

## The nexus between university gender policy and gender-based violence. A social relations approach to gender policy analysis at institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe

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### Abstract

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a phenomenon that affects society negatively and its impact is heavier on women than men in all developmental settings. While much has been said about this phenomenon at international, regional and national conventions, agreements and protocols, statistics show that instead of decreasing the incidence is even rising. Possible policy interventions have been tabled for implementation but minimal achievement has been recorded if comparison is made to the size of the problem. This study uses a gender analysis approach to establish why the implemented gender policies have been less effective in reducing the occurrence of GBV at institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. The gender analysis tool employed is Naila Kabeer's (1994) Social relations approach. Only two concepts (i. Social Relations and ii. Institutional Analysis) from Naila Kabeer's Social Relations Approach were operationalised. The study established that GBV prevails as an outcome of gaps linked to organisational social relations. These relations play a key role in the incidence of Gender Based Violence and the perpetuation of gender inequality in these institutions. The study is of the view that robust gender policy analysis at institutions of higher learning is an urgent imperative so that deep seated social relations that incubate motivations GBV are exposed and properly addressed. Gender based violence is a cancer that is feeding on unattended gender social relations resulting in the increase of this vice. The study recommends the need for more frequent gender policy analysis if policy objectives regarding gender equality are to be achieved. The use of the Social Relations Approach as a tool for such an analysis is highly recommended.

**KEYWORDS:** gender analysis, gender-based violence, gender policy, gender social relations, social relations approach, institutions of higher learning

## Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a global and retrogressive phenomenon that negatively affects everyone in our communities; numerous studies and statistics have shown that instead of decreasing, the incidence thereof is rising (Mutinta, 2022; Institute for Community Development in Zimbabwe Trust (IODZIM) 2022; Takaza, 2021). GBV is defined as violence targeting individuals based on biological sex and/or minority/disadvantaged status just because of their gender identity. Males and females can all stand as perpetrators and/or victims. GBV manifests as physical, sexual or psychological harm to victims and it calls for urgent attention as it has devastating social and health effects which in the long run impacts negatively on economic and general development of any community. GBV is a phenomenon deeply rooted in gender inequality, abuse of power and it prevails as a gruesome human rights violation common in most societies. It can directly or indirectly result in psychological, physical and sexual trauma, injury, as well as deprivation of personal rights (Gordon & Collins, 2013). This global pandemic that affects one in three women in their lifetime. 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. While gender has grown to be a topical issue in the global development agenda, its relevance for organisational processes and policies has been considered irrelevant and at the same time not important for organisational core business (Eveline & Bacchi, 2010). The prevalence of gender inequalities in most institutions is clear evidence that institutions to a larger extent are gendered. While much has been accomplished towards gender equality gender inequality remains in most developmental spheres (Rao 2000). Rao (2000) concurs with Rao, Stewart and Kelleher (1999) on the notion that organisations (formal and informal) have hidden aspects that maintain gender inequality. In the same line of thinking Schein (1992), in Rao et al (1992) is of the view that there is a certain kind of hidden culture which blocks change towards gender equality. Acker reiterates and names these unexamined organisational insides as “substructures”/ deep structures (Rao et al, 1999; which are described as gendered. These deep structures represent a collection of values, history, culture and practices that form the unquestioned, ‘normal’ way of working in an organisation (Rao et al 1999). However, an observation made by Rao et al (1999) is that there is a need to develop gender equitable organisational inner so that it can bring about gender equitable outcomes on the outside.

The argument in this case, is not for increased accountability and representation or women's integration into development or the workforce but it is the need for transforming social structures, processes and relations which give rise to women's disadvantaged position (Miles 2016). Key to all this is that all other ways aimed at achieving gender justice for sustainable development in institutions must start by changing the organisational inner so that it is set for supporting gender balance. Organisations need to commit themselves for an examination of hidden assumptions and values that inhibit gender equality in institutions (Rao et al 1999). This implies a kind of organisational needs assessment (Rao et al, 1999) for gender equality. The most important of them all is the redistribution of power (Kabeer, 1994; March et al, 1999; Razavi & Miller 1995) in organisational deep structures.

Gender based violence is a vice that is incubated in the unshaken organisational subcultures that are gendered. One factor that continues to increase the gap between males and females at institutions of higher learning is sexual and GBV. The development of gender policies in organisations aims at reducing gender inequality. However, cases of GBV persist and are on the increase because these policies focus on organisational outer and additionally they focus on outcomes of unequal social relations and not the social relations themselves. The entrenched groups, those in power and the dominant who rule in organisations consider gender as irrelevant to organisational structure so they value it as not important for organisational core business (Eveline & Bacchi, 2010). That is how the dilemma develops, so created policies leave the organisational core intact which contributes to the perpetuation of gender inequality and GBV. On the other hand retrogressive gender ideologies remain intact cushioned by the existing status quo. Violence increases as perpetrators enjoy the implied impunity that emerges from deep seated beliefs and practices enshrined in gender policy gaps as well as organisational social relations that are directed by beliefs and practices of dominant groups.

Lack of gender analysis of policies at tertiary institutions has normalised beliefs and practices of entrenched groups thereby increasing vulnerability of disadvantaged groups. Previous work on gender mainstreaming of policy was mainly dominated by feminist political theory in the area of policy studies where little or no detailed attention was given to the organisation itself (Eveline & Bacchi, 2010). In that state of affairs Benschop & Verloo (2006) argue that gender mainstreaming cannot be achieved without attention to the organisational contexts in which policy is developed and implemented. The argument that

they were bringing to the fore is that it is not policy that is gender blind but it is the everyday organisational practices that produce gender blindness (Benschop & Verloo, 2006). Organisational analysis is important because it shows that gender equality is institutionally repressed (Eveline & Bacchi, 2010).

A number of legal and policy initiatives have been put in place to address SGBV (Sexual and Gender Based Violence) at institutions of higher learning, however, no significant change has been realised in terms of combating this vice. Additionally, significant research has been done on the contributing factors to the prevalence of GBV at institutions of higher learning but there is a dearth of research in the area of gender policy analysis. This study aims at filling that gap by carrying out a gender policy analysis guided by Naila Kabeer's (1994) Social Relations Approach. This gender analysis tool was used by Miles (2016) in looking at the empowerment of women factory works in Malaysia. In a different study Hillenbrand, Lakzadeh; Sikhoin, Talukder, Green & McLean (2014) used the Social Relations Approach to capture the complexity in women's empowerment in the Fish on Farms project in Cambodia

This study uses the SRA for establishing the nexus/link between university gender policy and sexual and GBV at an institution of higher learning in Zimbabwe.

## **Materials and Methods**

This paper is structured as a desk study guided by a gender analysis framework. The gender analysis framework used is Naila Kabeer's (1994) Social Relations Approach. Out of the five concepts that are part and parcel of this gender analysis framework only two (concept of social relations and concept of institutional analysis) were operationalised in the study. For convenience and easy access one institution of higher learning was purposively selected for participation in the study. This was because this institution has very high prevalence of SGBV and it also has both the sexual harassment and the gender policies. The gender policy used in this study is dated 2006 and the one on sexual harassment was done in 2020.

The overall objective of this study was to do a gender analysis of existing sexual and Gender Based Violence policies at an institution of higher learning in Zimbabwe.

The specific objectives are as follows:

- i) to present a justification for using the Social Relations Approach as a tool for gender policy analysis
- ii) to establish the gender social relations that perpetuate gender inequality at institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe and
- iii) to examine the gendered nature of institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe

## Doing Gender Analysis

### 1.4.1 Defining Gender Analysis

Gender analysis is, in short, an examination of gender social relations. It is the basic foundation on which gender mainstreaming is built (Plavcova, 2019). Gender analysis ensures that every step in an activity, policy or program is promoting gender equality and sustainable development. This is done to make sure all genders are benefitting equally from development initiatives. Gender analysis uses various tools to track for gender equality as it is enunciated in international and constitutional agreements, laws and human rights such as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Gender analysis does that by using specific tools in the examination of relationships between males and females in our communities, it also examines the activities they do and the constraints they face: who does what, where and how using what resources and who owns what and controls even the benefits to achieve what for who? (Mawere et al 2015; Government of Canada, 2019). It also establishes who has opportunity and power (Plavcova, 2019) It is an element of socio-economic analysis which considers gender relations as a factor in all socio-economic relations.

Information from gender gender analysis can inform and improve policies and programmes (Government of Canada 2019, Mawere, ChaurayaMatsa, Mugodzwa, Matope, Maruzani & Mukoni, 2015). Gender analysis can provide insights on how to ensure maximum efficiency in pursuing sustainable development goals (Government of Canada, 2010). It can help us understand why a situation has developed that way and the assumptions related to that issue.

## Conceptual Framework

### *Naila Kabeer's (1994) Social Relations Approach*

The Development Manager: Gender (2012) stated that Naila Kabeer's (1994) Social Relations Approach is the strongest of all the gender analysis frameworks. The strength of this tool lies in that it places gender at the centre of development theory and practice and it takes into consideration the key role that social relationships have on how people participate in development programmes or policy processes. Unlike other gender analysis frameworks, the Social Relations Approach does not focus on women only but it focuses on the social and economic dynamic of gender relations (Hillenbrand et al 2014).

The aim of the SRA is the analysis of existing gender inequalities in the distribution of resources, responsibilities and power for the designing of policies and programmes which enable women and other disadvantaged groups to be agents of their own development (March et al, 1999; Hillenbrand et al, 2014).

Kabeer's (1994) SRA is made up of five concepts as follows:

*Concept 1: Development as improving human well being*

*Concept 2: Social relations*

*Concept 3: Institutional analysis*

*Concept 4: Gender policies*

*Concept 5 Immediate, underlying and structural causes*

The social relations approach uses these five concepts to capture the complex power dynamics between men and women, and analyses the gendered nature of social institutions (Hillenbrand et al 2014). For this study only two concepts were operationalised, that is, concept 2 and concept 3. While this tool can be commended for institutional analysis of inequality, users need to be well-trained so that they can overcome the complexity associated with this tool and multiple levels of analysis that characterise it. The other challenge is that the gendered nature of organisations is challenging to interrogate especially in a participatory manner (Hillenbrand et al 2014).

#### **1.4.2.1 Concept 2: Social Relations**

Kabeer (1994) uses the term (social relations) to refer to structural relationships that create and reproduce systemic differences in the positioning of different groups of people (March et al (1999; Equilio, n.d.). Such relationships determine

who we are, what our roles and responsibilities are, and what claims we can make; the rights people have; and the control that people have over their own lives and those of others (March et al,1999). Social relations change and they also determine what tangible and intangible resources are available to groups of people. Poverty and inequality arise out of peoples unequal social relations. Kabeer (1994) observed that poor people in general and poor women in particular are often excluded from the formal allocation of resources so they draw on other resources determined by their social relations. Poor / disadvantaged people which includes people with disabilities, minority groups from vulnerable groupings have access to resources mainly through social relationships based on patronage and dependency where they have to trade in their autonomy for security (March et al, 1999). Kabeer (1994) in the SRA states that development/policy in this case, must look at supporting relationships which build on solidarity and reciprocity and which build autonomy, rather than reduce it.

#### 1.4.2.2 Concept 3: Institutional Analysis

The other element of this gender analysis framework is the concept of institutional analysis (March et al, 1999). The broader implication of this framework aims at revealing how gender and other inequalities cross cut each other in different institutions' interactions which produces situations of specific disadvantage for individuals (March et al,1999; Rao, Stewart & Kellerher,1999) concurs and adds the notion that the problem of gender inequality (which facilitates sexual harassment and GBV is rooted in the institutional arrangements of organisations which in turn produce gender inequitable outcomes.

Kabeer (1994) challenges the myth that institutions are ideologically neutral but they produce, reinforce and reproduce social differences and inequalities. Each institution has an official ideology which accompanies all its policy and planning (March et al., 1999). From that understanding Kabeer(1994) emphasises on the need to move away from bureaucratic neutrality, and scrutinise the actual rules and practices of institutions to uncover their core values and assumptions. The SRA states that all institutions possess five distinct but interrelated dimensions of social relationships, that is, rules (how things are done), resources (what is used, what is produced), people (who is in it, who is out, who does what? Institutions are selective about people and the selection reflects class, gender and other social inequalities), activities (what things are done) and power (who decides and whose interests are served). These dimensions are significant to



the analysis of social inequality in general and gender inequality in particular (March et al 1999). Examining institutions from that perspective will help in making people understand who does what, who gains, who loses (which men and which women).

## **1.5 The Nexus**

The link between GBV and gender policies was done using two concepts of the SRA, as indicated earlier on. The institution was examined through the five interrelated dimensions of social relationships (Rules, resources, people, activities and power.)

### **Rules resources and activities**

First and foremost, the sexual and gender policy documents can be taken as rules in that they are statements of intent and are implemented as a procedure to be followed for combating and reprimanding SGBV. Rules can be written or unwritten. The policy document represents the written law, while norms, values, traditions and customs represent the unwritten law. Institutions and individuals develop gender ideologies in line with these two groups of laws. In a patriarchal set up, policies remain biased in favour of men.

*Who does what in gender/sexual harassment policy making?* At institutions of higher learning everyone (students and staff) is free to contribute items for inclusion in the policy document. This is at policy formulation level. The policy goes through verification processes until it gets approval by the University Senate (the supreme body that governs institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe). While some strides have been made in increasing the participation of women in management levels at institutions of higher learning, the fact remains that participation of women in key positions in academia is still low. Middle and top management remains male dominated.

When key positions in tertiary institutions are filled by males it fulfils the gender stereotype that links masculinity power, authority and control. Men in key positions perpetuate violence when they take advantage of females who do gender reproductive work in their offices. In line with the written and unwritten law females easily accept the authority of men who occupy the high offices. Feminine stereotypes motivate males to ask for sexual favours which will culminate in SGBV if it goes unchecked. Males in positions of power to take advantage of poor female ancillary staff attached to their offices. Most of these females earn far less than what the male bosses they serve. This creates fertile ground for using financial advantage to solicit for unwanted sexual favours.



Men use their advantage in policy making to safeguard their gender ideologies. Even in policy making women defer their participation to men, citing their need to participate in reproductive duties both at home and in the organisation. Family demands of unpaid care work “steal” opportunities from women, leading to their perpetual subordinate positions in the family and at work. This happens when women give priorities to feminine duties and responsibilities at the expense of personal upgrading academically and professionally. This impacts negatively on their participation in the policy making process; their structure and content has done nothing much to transform norms and behaviours that underpin SGBV.

### *People and power.*

Power dictates how people order themselves according to who is in, who is out and who does what? All these factors affect how people in organisations relate and for what outcome in terms of equality and equity. The way male staff members relate with female students and staff can be a breeding ground for SGBV. If policy omits such issues, that is when cases of SGBV will continue to skyrocket. This is one area where patriarchy uses established social relations to perpetuate violence.

Policy is not addressing / speaking to taken for granted values, ways of thinking and working that underlies decision making and action. Power hides the fact that organisations are gendered at very deep levels (Rao, 2006) and not many are aware of it. Policies do not make explicit references to patriarchal belief and patriarchal control. Only gender analysis of policy can. Gender social relations and abuse of power creates environments that facilitate SGBV. Those in power use their influence to structure organisational systems in such a way that victims will not manage to bring them to book (Rao, 2006).

### **Structure and content of policy documents**

Using dictates from international conventions and agreements, policies are structures as in more or less the same way starting with a title, preamble, rational vision, goals and strategies. In the preamble it is stated that:

*...The policy will therefore be applied in the three university key, sectors which include: Academic Activities, Human Resources Systems and Student Affairs (policy research document)*

The implication in this statement is that when these three sectors have been covered by policy then a degree of gender responsiveness is achieved. While these sectors also need policy attention for change so that gender equality

prevails there is an omission which is observed by the Social Approach and the Forum for African Women Educators (FAWE 2006). The observation is that gender responsiveness at any organisation must take into consideration the academic, physical as well as social aspects of organisations. The social aspect brings in cultural norms, traditions and religious beliefs that facilitate gender inequalities. If policy pays a blind eye to these gender retrogressive social aspects that find themselves into institutions, policy is indirectly perpetuating gender inequality.

The aim of the gender policy at institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe is borrowed from the Zimbabwe National Gender Policy, which is to create a gender just society in which men and women enjoy equity, contribute and benefit as equal partners in the development of the country. However, do males and females relate equally in the policy making process? Are the needs of women relating to care work addressed according to prescriptions from women? Are the targets for equality clear and easy to understand for all? In the backdrop of these and many other questions it can be realised that policy strategies that are finally put in the policy document favour the powerful and the dominant making it difficult for the policy to serve everyone equally thereby perpetuating inequalities.

Existing Gender Policy has the following goals:

- i) to mainstream gender in the university
- ii) to eliminate practices impeding equality and equity of the sexes
- iii) to empower students and staff with knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable them to create and live in a gender-sensitive way
- iv) to have a critical mass of women on campus that give them confidence the university so that they begin to create a conducive environment for themselves
- v) to achieve a critical mass of female role models in the university
- vi) to promote a gender responsive environment.

While the policy can be recommended for articulating the goals as they will impact on different university environments, achievements of this policy have been very minimal. One of the reasons for that is because of limited financial commitment. Institutions provide limited funding for strategies that target gender equality. Finance departments make low priority of issues relating to gender in the budget. Prevalent gender ideologies consider gender budget lines last or give it limited financial attention. This will result in unchanged or even worsening gender relations in institutions of higher learning as perpetrators will be knowing that nothing will be done to them.

Over a number of years now unpaid care work has been an issue tabled for urgent attention for effective women empowerment in organisations. Child care facilities at institutions of higher learning give women more time to concentrate on personal grooming, academic and professional development which will help women climb the organisational ladder into key decision-making positions. As women get more qualified they then occupy higher posts which positions them strategically for interrogating the organisational subcultures/organisational core.

The sexual harassment policy at this institution talks about sexual harassment only as if it is the only form of GBV. The male student with pseudo marriages assumes masculine roles as in the traditional patriarchal marital union. He provides the finances, he pays the rent, and he does his assignments and those of the girl. On the other hand, the girl does all the gender reproductive duties for the couple. These duties are labour intensive and time-consuming which results in some of these girls failing to do well in their academic work. These unions breed violence at the end of semester as girls may have unwanted pregnancy, contracted diseases and the male may be going out with someone else leading to SGBV in and out of this semester marriage. The environment allows the continued objectification of women by men. When females from such unofficial unions get pregnant, the policy is silent about the welfare of the female student who becomes a mother and there are no initiatives for childcare when the girl gives birth. This is how GBV is on the increase in the wake of sexual and GBV policies at institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe.

Dressing has been informally accused for fuelling victimhood of girls in sexual harassment. Male students and staff accuse females for attracting SGBV by the way they dress. Unfortunately policy is silent on the issue of dressing) so the scourge continues unabated to sexually harass female students using the victim blame game.

Access to resources is gender biased at institutions of higher learning. Deep seated biases limit women from accessing information related to academic and social resources at institutions of higher learning. GBV is rampant in academic and social activities such as sport, promotions and participation in University funded activities. Access to food in the dining hall can bring about GBV as staff take advantage of students. Female students and staff have limited access and control of key academic financial resources. The occurrence of GBV is linked to key resources. For example, female staff members may be asked for sexual

favours so that they get promotion to a higher grade. This happens for other things such as getting listed for sporting tournaments, access to the internet, getting campus residence among others. Policy gaps in these areas point to areas where perpetrators take advantage of victims.

Organisational culture is embedded in organisational relations and processes but it is much hidden. This situation strongly influences the “Unquestioned’... normal way of doing things in organisations. The creation of policies and their implementation takes for granted that these hidden deep seated subcultures will change on their own as other aspects of the organisation change. As long as this rhetoric continues, policies will not be able to curb SGBV at institutions of higher learning but the occurrence of this vice will continue to increase. Policies are crafted with the aim of changing for equality on the organisational outer yet organisational inside which is characterised by organisational formal and informal cultural norms and exclusionary tendencies remains untouched.

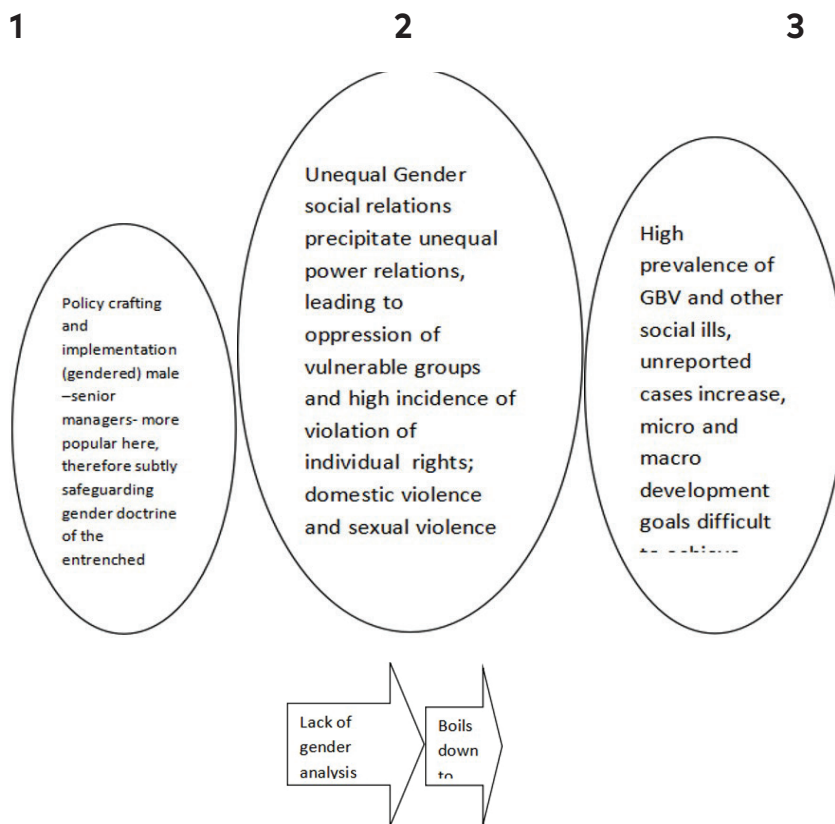


Fig 1.1 Justifying gender analysis for improved gender policy implementation.

In the above diagram oval number 1 represents activities that serve to build and protect the organisational substructures. In a patriarchal society the organisational core remains patriarchal. That is how organisations develop stereotypes and gender biases that ultimately impact negatively in policy making and implementation. Patriarchal views of sexual and domestic violence may not be in favour of the gender ideology of dominant groups if these substructures which represents the organisational core remain intact without any attempt for gender analysis; the result is the state of affairs in oval number 2 which leads to situation in oval number 3. Addressing the situation in oval number 3 and failing to interrogate the organisational core as in oval number one is as good as promoting unequal gender relations and all forms of inequality. If core values and assumptions are recognised, it enables the understanding of how gender inequality is produced and reproduced (Miles, 2016).

Of all the strategies stated in the gender policy that was used in this study, there is no mention of trying to make a balance of work and family by providing facilities for childcare as it is one of the factors that stand as a challenge for working women.

## Conclusion

It can be concluded from this study that gender analysis of organisational gender and sexual harassment policies is an urgent imperative in curbing and combating SGBV at institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. Gender ideologies prevailing in organisational substructures are responsible for making adopted gender policies effective or ineffective. To make women qualify in organisational key positions structures there is need to address women's role in unpaid care work. This weakness of policy can be attributed to gendered organisational core. From the above conclusion this study recommends the need for sexual harassment and gender policy analysis to be taken as an imperative at institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. For this to be successful there is need for proper training for all who will participate in the gender analysis of policy.

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