part of men. While the police stations were available in most locations in urban areas, not everyone had easy access to the police, some still needed to board public transport to reach the nearest police station. Thus the situation was inconvenient for reporting intimate partner violence for some people who faced abuse.

Prolonged enclosure at home

Many people got to experience negative effects of spending more time enclosed with their families and intimate partners during the Covid 19 pandemic as they adhered to national lockdown protocols. For some women and men, this elongated time with family was felt as a curse whose effect manifested in the form of intimate partner violence. According to Magezi & Manzanga (2020), the national lockdown in Zimbabwe prompted a situation whereby women and their already abusive partners were locked together for a long time under one roof. The lockdown thus triggered intense violence from habitual abusers and sometimes created an opportunity for potential abusers to indulge in intimate partner violence. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP (2020) notes that the national lockdowns permitted prior negative social norms and gender inequalities coupled with restricted movement of abusive partners which led to an increase in gender-based violence during the pandemic. As such, the prolonged stay together during the national lockdown created a surge in the cases of gender-based violence (Mutongwiza, 2020).

The other critical factor arising from spending more time with family or partners is a high risk of relational conflicts. The Executive Director for UN Women described confinement at home during the Covid 19 lockdowns as "a

perfect storm for controlling, violent behavior behind closed doors" (UN News, 2020). Blood (2015) acknowledges that conflicts are inevitable within a family but emphasize that to achieve relative peace, controlling and managing conflict as it erupts is essential to effective conflict resolution. Thus there is necessity for a strong ability to maintain cordial relations and implementation of peaceful means of conflict resolution during such moments. However, some partners have not been successfully socialized to amicable conflict resolution strategies hence the national lockdown became a recipe for disaster and fuelled various forms of violence against women. In the absence of amicable strategies to handle and resolve conflicts, violent behaviors erupt. This is when a conflict emerges and more so minor misunderstandings can easily mature into nasty exchanges. More so, spending more time with families during the Covid 19 pandemic, for most people was not on voluntary basis but a result of a stressful catastrophe which subjected people to changes in many aspects of life. For Blood (2015), change in its own right is a potential source of conflict amongst many families and the Covid 19 pandemic came with different uncomfortable changes and alterations in people's lives. Since it is inevitable for relational conflicts to emerge when couples spend more time together, violence cases targeted at intimate partners soured day by day as many couples were exposed to spending more time together.

Suggested intervention strategies to mitigate intimate partner violence

The government of Zimbabwe and other civic organisations have rolled out various strategies and programmes in response to the challenge of gender-based violence which is swiftly on the rise since the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic. According to Singh & Mittal (2020), acknowledging the existence of gender-based violence during pandemics is paramount in tackling the matter. Acknowledging intimate partner violence goes with understanding repressive cultural beliefs and practices and environmental stressors which stimulate relational violence. This may lead to implementation of befitting well informed intervention and preventive measures to make a positive impact. Efforts implemented in Zimbabwe have not adequately tackled the issue as evidenced by perturbing cases of gender-based violence and intimate partner violence that the country continues to record. Therefore, the following measures are submitted to improve the situation:

Vigorous campaign strategies against gender-based violence

It is of paramount importance that massive awareness campaigns denouncing intimate partner violence be implemented using various channels and structures which can reach the majority of the population. Intimate partner violence during the Covid 19 pandemic is as contentious and adverse as the novel virus; hence it deserves an extensive response. The Covid 19 pandemic paved way for intensified abuse by habitual abusers and also incited potential abusers, as people struggled to cope with the complicated situation posed by the pandemic. The researcher argues that people should realize and accept that whatever hardship they are dealing with as a result of the pandemic cannot qualify or justify any form of violence against their intimate partners. Campaigns against intimate partner violence should take an inclusive approach and involve various actors who have influence in people's lives. Magezi and Manzanga (2020) argue that the government and other civic organisations may be overwhelmed by the large numbers of victims of intimate partner violence in need of assistance. Therefore, there is urgent need to involve as many people as possible to play an active role in raising awareness against intimate partner violence.

One strategy which can be employed is engagement of religious leaders to raise awareness against intimate partner violence during the Covid 19 pandemic. Though some stricter levels of the Covid 19 national lockdown in Zimbabwe prohibited people from attending religious gatherings, people have established alternative ways of congregating virtually and through social media platforms. In line with this, Magezi & Manzaga (2020) advocate for a public theology approach whereby religious leaders take responsibility to address issues facing the public for the common good of humanity. This approach can be feasible because religious centers are widespread in both rural and urban areas in Zimbabwe. To give an example, according to ZIMSTAT (2012), people who subscribe to Christianity constitute the majority of the Zimbabwean population. Religious leaders are strategically and conveniently positioned to educate people on respect of rights, love, tolerance and peaceful ways of conflict resolution. This can be more effective than waiting for the government and other organisations who are grossly embattling with the Covid 19 pandemic to be the sole players in raising awareness against intimate partner violence. Magezi & Manzanga (2020) recommend that religious leaders be empowered with necessary referencing systems so that they play an effective role in dealing with gender-based violence during the pandemic. The integration of religious

leaders can be instrumental in effecting changes of mindsets thereby inculcating mutual respect amongst intimate partners and the society at large.

While the media is being utilised in Zimbabwe to raise awareness against gender-based violence, the strategy can be intensified and diversified so that it becomes more effective and far reaching to mitigate the rising cases of intimate partner violence during the Covid 19 pandemic. As observed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2020), television, radio and print media in Zimbabwe are rolling out educative programmes and awareness campaigns against gender-based violence. This move can be consolidated by establishment of networks in social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter among others. According to Chiriza et al (2016) many people have access to WhatsApp in Zimbabwe. Marima (2019) states that at least six million people are estimated to have internet access while Facebook and WhatsApp dominate the market share. These social media platforms can be constructively used to reach out to people and preach about amicable ways of resolving conflicts, surviving and maintaining cordial relations amongst intimate partners during the Covid 19 pandemic. Influential people such as actors and actresses who have many followers on different social media platforms should also join the campaign like what happened in Australia where sports celebrities spread a solidarity message against violence towards women (Raab &Rocha, 2011). Therefore, the researcher argues that comprehensive information on anti-intimate partner violence should be disseminated in various indigenous languages so that it appeals and is comprehensible by many people in both rural and urban areas. This can make intimate partner violence a matter of public concern and strengthen advocacy against any forms of gender-based violence during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Moreover, efforts of raising awareness against intimate partner violence can be consolidated by incorporation of community leadership, both traditional and political, to castigate intimate partner violence and other forms of abuse in the community. Drawing from the experiences and lessons from HIV and Ebola responses, Mackworth-Young et al (2020) argue that community engagement is a cornerstone of efforts to address the Covid 19 pandemic in Sub-Sahara Africa. Both traditional and political leaders are influential people in Zimbabwe who should act as agents against intimate partner violence as they have close and timely interaction with the public. The Zimbabwe National Gender Based Violence Strategy (2012-2015) declares that traditional leaders have a crucial role in shaping public opinion hence their support is critical towards achieving zero

tolerance against gender-based violence. Thus the role of traditional leaders in harnessing intimate partner violence is much needed in the era of the Covid 19 emergence to consolidate efforts made by the government and other gender-based violence organisations operating in Zimbabwe. More so, a study by Dziva (2020) reveals that some traditional leaders in Masvingo province are actively involved in efforts to address the Covid 19 pandemic in Zimbabwe. WHO (2020) recommends that community members be made aware and be alerted of the threat of intimate partner violence during the Covid 19 pandemic. Traditional leaders also handle cases of gender-based violence in their jurisdiction hence they need to be authorized to send a strong message against offenders and the public in general in order to quell the surge in intimate partner violence during the Covid 19 pandemic. Community leaders should use the principle of Ubuntu which binds Zimbabwean societies to cultivate oneness, tolerance and respect to condemn intimate partner violence and encourage harmony amongst intimate partners. For this to be effective, traditional leaders need to be capacitated and provided with information on determinants, trends and effects of intimate partner violence in Zimbabwe during and after the Covid 19 pandemic.

Provision of basic needs and financial support

One of the adverse effects of the Covid 19 pandemic is that it exposed a lot of people in Zimbabwe to economic constraints as the virus eroded employment and income generating opportunities. Many families struggled to put food on the table let alone source other sanitary essentials. SAFE (2020) reports that financial stress led to increased intimate partner violence during the Covid 19 pandemic in Zimbabwe. Therefore it is critical for the government and other civic organisations to prioritize provision of food aid and other basic needs to affected people during the Covid 19 pandemic to ease their financial burden. Provision of aid should target as many people as possible as the Covid 19 pandemic left many people financially vulnerable and in a pathetic state of poverty. As the saying goes "a hungry man is an angry man", it is vital to address the politics of the stomach in order to reduce unwarranted friction and tension amongst intimate partners.

The UNDP (2020) also recommends economic support for survivors of gender-based violence through transfer of funds directly into their pockets. Gupta (2020) argues that as resources become scarce women are exposed to suffer economic abuse. While men and women were both affected by the Covid 19 pandemic, studies have shown that women were the worst affected economically in

Zimbabwe as they constitute the bulk of informal and international cross border activities which were severely crippled by different Covid 19 protocols (Institute of Development Studies, 2020). Thus establishing funds or schemes for women would help them to meet their other needs which can be deprioritized in the period of the Covid 19 crisis. While UNICEF (2020) commends the government of Zimbabwe for introducing safety nets for the most vulnerable through cash transfers, more still needs to be done to ensure economic security. More so, such moves can protect women from economic abuse and enhance their financial independence during a time when most of their income generating activities is unfruitful.

Another way to boost people economically in order to minimize instances of intimate partner violence is through supporting people to revive their businesses which were stalled because of lockdown restrictions. When lockdown regulations were relaxed in Zimbabwe, businesses were allowed to operate once they met certain safety measures to curtail the spread of the Covid 19 pandemic. However, not everyone was on a sound financial footing to restart operations. In light of this, Zamchiya, Mavhinga, Gwinji, Chamungowa & Madhuku (2020) urge support from the state and donor community to ensure that small scale farmers and informal traders have adequate protective equipment as well as sanitizers as recommended by the medical experts so that they can continue with their businesses within the confines of the law. Informal traders also need to be assisted financially so that they are able to restock while other people may also need to be motivated to start their small businesses for self-reliance and survival during the Covid 19 pandemic. JohnBosco & Ggoobi (2020) argue that having a reserve fund to assist women who are victims of gender-based violence to start their own small businesses is worthy, to minimize various forms of gender-based violence. Robust economic assistance of people during the Covid 19 pandemic is needed most as the pandemic paralyzed economic activity. This stands as a threat stirring relational conflicts.

Increase in support services to victims and survivors

The Covid 19 pandemic led to the swelling of cases of intimate partner violence in Zimbabwe, therefore it is vital for an expansion of the support services to survivors. OCHA (2020) acknowledges that protective and support services as well as crisis centers targeting survivors of gender-based violence scaled back during the Covid 19 pandemic. It is therefore essential that virtual and online support services be availed for people to report and seek help in case of abuse

during the Covid 19 pandemic. JohnBosco & Ggoobi (2020) urge governments to set up toll free lines to be used by the victims in cases of violence. For example, France set up warning systems at grocery shops and pharmacies to aid victims of gender-based violence to notify authorities (Guenfound, 2020). In Zimbabwe such services are offered by various gender-based violence organisations such as Musasa Project, Family Support Trust, World Vision, Adult Rape Clinic among others which work hand in glove with the Ministry of Women's Affairs Community and Small to Medium Enterprises Development and United Nations Population Fund (UN Zimbabwe, 2020). However, it is imperative to augment and extend communication resources to improve and promote positive behavior during the Covid 19 pandemic (Cannon, Regardt, Buttel & First, 2020). The public needs to be alerted of the toll free numbers of these organisations and the same can be advertised in radios, television, social media platforms as well as through posters in public places and public transport so that they are known to as many people as possible. WHO (2020) emphasises that policy makers and humanitarian organisations should consider inclusion of essential services to address gender-based violence in their preparedness and response plans for Covid 19.

Counseling services provided by various Civic and Society Organisations during the pandemic should also gather momentum. CARE International (2020) observes that support services are not easily accessible to all victims during the Covid 19 pandemic, therefore counseling services should be made conveniently reachable by victims of intimate partner violence. With the economic and social crisis of the Covid 19 pandemic, many people are apparently in need of guidance and therapy from experts on how to continue leading a normal life under the strenuous new normal of the pandemic. The pandemic has generated alarming and threatening levels of stress and anxiety which trigger intimate partner violence (Nair & Banerjee, 2020). Therefore, remedy intervention approaches are needed so as to equip people with effective stress and anxiety management strategies in the midst of the Covid 19 pandemic. Some countries have established online facilities for counseling and therapeutic services during the Covid 19 pandemic (Mittal and Singh, 2020). In Zimbabwe, community surveillance and psychosocial services are being conducted for survivors of violence but underfunding remains an obstacle to the achievement of large scale targets (OCHA, 2020). With the high prevalence of intimate partner violence during the Covid 19 pandemic, the matter should be treated like an emergence and counseling services should not be limited to victims and survivors of

intimate partner violence to encompass the population at large. Many people are potential victims of abuse during the Covid 19 pandemic. Counseling can be used as both a preventive and treatment tool for people to minimise the effects intimate partner violence.

Provision of shelter to survivors of intimate partner violence can be another effective intervention to reduce intimate partner violence during the Covid 19 pandemic. The UNDP (2020) encourages governments to provide shelter in order to give a sigh of relief to victims. There is urgent need for more centers to be established in both rural and urban areas to serve as refuge centers for victims of intimate partner violence. The UNDP (2020) further recommends provision of additional financial backing and capacity support to organisations that provide support services to people so that they accommodate victims of intimate partner violence in their large numbers. In the wake of the Covid 19 pandemic, victims of abuse have limited contact with relatives and friends who can provide support and protection hence the need for widespread setting of crisis centers which provide shelter. The establishment of these facilities requires funding and the government as well as the donor community should make provisions to make this a reality. Without alternative places of residence for escaping from an abusive intimate partner, violence may continue unabated thereby attracting detrimental effects to the victims.

Enacting a safety plan

It is a blatant reality that the Covid 19 pandemic has triggered an increase in gender-based violence and intimate partner violence cases in particular. Against this background, the World Health Organisation (2020) urges women to establish a protection plan against intimate partner violence. People can identify organisations, friends and relatives to confide in, in the case of intimate partner violence. This can facilitate immediate access to help and support services for people who are vulnerable to intimate partner violence. For this to be successful, the public should be educated to take cases of intimate partner violence seriously so that they are able to offer an appropriate and helping response upon getting a report of intimate partner violence from a survivor.

Wayfoward

Having deliberated on how the Covid 19 pandemic has acted as a trigger to the escalating cases of intimate partner violence in Zimbabwe, it is critical for the government and the nation at large to consider the following as the nation battles with the novel virus which offset people's economic and social life:

- Strong advocacy against intimate partner violence during and beyond the Covid 19 crisis. All forms of gender-based violence are a massive set-back towards achieving sustainable peace and gender equity in the society. Leaders, academics and the public at large should rally behind and give weight to a mantra of zero tolerance against intimate partner violence. Both men and women alike should voice loudly in efforts to abolish all forms of gender-based violence in Zimbabwe and globally.

- There should be prioritization of gender equity in all post- Covid 19 recovery strategies. This will empower both men and women alike who have been economically disempowered by the Covid 19 pandemic. Women who are the worst victims of intimate partner violence need to be assisted to get back on their feet and achieve self-reliance so that economic violence is abated. This will require an extensive gender oriented assessment and comprehensive research on the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic on both men and women by the government and empowerment programme managers.

- No to stigmatization of victims and survivors of intimate partner violence. Intimate partner violence is a social ill and survivors need support from the public so that they go past the trauma of violence. Labeling survivors and victims of intimate partner violence can cause more harm than good and have detrimental and life threatening effects on survivors. Stigmatization of victims can compel them to harbor their suffering while perpetrators go scot-free without being reprimanded. Such attitude is uncalled for and it can reinforce gender-based violence amongst intimate partners.

- Gender mainstreaming on Covid 19 protocols being implemented in Zimbabwe is essential. Gender issues should be omnipresent in policies and regulations enacted to deal with catastrophes and emergencies such as the Covid 19 pandemic now and in the future. Neglect of gender issues in dealing with the Covid 19 pandemic gives rise to a plethora of disparities, vulnerabilities and complications which damage relations between men and women thus inciting a rise of intimate partner violence.

- There should be quick and befitting constructive responses from the public and various institutions to reports or incidents of intimate partner violence. Victims of intimate partner violence greatly require immediate responses from the public so that they do not feel dejected. People should not cast a blind eye on incidents of gender-based violence but step up to render constructive assistance. Any form of violence in Zimbabwe is unlawful and not justifiable hence survivors need a warm prompt reaction from the public so that they are courageous to deal with violence and maintain their dignity and self-esteem. Support of survivors of intimate

partner violence is a bold positive step in reducing discrimination of people exposed to various forms of intimate partner violence.

- A bold step up from the victims of intimate violence to seek help from relevant authorities is vital. Survivors of intimate partner violence tend to blame themselves which is a stumbling block towards eradicating the prevalence of this form of violence. People should go beyond "what will others-say syndrome" and seek help. It is only when the people concerned take the initiative that the efforts to fight intimate partner violence will yield desirable results. This will help demolish long held prejudices and beliefs against victims and survivors of intimate partner violence.

Conclusion

Intimate partner violence is one of the prevalent forms of gender-based violence which continues to haunt Zimbabwe with a sharp increase of cases being recorded during the Covid 19 pandemic. Efforts and protocols to curtail the spread of the novel virus disrupted the economic and social lives of many Zimbabweans which ignited relational conflicts. Women constitute the majority of victims of intimate partner violence and some pre-existing cultural beliefs are accountable for this. There is need to revise the measures put in place to contain the spread of the virus so that protective and support facilities are enacted to mitigate intimate partner violence. The public has a role to play in campaigning for zero tolerance against all forms of gender-based violence. Intimate partner violence is unlawful in Zimbabwe and no crisis should be used to justify violence. The nation should draw lessons from the Covid 19 pandemic so that gender issues are integrated in handling epidemic crisis in the future and so that all forms of gender-based violence are prevented.

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