



A quest for a phenomenological perspective in the fight against gender-based violence in Zimbabwean tertiary institutions: A replica of Tamar and Amnon saga.

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Published online, 2023

Preamble

Violence against women and men is considered a grave violation of human rights. Gender-based violence can occur anywhere around the world regardless of age, race, religion and even academic qualification. Gender-based violence includes any conduct which may lead to psychological, physical, emotional or sexual harm to men or women. In its worst form, gender-based violence may lead to death. Considering the prevalence of gender-based violence in various facets of life, tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe cannot be regarded as immune to this phenomenon. Drawing from the Amnon and Tarma saga, the aim of this study develops an understanding of the experiences of gender-based violence victims. The study utilised the qualitative research design in which participants' perceptions, feelings and opinions were explored. The paper posits that female students are subjected to gender-based violence due to lack of information on gender-based violence, short time benefits, trust, persuasive and manipulative means. There is a need to come up with mechanisms which promote sharing of experiences with the hope for justice, and healing, for the benefit of gender-based violence victims.

KEYWORDS: Phenomenological, Gender-Based, Violence, 11 Samuel 13:1-22



Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a phenomenon that affect societies globally regardless of race or economic status. It is the most pervasive, yet least recognized human rights violation in the world (Heise, Ellsberg & Gottmoeller, 2002). Regardless of the availability and implementation of international and national policies aimed at curbing GBV, it remains a global pandemic as the problem continues to be pervasive in almost all societies. Zimbabwe is among states which are experiencing this phenomenon. In the case of Zimbabwe, GBV has infiltrated almost all facets of the community such as families, churches, workplaces, schools and tertiary institutions.

Tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe are not immune to GBV. Mpofu (2013) argues that despite numerous interventions to curb GBV in general, cases of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse are escalating in tertiary institutions. This unacceptable state of affairs has far-reaching negative consequences to both victims of GBV and the nation at large. Evidence suggests that those who experienced such violence may grow up to repeat the behaviour that they have 'learned' and regard it as acceptable (Bhebhe, 2017).

Students, as human beings have the right to be protected from all forms of violence. In the case of Zimbabwean tertiary institutions, it is beyond doubt that young people have different experiences of GBV depending on their sex, gender, identity, and context. Hence, there is need to interrogate these different experiences as they come from students themselves. It is against this background that this paper calls for a phenomenological approach to the issue of GBV in tertiary institutions.

The biblical story of Tamar and Amnon, as recorded in the book of 11 Samuel 13:1-22, presents an eye opener on a number of significant realities on issues around GBV and the experiences of the victim, the perpetrator, the community around the place of violence and responsible authorities. GBV in tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe, is therefore, studied using phenomenology from which experiences of female student's narrative are drawn and taken as representative of lived experiences of students in tertiary Institutions in Zimbabwe.

Theoretical Framework –the GAD approach

The study is couched in Goode's (1971) Resource Theory (RT) which suggests that violence is an ultimate resource used to derive power within relationships. Goode (1971) argued that individuals lacking other means of power are more likely to rely on violence to achieve greater power within the relationship. This suggests that power is a weapon that can be used as means to achieve that which one may desire.

Victims of GBV are often abused by people who use physical, economic or any other form of power to subdue their victims. This in turn has long-term emotional and psychological consequences that affect victims' abilities to perform routine tasks effectively (Gorde et al., 2004). Negative psychological outcomes associated with traumatic event exposure include higher risk of psychiatric disorder (Kilpatrick, Saunders, Best, & Von, 1987) including post-traumatic stress disorder. Health problems such as chronic pain, migraines, speech disorders, sexually transmitted infections, ulcers, pelvic pain, intestinal problems are associated with psychological and physical abuse (Coker, Smith, Bethea, King, & McKeown, 2000). Injuries caused by the physical assaults may result in doctor's visits or hospitalisations (Crane & Costantino, 2003).

Goode's (1971) Resource Theory suites very well the discussion of GBV in the sense that it opens up new perspectives for how to understand women and men in the contexts of tertiary institutes in Zimbabwe. Tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe are a community, hence, Goode's Resource Theory presents a much clearer picture of how some people rely, to some degree, on force or threat of force to abuse others. This force can promote GBV to some extent. However, the assumption that men resort to force when they lack other means to get what they want is subject to criticism. It is not always the case that men are the ones who force and outclass women. Women can also have equal or more force to stand up against men. To that effect GBV against female students can be out of other factors besides force for some students might be more powerful physically or economically than males in tertiary institutions.

The theory is a more sociological explanation of interaction between individuals in a given context. Therefore, it provides an insight into how female students can be exposed to GBV in tertiary institutions. However, there are cases where those with resources also use power to obtain what they might want. This observation

presents a weakness of the theory. To a greater extent, RT is appropriate for interrogation of gender-based violence in tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe

Unpacking GBV in Zimbabwe

GBV is considered a grave violation of human rights. According to Chari (2008), GBV is the most extreme expression of unequal gender relations in society and one of the most widespread violations of human rights. GBV affects women, girls, men and boys. It involves the fear of violence, acts or comments which are sexual, physical or psychological. In this context, such acts may result in physical, sexual or psychological harm to students in institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe. Bhebhe (2017) states that GBV can be a result of gender norms and stereotypes enforced by unequal power dynamics. Thabo (2009) posits that GBV involves any act or conduct that may cause death or physical, psychological, or sexual harm to another – whether in the public or private sphere – that is done solely based on gender.

Violation of one's rights in the form of GBV is something which a student at any tertiary institution can suffer from while in private and /or in public. In this context, public places may include college grounds, lecture rooms or assembly points. Private places may include offices or student hostels. All these places can be fertile grounds for GBV.

When it comes to causes of GBV, there is no single factor that can be regarded as the driver in tertiary institutions. For Nhende (2011), there are many drivers of GBV, and the unequal balance of power between girls, women, boys and men is the key root cause. If not addressed properly, tertiary institutions can implicitly legitimise, and reinforce, harmful gender norms. Some violent environments both in the lecture rooms, and outside, if left unattended could further fuel gender-based violence. Deer (2019) is of the opinion that the patriarchal nature which promotes male dominance within any learning environment breeds GBV. Therefore, some people or groups risk subjection to GBV than others. As such female students in tertiary institutions may be more vulnerable to GBV than their male counterparts. For that reason, much focus of this paper was on the experiences of female students in tertiary institutions in relation to GBV.

1. Conceptual Framework

The lenses of phenomenology

A phenomenological study describes the meaning of several individuals and their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology was developed in philosophy by Edmund Husserl. Husserl (1962) developed a philosophy designed to explain how human beings get to a better understand experiences in a much more detailed manner.

The motivation behind Husserl's work was to interrogate a phenomenon, as experienced from the first-person point of view. In this case, the individual's experience comes first. With time Husserl's ideas were subjected to criticism for improvement by his predecessors. According to Husserl (1962), ideas and meanings that individuals develop are a direct result of their unique experiences, interactions, and reflections about worldly things. Therefore, two experiences from two different people cannot be regarded as the same.

Husserl (1962) argued that there is a need to interpret and draw meaning from these experiences differently. In light of this, the experiences of victims of GBV tertiary in institutions vary from individual to individual. From a phenomenological perspective, each case of GBV has to be treated as unique since it constitutes a totally different experience. When viewing GBV from a phenomenological perspective, there is a need to get the experiences from the victim's point of view. It is not enough to rely on reported or interpreted experiences. Hence, the call for phenomenological lenses when combating GBV in tertiary institutions. Husserl (1962) maintained that in order to understand our own subjective meanings of things, we must explore our experiences and our intentionality with those objects. Husserl (1962) further indicated that exploring our intentionality often includes disengaging ourselves from our natural and default attitude about objects and constructs, and moving toward a phenomenological attitude of self-reflection (Husserl [1931] 1962).

Interrogation of GBV using phenomenological lenses appeals for consciousness of the fact that there are certain societal customs, expectations and cultural standards which fuel violence under the cover of safety, security, and justice. These accepted ideas perpetuate the wheels of violence and in turn placing others at an advantage to manipulate those who might be within their reach. Deer (2019) asserts that in order to put a stop to this millennia-long cycle of violence, one must change protocols, customs, and laws that degrade people to feel inferior. When studying a phenomenon, Husserl proposed what he referred to as phenomenological epoch –meaning to stay away from or abstain.

Moustakas (1994) goes on to explain that the phenomenological epoch calls for a researcher to set aside prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about the phenomena in preparation for deriving new knowledge. To that effect, there is a need to set aside ideas, information, fears and what we already know about gender-based violence in tertiary institutions as we get experiences from each individual student. One may have been a student at a tertiary institution and might as well have experienced or witnessed GBV. However, the phenomenological epoch calls for staying away from those experiences during the time of studying a new experience. The meaning of the situation as it is given in the participants' experience has to be observed.

Giorgi (1997) says there is a need to consider the process of phenomenological reduction. This means to 'bracket' past knowledge about a phenomenon in order to encounter it freshly and describe it precisely as it is intuited (or experienced). It also means to consider what is given precisely as it is given. However, Edmund Husserl concepts on phenomenology promoted other academics to come up with other disciplines through which one can refine sensemaking in human relationships, interactions, and other phenomena. Because of the redefinition of phenomenology by these academics, several different types of phenomenology were born. Of these types, the most controversial and significant schools of thought in phenomenology are two core and highly interrelated forms which are existential phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology (Sariieddine, 2018).

Existential phenomenology was initiated and inspired by Martin Heidegger, and it mainly focused on the study of concrete human existence, including experiences wherein one invokes free choice or action in concrete situations (Sarpere, 1999). For Sariieddine (2018), hermeneutical phenomenology studies interpretative structures of experience, that is, how people understand and engage things around them in the human world, including ourselves and others. Han-Georg Gadamer, a student of Heidegger, made substantial contributions to the rise of hermeneutical phenomenology. Gadamer emphasised that one can only achieve a genuine understanding of meaning through dialogue and with an open mind to the opinion of others (McConnell, 2009) Therefore, sensemaking of a phenomenon cannot avoid the influence of the researcher's preconception or already existing ideas and knowledge. Hence, understanding is a mixture or an interface of shared meanings drawn from both parties. Hence, each person brings a history and adds value to a research environment when they begin to

study that environment. It is impossible to have a researcher who just observes, understands, or analyses a situation or phenomenon without attaching personal beliefs and thoughts about those particular phenomena.

There is a forward and backward movement which is done through questioning, analysing, and re-examining text, structures of phenomena; this is called the hermeneutic circle. When studying GBV in tertiary institutions, there is need give the victim a chance to freely share the experience without any form of interference and at the same time, dialogue to fuse and share meanings.

In the shoes of Tamar

Bible stories can be contextualised to suit the prevailing social life. Contextual bible study is one of the ways in which the scripture can be brought to life through our own experiences as we live today. Contextual bible study opens up a chance to share experiences all in an effort to learn, prevent, stop and seek healing. The book of 2 *Samuel 13:1-22* records the story of Tamar, the daughter of King David, who was a victim of GBV. Tamar's story presents a rape which has in it elements of both incest and GBV. The story in 2 *Samuel 13:1-22* unveils a heart-breaking incident of an innocent girl who was abused by her own brother with the help of his friend Jonadab. This is an encounter of men aiding and abetting the perpetrator of the crime, and a male conspiracy of silence after the act. As earlier on alluded in this paper, men are seen to be at play in the commission of GBV. In the last part of the story, there is a raw form of retribution. However, this brutal act of revenge is done without the involvement of Tamar. Agency and voice are both taken away from Tamar. The father to all three of the principal characters in this story mourns by wailing and weeping bitterly not for the victim, but for Amnon and later on Absalom.

The story of Tamar fits well to the discussion on GBV in tertiary institutions and phenomenological perspectives. Tamar was sexually assaulted, not by a stranger, but by someone she knew. GBV in tertiary institutions can be perpetrated by people who interact with victims constantly. These are people who survivors know and these could be fellow students, staff members or anyone who is no stranger to them. Tamar was sexually abused not in a desolate remote place at the hands of a stranger, but by a member of her own family in his home. GBV can take place anywhere within campus.

Tamar was exploited through one of her most vulnerable traits-her kindness, her culturally instilled obedience and her upbringing to take care of her sick brother. A gesture can be executed in good spirit and good intentions by a college student. However, like in the case of Tamar, the reward may end up being GBV from the recipient of the good gesture. Performing known and culturally accepted duties may end up exposing one to GBV. Through obedience to what was expected Tamar ended up a victim of GBV.

Tamar said 'No' to the advances of her ruthless brother Amnon. However, despite her clear position, the 'No' was not respected. Rachel (2021) asserts that Tamar's voice is the only female voice representing the voice of women whom we hear protesting the rape. Tamar's voice of protest to rape fell on deaf ears. Amnon fails to listen to her pleas and proceeds to rape her. After the violent physical act, Amnon continues to shame her by sending her away from his house, bolting the door behind her. Soon after raping Tamar, Amnon is seized with hatred of her. These words pained Tamar more than the act of rape itself for she pleaded with him not to further shame her through this way. In verse 16, Amnon sends his commands to send "this one" out. For Rachel (2021), an object of loathing, the woman is reduced to the demonstrative pronoun "this" when she ceases to satisfy, she is cast away. The developments soon after the rape of Tamar give a glance of the experiences of both players after GBV.

Tamar publicly displays her grief by putting ash on her head and tearing her beautiful dress; a dress fit for a princess. As a way to demonstrate publicly that she had been violated, Tamar showed signs of mourning through putting ashes on her head, putting on a torn garment and wailing. After suffering GBV, Tamar was in a state which called for maximum support, security, comfort and healing. Perhaps one of the most heart-breaking experiences is that when Tamar sought help, she was told to hush it up. Her own blood brother, Absalom, told her to keep quiet. Absalom suspects the cause of her disgrace and takes her into his house, while David only turns red with anger, but does no more.

White (2007) is of the view that the process for achieving justice and restitution was taken out of Tamar's hands entirely and carried forward by her brother. There is no record of other women in this story as having a voice or a role in coming to Tamar's aid. After the rape incident, it suddenly became a men's affair until the end when it was Tamar's abuser for whom her father mourned not for her (*11 Samuel 13:31*), and Tamar's voice is not heard again. Tamar lives in the house of Absalom, her brother, as a bitter woman. She is silenced by her

full brother, Absalom, and lives the rest of her life forlorn in the house. It is unfortunate to note that the end of Tamar's story happens without her.

Ammon's motive to rape may vary depending on the angle from which the story is read from. Although the act may be regarded as rape, sexual harassment, battery or the sexual abuse phenomenological lenses are interested in the experiences of Tamar as she presents them. There is also a need to look at prevention as well as intervention and healing will. Tamar's narrative presents acts of passion, lust or temper; power and aggression often related to GBV. There are young women in tertiary institutions who are in the shoes of Tamar. The most important question is: How are these female students viewed using phenomenological lenses?

Methodology

Population and Sample

Purposeful sampling was utilised in this study. Purposive sampling is common in qualitative research. The researcher selects individuals and sites that can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study (Creswell, 2007). According to Spradley (1979), the ideal participants are those who know the information required, are willing to reflect on the phenomena of interest, have the time, and are willing to participate. The researcher interviewed a sample of 20 female college students who have experienced gender- based violence while in institutions of higher learning. These students were selected from teacher's colleges in Zimbabwe.

For ethical reasons and maintain anonymity of respondents, pseudo names were used in this study where data lined to them was reported. This helped to maintain confidentiality on the part of participants for some of them feared further victimisation and stigmatisation. It was noted that some of the victim-female students continued to have contact with their perpetrators.

Research design

The qualitative tradition of inquiry used in this study was phenomenology. Polkinghorne (1989) argues that phenomenology focuses on the exploration of the structures of consciousness in human experiences. Phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The study used an Interpretative (hermeneutic) Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) design to explore the lived

experiences of women. This method was because it is very good at bringing out what is usually hidden in human experience and human relations.

The IPA design requires interpretation of the narratives provided by participants, and the researcher's expertise in terms of knowledge which is regarded as important. The IPA design is known to go beyond the descriptive, in looking for the meaning hidden in standard life practices. The use of IPA enabled understanding of how individuals make sense of GBV experience.

This methodology was chosen because phenomenology enables understanding of the challenge from the lived experience. This understanding is possible when analysing, and interpreting, the subjectivity stored in the body through language. Speech interpretation and understanding are interconnected. This is so because one does not exist without the other; they enable finding the essence of the phenomenon, and therefore unveiling it.

In phenomenological research, the interview is used to explore experiences, narrated in depth, in order to understand the phenomenon being studied. The formation of reality enabled revealing the fact lived by the experience narrated in the perception of victims of gender-based violence. The interview questions were carefully constructed to capture the lived experience of each participant through open-ended, descriptive questions which ask about GBV.

Kvale (1996) identified five criteria for an ideal qualitative interview. Firstly, the answers should be spontaneous, rich, specific and relevant. Secondly, the interviewer's questions should be short and the interviewee's responses long. Thirdly, the interviewer should follow up and clarify participant meanings. Fourthly, the ideal interview is interpreted throughout the process; that is, the interviewer is engaged in analyzing and interpreting the data as it is produced. Because of that, the interviewer is in a position to verify those interpretations within the interview context. Open-ended questionnaires were used to help tap information which participants may have willingly or unwillingly omitted during interviews.

GBV: Responses from selected female students at tertiary institutions.

During interviews, a number of issues and concerns were raised about the experiences of tertiary institutions female students. Four thematic areas emerged from the interviews namely traumatizing experiences of female students on

GBV in different forms, shame humiliation and confusion, separation and distress and healing and support.

Traumatising experiences of female students on GBV in different forms

Traumatising experiences of gender-based violence in tertiary institutions is one of the major themes in this study. From interviews conducted, it shows that most of the participants had experienced different types of GBV which in turn has caused serious terrifying experiences. These forms of GBV include physical, emotional and sexual violence. Data collected from participants revealed that participants experienced sexual violence. Sexual violence experienced by female students was perpetrated by such people as their fellow students they might be in a relationship with or by people they respect like college staff members. GBV in sexual form includes acts such as being touched on body parts without their consent, forced sex, and sexual harassment. GBV in the form of sexual abuse was observed in the following response from Tasha (pseudo name) interviewed 19 June 2022:

My boyfriend invited me to his room one weekend when most people had gone out. As someone whom I trusted, I accepted since I had seen him several times in similar settings and little did I know that he had planned to have sex with me. I tried to fight for my release but failed.

The attacker proved persuasive and manipulative, and the victims of violence perceived themselves as cornered. Oftentimes, female students adopted a way of being and existence that did not permit any type of confrontation. This view of confrontation involves awareness of the lived phenomenon. The reason why most female students end up being victims to sexual GBV is that they innocently trust their partners especially if they are both students. Because of such trust, they fall prey to GBV from people they trust. People whom female students trust include lectures and other college staff members. However, some of these trusted members end up exposing female students to GBV. This was reflected in the response given by Tinotenda (pseudonym) interviewed 11 June 2022:

I regret the day I visited Mr Dombo's office (not real name). The purpose of my visit was to submit my late assignment. The set condition for acceptance of my assignment was that I had to be intimate with him. I was traumatised by the fact that he made the request while touching my thighs.

Female students may be exposed to GBV in exchange for good grades or any other favours. When it comes to sex-related GBV, victims are abused by people they know as discussed above. Like in the biblical story relating Tamar and

Amnon, Tamar was sexually abused by her own brother Amnon. She fell prey to GBV because she trusted her brother and did not suspect foul play. For these female students, the abuser was an evil manipulator who entirely consumed them by imposing intimidation, humiliation and, thus, the feeling of fear.

Threatening the abuser provokes in the victim attitudes of subordination, numbness or even aggression. Fear often affected actions, preventing the female students from transforming their experiences. It appears to transform the victims into constant hostages of the violence. Sexual harassment involves passing of comments or jokes of a sexual nature, e-mails or texts with sexual content and repeated requests for dates.

Emotionally-traumatising experiences as a result of GBV affect female students to a large extent. These come in the form of some public comments and stigma attached to them. Data gathered from participants revealed that they feel that male students generally believe that female students are in love with some old married man who takes care of their upkeep while in college. Gamuchirai (pseudonym) interviewed 15 May 2022 shares:

At times I try to avoid passing through a corridor or a place where male students will... gather. You at times hear them openly commenting that 'Mrs Blessers' is passing. They even loudly shout that the ancestor's side chick is here.

There are reports that old married men target female students at tertiary institutions so as to exploit them sexually. These rich old men are referred to as 'blessers' or 'ancestors'. Ancestors implies that they are too old to be their grandfathers. From data gathered, these old men buy clothes, food and flash cash to female students who at times might be going through difficult times financially due to family backgrounds. However, female students are exposed to GBV which terrifies them when they are seen holding food or being dropped by a car. The conclusion that fellow male students draw is that wearing smart fashion and just showing signs of a good life while at college is a result of a relationship with old men. This is reflected by comments and name-calling which they make and such comments affects female students emotionally. Female students are belittled and insulted in public and this form of GBV offend them.

Gender-based violence affects both women's physical and mental health. For example, the physical effects reported could be both short and long term, as a result of abuse at the individual and social/community level. Participants described many health problems such as acquisition of STI and/or HIV. Women

also reported the negative impact of violence on their daily social engagement with others. For instance, according to the discussants, as a result of some form of discrimination from their community, female experienced loneliness, fear, and depression.

Shame, humiliation and confusion

The experience of GBV is one which one cannot easily be forgotten or ignore regardless of time. From the data gathered, female students in tertiary institutions who at one point were subjected to GBV constantly look back to the experience and try to make sense out of it. These experiences vary from individual to individual and this influence severity and impact. However, most of the victims of GBV have time to revisit the site of experience psychologically. Mambeu (2001), who comments on victims of GBV, says that these women indicated that upon looking back it was easy to see the signs of abuse but at the time there were many reasons not to admit to themselves or to others. It is difficult for them to accept that they were subjected to GBV by people they either trust or know. Zenzo (pseudonym) interviewed 13 June 2022:

I find it difficult to accept that the person I trusted most sexually abused me. What bothers me is that every time I demand an explanation from him, he insists that he did so because he loves me so much to the extent of failing to control himself.

GBV can be misinterpreted as love and this has devastating effects to both the victim and the perpetrator. The perpetrator may continue to subject one to GBV in the name of expressing love through sex. The victim risks accepting GBV as a sign of love and she may continue being exposed to it without reporting. Failing to report GBV means that the survivor won't be able seek healing, counselling or any other form of help. This might be due to the fact that the victim won't be aware that her rights have been violated.

The danger of failing to realise that one has been subjected to GBV is that one may just decide to take care of the situation alone and exclude other people. One participant Thembie (pseudonym) interviewed 13 July 2022 stated:

I decided to keep whatever happens to me to myself because telling a friend would not help me much. I feel that by telling someone, I would have told everyone and I know people will attach their own interpretation to my personal experiences. I know most of them would lay the blame on me.

Shame, humiliation and embarrassment are common feelings which grip victims of GBV. This feeling usually comes after the act of GBV. Just like the

feeling which gripped Tamar after abuse, most victims of gender-based violence feel low, rejected and used. However, Tarma had to publicly display that she had been subjected to gender-based violence by putting ashes on her head, putting on a torn dress and wailing. This meant that if there were a healing mechanism in place Tamar could have been helped.

Tarma's experiences after GBV are different from what came out of the interviews during the study. In this study, most of them showed that they are not free to share their experiences with anybody. This reluctance to share experiences with others emanates from a number of factors. Usually, one will be trying to make friends and relatives think that all is well by trying to make it appear as if no challenges are being experienced. The other reason may be that one will avoid making those who know about her relationship worry. These people may include sisters or mothers. The victims know that once these relatives realise or know that the student is being exposed to GBV, they become worried and fear for her. Hence, she will try by all means to manage the situation on her own.

In the event that GBV is coming from a respected person, like a lecturer or any other staff member at a tertiary institution, there are also reasons why victims are not prepared to share as shown in the data collected from participants. Vimbisio (pseudonym) interviewed 1 August 2022 said:

I had this feeling of shame and embarrassment after Mr Haka (not real name) had forced sex with me in exchange for a pass mark in my dissertation. Although I had this feeling, I could not share the experience with anyone because I also wanted the passing mark.

There are incidences where female students are subjected to GBV not by force or coercion but out circumstances. They might be getting favours ranging from passing projects, assignments and also to have extra favours like being in a sports team traveling to some places away from the college. Though students may be aware that this is pure GBV, they may not share or report the experiences because they will be getting some benefits after the act. Shame is a powerful emotion and one that often leads to isolation. Shame was a common reason given as to why GBV was kept hidden and even when committed. Generally, female students in tertiary institutions took responsibility for the GBV, feeling like it was their fault, or just due to the fear of being labelled. Instead of placing the blame on the perpetrators of GBV, female students took on feelings of guilt, shame and embarrassment as if they had done something wrong.

Separation and distress

After having gone through GBV, female students reported that they were isolated. Isolation in this case may be in the form of physical isolation or even emotional isolation. There are cases where participants revealed that they suffered both physical and emotional isolation. Participants described feeling isolated from family and friends. Rendani (pseudonym) interviewed 23 July 2022 said:

From the day I went in front of other students when we were in the great hall and fellow students started to shout “mavaona here slay queen vanetsa patown” (have you seen the slay queen who is currently hot in town), I decided never to be on the forefront of any activity at college.

Sexual harassment in public is a form of GBV that really leads to withdrawal on the part of female student teachers. By virtue of being physically withdrawn from fellow students, and family, due to the effects of GBV, female students can actually deprive themselves of people who can be supportive to them in their different situations. They end up finding it difficult to access help for their healing. In Tamar’s narrative, the last time one hears of her is when she was wailing after being raped. From there on, she was separated and went to live in her brother’s house and never to hear from her again. The moment she was separated was the last moment her voice was heard. The story ended with her out of the picture.

In the event that GBV might be perpetrated by someone they are in love with, some participants complained that they will be forced to spend time with the abuser in the guise of love. Participants revealed that they would be discouraged from spending time with either their friends or families. The perpetrators of GBV fear that their victims might divulge GBV they will be experiencing to friends.

Anxiety, depression and anger are common feelings of tertiary institutions female students who experienced GBV. Psychological distress results from such feelings. Low self-confidence and low self-esteem result from being exposed to GBV. Yemurai (pseudonym) interviewed 25 July 2022 said:

I boiled with anger when Madala (not real name) touched my private parts. He had just asked for a hug as someone I know at college and we are all tennis players. I did not know that he was up to something foolish when he asked for a hug after the session.

The long-term effects of GBV are significant and long lasting. Those who experienced GBV especially when they are totally unaware of its likelihood

were affected most. Whenever they face a similar situation in life, they are likely to behave awkwardly. For example, one may become suspicious to all men to the extent of avoiding hugging even at church. Some female students revealed that they are now even scared of being in a room with a man, even if he is a relative.

Healing and support

Victims of any form of violence need counselling so that they can heal from the experience. GBV has physical, psychological and emotional consequences. Therefore, healing and support is another theme that emerged from the interviews. It is important to realise that for one to be able to be helped, those around them must be aware that there is a problem. Therefore, only those participants who share GBV experiences had to seek healing and support. Data collected indicated that female students at tertiary institutions delayed moves to seek counselling. One participant stated that:

I only decided to seek help from a counselling session after the person who has been subjecting to GBV had gone out of my life.

As much as these students knew the benefits of counselling after experiencing GBV, they had their own reasons not to rush to seek healing. As long as they were still gaining benefits, such as good marks from lectures or good food from the dining hall, they did not try to find healing and support services. Distress caused by GBV caused stress in the life of female students.

Some participants stated that they went into counselling because they felt like they could not handle things on their own any longer. Students delayed seeking counselling because they felt the situation was still under control and that they believed that the situation could remedy itself for the good. Some participants showed that they were feeling stressed and overwhelmed and wanted to talk with someone about all the difficulties in their life. Diana (pseudonym) Interviewed 10 August 2022 said:

When I made up my mind to go and seek help, I told myself that the person who can help me in this situation is a female. I could not go and try to get help from men because I was put into this stressful situation by a man.

Most participants felt that the kind of help they got from female counsellors made them feel easy and relaxed. They were given an opportunity to tell the whole experience. The counsellors were kind and friendly. This gave the student-teacher an opportunity to tell the experience without fear of shame or

embarrassment. This helped them when it comes to healing as most of them said that they felt relieved soon after being given that opportunity to share. They were given an opportunity to tell the experiences at their own pace. Words from the counsellor only came while they were already on the road to recovery. Generally, participants agreed that availability of a right counsellor facilitated their process of getting their lives back on track.

Conclusion

Phenomenology is a study that focuses on the essence of consciousness based on first-person accounts and experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenology focuses on how we understand and engage things around us in our human world, including ourselves and others. Taking this hermeneutic phenomenological perspective, it can be argued that GBV in tertiary institutions involve actions well thought of and planned by those who abuse female students. GBV against female students in tertiary institutions is mostly perpetrated by male figures they know or those whom they respect. GBV has far reaching effects on victims.

Most female students who fall prey to GBV delay seeking counselling due to a number of reasons. However, those who eventually receive counselling got healed and by the process of getting their life back on track as facilitated. However, some suffered, and continue to suffer, gender-based violence and shame. These need to undergo therapy and reconciliation in order to renew their psychological and emotional strength, thereby stopping the cycle of violence and shame. Although the story of Tamar was recorded in a context totally different from modern tertiary institutions, the experience represents the experiences of female students in tertiary institutions today.

Recommendations

The study proposes the following recommendations:

1. There is a need to educate various stakeholders in tertiary institutions including female students on GBV. This form of education can be delivered by lecturers. GBV can be adopted as a cross cutting theme in those courses which are faculty wide.
2. Voices of victims of GBV have to be considered by responsible authorities at tertiary institutions. These voices should be involved when coming up with mitigation strategies. Guided by both national and tertiary institution policies on GBV, there is need to take appropriate action to any reported case of GBV.
3. There is a need to give female students a chance to speak of their experiences.

4. There is a need for tertiary institutions administrators to attend to the voice of female students who are victims of GBV. Once a female student open up to share experiences of GBV through counselling sessions or any other platform, action has to be taken by college responsible authorities to attend the victim.
5. Implementation of GBV policies in tertiary institutions in a manner which deter would be perpetrators.
6. Authorities in tertiary institutions must be supportive to female students who suffer GBV through provision of healing mechanisms.

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Interviews (Pseudonyms)

Gamuchirai	Interview, 15 May, 2022
Tinotenda,	Interview, 11 June, 2022
Zenzo,	Interview, 13 June, 2022
Tasha,	Interview, 19 June, 2022
Thembe,	Interview, 13 July, 2022
Renadani,	Interview, 23 July, 2022
Yemurai,	Interview, 25 July, 2022
Vimbiso,	Interview 1 August, 2022