

Gender and development approach to reducing gender-based violence

Irene Muzvidziwa^a

^aMidlands State University, Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the main causes of gender-based violence (GBV) in tertiary institutions and find ways of reducing the phenomenon in these institutions. The context of higher learning, in which women are under-represented in positions of authority and lectureship, and the structural inequalities, increase gender-based violence in tertiary institutions. Unequal power relations, and the cultural values, that operate on a patriarchal system are the primary cause of inequality leading to gender-based violence even in institutions of higher learning. In a patriarchal society, women are perceived as perpetual minors who cannot take independent decisions. That alone promotes male superiority. Gender equality cannot be achieved without considering the issue of equity. The absence of *Hunhu/Ubuntu*, results in undesirable outcomes such as sexual harassment in schools, colleges and universities. True *Ubuntu* recognises differences, and hence, always strives to strike consensus. *Ubuntu* makes a fundamental contribution to indigenous 'ways of knowing and being' and is 'based on the primary values of intense humanness, caring, sharing and respect. A holistic approach in promoting gender equity and equality will help combat gender-based violence in institutions of higher learning. Mainstreaming a gender perspective at all stages is important. Gender mainstreaming involves the integration of a gender perspective into the preparations, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes. The Gender and Development (GAD) approach to addressing issues of power relations is very critical. The GAD approach seeks to correct systems and mechanisms that produce gender inequality by focusing not only on women, but by assessing the social status of both women and men. The paper advocates for gender policies that are not just gender sensitive but gender responsive - policies that seek to promote zero tolerance of GBV.

KEYWORDS: Gender and Development (GAD), Gender Mainstreaming, gender socialisation, *Hunhu/Ubuntu*

Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) has become a vicious animal that requires everyone's effort in order to effectively combat it. It is rather difficult to cure a disease without getting to know it or its cause. The paper seeks to find ways of reducing GBV in tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe. It seeks to advocate for policies that are gender responsive and promote zero tolerance of GBV in institutions of higher learning. To achieve that, the author starts by giving a brief background on the perceived causes of GBV, the construction of gender and its implications on the development of a child up-to adulthood. This is followed by literature focussing on frameworks that can be adopted for effective implementation of policies, and activities designed to reduce and curb GBV particularly in institutions of higher learning. Later, the methodology, findings, discussion and conclusion are highlighted.

Background

The unequal status of men and women in a patriarchal society is a cause for concern as it is the primary cause of gender-based violence. The gender perspective on violence against women and girls show that, the root cause of violence lies in the unequal power relations between men and women, which ensures male dominance over women. Chandra and Erlingsdottir (2021) observed that universities and research organisations, have a distinct organisational structure with specific implications for gender inequality, and thus create space for perpetrators who normally take chances. From senior management to administrative and professional services staff, hierarchies of power are structured by gender and age, and that can underpin violence. The unequal status of men and women can be articulated and addressed by revisiting the concept of gender and how it is constructed. Gender is constructed by society through socialisation. Since the family is the child's first window to the world in which gender socialisation starts (Murdock, in Haralambos & Holborn, 2004), the intervention should start from the root.

Okin, (cited in Muzvidziwa, 2014), noted that the family as the primary institution is the chief constructor of gender that needs to be looked at, if issues of power and power relations are to be addressed. The school, peer group and others, are secondary forces that reinforce, and perpetuate gender inequality. From the early age children are socialised that men should be strong and tough. The school reinforces the cultural values that operate on a patriarchal system. In a patriarchal society, men are socialised not only to be public holders of power,

but to own and control major resources of a society in which women are taken to be critical part of those resources (McFadden, 1997). Hence, to combat GBV, effective frameworks and policies need to be drawn, as they would facilitate the implementation of the different strategies.

Theoretical Framework –the GAD approach

A framework tends to justify the study and explain its structure and design. A conceptual framework is seen as the foundation for the study providing the essential support and clarifies the context of the study for the reader (Crawford, 2020). A framework, does not only justify but adds an understanding of the need for the paper, and the knowledge regarding the topic. Hence, a conceptual framework helps the reader understand how the different elements of the study design align with the problem identified in the paper.

The purpose of this paper is to establish a holistic approach to promote gender equity and equality. Marshall and Rossman (2016) emphasised the importance of grounding a conceptual framework in the literature. In seeking solutions to combat GBV in institutions of higher learning, I adopted a Gender and Development approach (GAD) as it focuses on social relations between men and women. The GAD approach seeks to correct systems and mechanisms that produce gender inequality by focusing not only on women, but by assessing the social status of both women and men. Moreover, it emphasises the role of men in resolving gender inequality, and places importance on the empowerment of both.

Men need to be empowered so that they understand the concept of equality and accept diversity. The importance of this framework is that it questions the current social, economic and political structures that put women in subordinate positions thereby perpetuating the inequalities. The GAD approach brings about a gender perspective that puts under scrutiny the whole range of different powers. It is about bringing people together. Muzvidziwa (2014 p. 813) observed that “Bringing the community together is a skill that needs commitment and moral ethics. It requires not just theoretical approach, but practical engagement in the process of making a new shift.” The framework calls for a total transformation of communities and the society at large, in relation to behaviour patterns and understanding. It calls for a gender just society.

Gender and Justice

Violence towards women and girls is often legitimised, justified or ignored due to discriminatory social norms, fuelled by patriarchy and gender inequalities. In some cases, women are even blamed for the violence committed against them and stigmatised as a result of it. Justice and fairness are about being considerate of human dignity despite race or gender. Hoy and Tarter (2004 p. 252) argued that treating everyone equally is not equal. Without addressing the issue of power relations in Institutions of higher learning, it is difficult to end GBV. Without understanding what gender equality entails, GBV is also not easy to eliminate. Capper, Theoharis, and Sebastian (2006) referring to schools argued that, school leaders need to embody a social justice consciousness within their belief systems or values.

In a similar vein, Institutions of higher learning need to draw from this observation if the process of creating a socially just educational environment is to be implemented. The concept of equality suggests that women and men may sometimes require different treatment to achieve similar results (Gender-Based Analysis, Status of Women Canada, 2004). There is need for fairness and justice in addressing GBV. Gender equity means being fair to women and men.

To ensure fairness, measures are often needed to compensate for historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating as equals. Equality can never be achieved if equity issues are not taken seriously, since equity leads to equality. All this require an appreciation of the concept of *hunhu/ ubuntu*. Muzvidziwa and Muzvidziwa (2012) acknowledged that true *ubuntu* recognises differences, and hence, always strives to strike consensus rather than impose a universal sameness on issues or on people.

Achieving gender equality requires the recognition that every policy, program and project affects women and men differently. As mentioned above GAD approach is a framework that seeks to correct systems and mechanisms that promote gender inequality, it strives to promote fairness and justice (Tasli, 2007).

Gender Socialisation

Okin, believed that the family is important for the moral development of individuals, especially the development of a sense of justice. Justice is fairness in the treatment of people irrespective of their status in life. It is argued then that if the:

...family is the foundational institution in the formative and moral development of individuals, and if schools serve as agents of society, then structures and practises of the family should be well connected, such that the larger society respects the human rights in relation to gender, if social justice is to be fostered and maintained (Muzvidziwa 2014, p. 803).

Gender is constructed by society through the process of socialisation. Hence, to address the issue under discussion, the need to work with families, schools and communities is of great importance, so that they can actively participate in the process of gender re-socialisation. Mainstreaming a gender perspective from the family level require a comprehensive family -school community -partnerships. This suggests that, by the time students reach institutions of higher learning, they will have internalised new ways of moral development and undergone revised gender socialisation process that equally respects the girl child as the boy child.

Gender mainstreaming is not only about integrating gender into all programmes and public organisations, but starts from the family and society at large. Gender socialisation is a process that facilitates individuals develop, refine and learn gender norms, values and roles as they interact with key agents of socialisation, such as their family, and other social institutions (John, Stoebenau, Ritter, Edmeades & Balvin, 2017). Through this process, people understand what behaviours, beliefs, and lifestyles are acceptable to the community. Sanders (2017 p. 39) see school-community partnerships as the connections between schools and individuals, organisations and businesses that are forged to directly or indirectly promote students, social, emotional, physical and intellectual development.

In a similar manner, Mncube and Harber (2010) associated school-community partnership with parental involvement. The absence of *ubuntu* would result in undesirable outcomes in schools. The need to understand the *Hunhu/Ubuntu* concept as it also touches on leadership from the aspect of caring, sharing, respect and value for others. Would help maintain dignity in schools, institutions of higher learning and its communities.

Methodology

The methodology used for this study was desk-research. Desk research is a research technique mainly used to acquire information online, or from books, documents and reports by sitting at a desk searching {Co-operative Innovation Project (CIP 2016)}. Secondary or desk research is a research method that involves using already existing data. It is used to identify and select information about

a topic. In this paper, the methodology selected allowed the author to critically evaluate the topic's overall validity. Given that the study topic is on combating GBV in institutions of higher learning, the author sought to find frameworks through existing literature that would cater for and align with the approach and design for addressing the problem. Hence the study is located within the interpretive paradigm. Interpretivist theorists' idea is that knowledge (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018; Cresswell, 2018) is socially constructed and it is bounded by time, culture and the context in which it is found. Furthermore, there is general consensus that there is no one truth, but multiple realities exist and that people's actions are underpinned by their experiences. Within the interpretivists paradigm the researcher therefore strives to understand these experiences through understanding the interpretation and meanings given by the actors (Neuman, 2006).

7. Findings

The findings for this paper are drawn from review of existing data. Literature shows that unequal power relations is one of the issues that cause gender violence. The methodology adopted in this paper enabled the author to acquire relevant information that address the issues raised in this topic. It also helped to identify frameworks suitable for addressing the concerns raised. Hence, to be able to reduce gender-based violence in institutions of higher Learning, findings from literature shows that there is need to mainstream a gender perspective within the family, the school and the community. How this should be done is elaborated in the discussion section. Findings from Literature shows that there are structural inequalities that promote gender-based violence. A holistic approach to reducing GBV has been identified as critical. This suggests that the matter is not left to one person or one organisation, but requires team work. The need for justice in the way women and girls are treated has been noted. Findings from literature reveals that violence towards women and girls is often legitimised and sometimes ignored or fuelled by patriarchy, which is a social system that gives males superiority over women. That again is a source of problem. This is why for instance Gender and development approach has been identified in this paper as a framework suitable for addressing the topic. GAD focuses on social relations between men and women. The GAD approach seeks to correct systems and mechanisms that produce gender inequality by focusing not only on women, but looks at the social status of both. The need for adopting the concept of *hunhu/Ubuntu* has also been articulated. It recognises difference. The findings highlighted in this section will be elaborated further.

Discussion

As indicated earlier, GBV in tertiary institutions is not a new phenomenon (Graaff, 2021). Literature has also revealed that the challenge requires a synergistic approach as it will produce combined efforts to deal with the problem. While unequal power relations and the cultural values have been identified as the influencing factors of GBV, the issue of socialisation has gone under scrutiny as it either strengthens or disempowers an individual. It is the re-socialisation that is needed to over-come the influence of patriarchy. The GAD approach, identified as the enabling framework, emphasises correcting the systems and mechanisms that produce gender inequality. It augers well with the concept of gender mainstreaming since it aligns the whole social, cultural, economic and political system, beginning from the family. Mainstreaming gender is more than just integrating a gender perspective. It is about setting objectives related and relevant to gender issues and meeting their targets.

While there are policies that already exist in Zimbabwe, this paper advocates for, gender policies that have an action plan and time frames for evaluating progress on each unit within the chain, from the family to the highest-level institution, organisation, and the community. Gender focal persons play a major role in this particular chain or system. Drawing on Muzvidziwa's (2012) study of how women school heads handled the problem of indiscipline in schools, creativity and innovation were identified as important in coping with challenging situations.

Women's nurturing skills played a very important role in turning around schools that were experiencing high levels of indiscipline. The author in this paper argues that the concept *Hunhu/Ubuntu* should be part of the discussion as issues of GBV are being articulated. In this case, family-school-community partnerships become a shared responsibility and reciprocal process whereby schools and other community agencies and organizations engage families in meaningful discussions including culturally appropriate ways of reshaping children. When the mentioned process is implemented, a holistic approach would be achieved. In addition, holding awareness campaigns by the gender activists would motivate families take initiative and actively support their children's moral development and learning. The campaigns would influence schools and community organizations to be active partners in their children's school experience. Once the foundation is strengthened in terms of moral development, gender violence in institutions of higher learning would be a thing of the past.

Kabeer, (cited in Mawere & Chauraya, 2015), acknowledged that there are different types of gender policies, some are gender neutral while others are gender specific, and yet, others are even gender-blind policies. With the influence of the revised gender policies, schools, parents and communities would rally together in shaping both the girl and the boy child into a well behaved and disciplined individual who respects his/her own body and that of others. Thus, sexual harassment would be reduced and GBV, eliminated. In that way, the importance of involving community and parents would not be over emphasised, or taken for granted. More important to note, is that the school leaders cannot achieve anything without the support of both the teachers and the community together with the pupils themselves. Hence, the relevance of the GAD framework in transforming the nation is of great importance. Combating GBV in institutions of higher learning cannot be achieved in one day. However, achieving excellence in academia would be influenced by comprehensive programmes that generate good behaviour at both primary and secondary schools and thus Hunhu/Ubuntu comes into play.

Conclusion

The approach to combat GBV involves a long-term process, and hence should be implemented with periodic evaluations and feedback from focal persons as mentioned before. Gender policies should be revised to improve the reporting structures and toughen the penalties for the perpetrators. Gender awareness campaigns such as orientations and mid-semester reminders are done through public lectures and seminars. Continuous empowerment by both lecturers and students is necessary. Thus, with combined efforts, GBV will be reduced and combated.

Recommendations

Equality of opportunity should be practiced from foundation by recognising difference between a girl and a boy child and sharing resources according to the needs and not wants.

Parents and the community should develop a sense of justice, that promotes fairness and justice in rearing their children. Policies should be amended to cater for the framework that empower both girls and boys at an early age. Once mature, the individual will not suffer the effects of lack of empowerment such as being abusive/abused.

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