



INTERVENTIONS TO
PREVENT AND TACKLE
**GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE, DRUG ABUSE,
STIS AND UNINTENDED PREGNANCIES**

IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS,
IN MASVINGO PROVINCE

Edited by
Vongai Zvidenga Nyawo
Tendayi Maravanyika
Clarice Princess Mudzengi



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INSTITUTIONS IN MASVINGO PROVINCE**

GREAT ZIMBABWE UNIVERSITY / UNESCO

Book Project

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**Interventions to Prevent and Tackle Gender-Based Violence, Drug Abuse, STIs and
Unintended Pregnancies in Tertiary Institutions in Masvingo Province**



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Acknowledgements

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SUB-THEME: GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

CHAPTER 1: Interventions to Prevent and Tackle Gender-Based Violence, Drug Abuse, STIS and Unintended Pregnancies in Tertiary Institutions in Masvingo Province: An Introduction

Nyawo, V. Z; Mudzengi, C. P and Maravanyika, T

Why this book?

This book project contains papers presented at the Great Zimbabwe University / UNESCO conference on ‘Interventions to Prevent and Tackle Gender-Based Violence, Drug Abuse, STIS and Unintended Pregnancies in Tertiary Institutions in Masvingo Province’. The conference was held on the 29th of August 2024 at the Robert Mugabe School of Heritage and Education, Great Zimbabwe University. A total of 56 papers were presented by contributors from 16 institutions that included: Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo Polytechnic, Midlands State University, University of Johannesburg, Zimbabwe Gender Commission, Africa University, University of Eswatini, Bondolfi Teachers College, University of Namibia, Chinhoyi University of Technology, Women University in Africa, University of Zimbabwe, Mpilo Center of Excellence, Zimbabwe Open University, Lupane State University, Zhejiang Gongshang University and others. The audience consisted of students, lecturers and non-academic staff from diverse institutions. Prof B Chazovachii (Acting PVC IBDSP) delivered welcome remarks on behalf of the esteemed Vice - Chancellor, Prof Bishop Rungano Jonas Zvobgo.

The conference presentations took place in 4 breakout groups – each breakout group had a total of 14 presenters. A panel discussion on ‘Gender-based violence (GBV) and drug and substance abuse in tertiary institutions’ was organized towards the end of the conference. Panel members included: Mr Redemption Chivorese – Saywhat? Prof H. Zirima – GZU Deputy Dean Simon Mazorodze School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Mr O. Simbo - GZU Dean of Students, Dr E. Zvobgo – GZU Director Nehanda Gender Center. The panel presentations raised educative discussions by listeners. Selected papers edited and peer reviewed are published in this book under Dzimbahwe.

Background

UNESCO supports Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions (HTEIs) to improve students’ access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) through the O3 PLUS project. Through the implementation of the project, institutions in Masvingo have highlighted gender-based violence (GBV), drug and substance abuse, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancies as major challenges that affect students. In light of this, it is important to come up with solutions to tackle these challenges. HTEIs are facing multiple and different forms of GBV, drug and substance abuse, STIs and unintended pregnancies, and on many occasions, the incidences include more than one of these socio-medical ills. While HTEIs are making efforts to tackle these challenges, research evidence is required to respond to the different ways with which they are now happening. Gender based violence is now going online, drug and substance abuse is now concealed, STIs are becoming more rampant and unintended pregnancies are continuing unabated though contraceptives are readily available. This conference sought to receive novel ideas of interventions that could be adopted by

Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions together with their partners to prevent and tackle the aforementioned ills.

Themes for the call

Abstracts were invited from students, researchers and academics on the following sub-themes in relation to the HTEI environment in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe.

Gender-based violence (GBV)

- Forms and prevalence of GBV in HTEIs in Masvingo Province
- Mechanisms for the prevention of GBV in HTEIs in Masvingo Province
- Strategies for tackling different forms of GBV in HTEIs in Masvingo Province

Drug and substance abuse

- Prevalence of drug and substance abuse in HTEIs in Masvingo Province,
- Prevention strategies that can be adopted by HTEIs in Masvingo Province,
- Strategies to tackle drug peddling, abuse and addictions among students and staff in HTEIs in Masvingo Province

Sexually Transmitted infections (STIs)

- Prevalence of STIs (including HIV) in HTEIs in Masvingo Province,
- Methods for preventing STIs among students in HTEIs in Masvingo Province,
- Mechanisms for tackling STIs among students in HTEIs in Masvingo Province.

Unwanted pregnancies

- Prevalence of unwanted pregnancies among female tertiary students in Masvingo Province,
- Available methods for preventing unwanted pregnancy for female students in Masvingo Province,
- Education and awareness raising initiatives to prevent unwanted pregnancy among students in HTEIs in Masvingo Province

The call was open to all researchers and institutions. However, preference was given to papers co-authored with students and staff of HTEIs that are involved in the O³PLUS project. Co-authors from different institutions, different disciplines and non-academic institutions were also encouraged to participate. All abstracts were reviewed by an inter-disciplinary team of reviewers from UNESCO and different HTEIs.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the research conducted by various stakeholders to tackle gender based violence, drug and substance abuse, STIs and unintended pregnancies in higher and tertiary institutions (HTIs) in Masvingo Province. These issues are critical as they influence performance of students in tertiary education institution and their success and failure later in life - post the education phase. The different studies employed a myriad of approaches including literature reviews, desk studies, action oriented approaches, qualitative and quantitative surveys and observations. Some studies were descriptive in nature and unveiled the breadth and depth of the problems faced around the four key focal themes. Others, in addition, implemented innovative interventions in an action-oriented-fashion (e.g. the use of ICTs in preventing gender based violence in this) and show case the pros and cons of the different strategies used under the four themes. From these studies, it is clear that there is hope for HTIs in Masvingo Province – what is

now needed going forward is for the successful innovations to be up scaled in the province and the nation at large.

Chapter 2 Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive issue that affects individuals, communities, and societies worldwide. In the context of higher and tertiary education institutions in Masvingo, Zimbabwe, GBV poses significant challenges and threatens the well-being and academic progress of students. This research explores the forms and prevalence of GBV in these educational settings and examine the implications for policy development and prevention strategies. The problem statement highlights the need to address GBV in higher and tertiary education institutions in Masvingo. Despite the potential long-term consequences of GBV on the physical, psychological, and educational well-being of students, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of the specific forms and prevalence of GBV within these institutions. This research endeavours to fill this gap by shedding light on the experiences and perceptions of students, faculty, and staff regarding GBV. The objectives of this study are twofold. The research sought to identify and analyse the various forms of GBV prevalent in higher and tertiary education institutions in Masvingo. This includes physical, sexual, emotional, and economic forms of violence. Secondly, the research aims to quantify the prevalence of GBV by examining the frequency and severity of incidents reported by participants. To achieve these objectives, a mixed-methods approach was employed. Quantitative data was collected through surveys distributed to a sample of students, faculty, and staff in higher and tertiary education institutions in Masvingo. This posture provides statistical insights into the prevalence and patterns of GBV. Additionally, qualitative data was gathered through interviews and focus group discussions to gain a deeper understanding of the forms, contexts, and impacts of GBV in these institutions. The findings of this research provide valuable insights into the specific forms and prevalence of GBV in high and tertiary education institutions in Masvingo. Additionally, the study sheds light on the underlying factors contributing to GBV, including social norms, power dynamics, and institutional factors. The implications of these findings will inform the development of evidence-based policies and prevention strategies to address GBV effectively within these educational settings. By understanding the forms and prevalence of GBV and its implications for high and tertiary education institutions in Masvingo, policymakers, educational institutions, and relevant stakeholders can work together to create safe and inclusive environments for all students. This research contributes to the broader efforts of eliminating GBV and ensuring that education becomes a transformative and empowering experience for all individuals.

Chapter 3 employed a phenomenological approach to explore how survivors of sexual harassment comprehend and interpret their lived experiences, perspectives, and understanding of the harassment. The research involved individuals who have experienced sexual harassment in different settings, including verbal, physical, or online harassment. Data was collected through self-testimonies, where participants shared their personal stories and experiences of being sexually harassed. In addition, focus group discussions were conducted to facilitate group interactions and generate collective insights into the impact and implications of sexual harassment within higher education institutions. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns, themes, and perspectives that emerged from the data. The findings of this study aimed to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on sexual harassment in higher education and provide valuable insights for institutions, policymakers, and stakeholders to develop effective strategies for prevention, intervention, and support for victims.

Chapter 4 explores innovative mechanisms for preventing gender-based violence (GBV) in higher and tertiary institutions in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe, by leveraging sentiment analysis and AI algorithms to analyze social media data. The researcher applied the content analysis research method and used data from Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram generated using Generative AI Engines. The study incorporated the concept of power dynamics and the intersectionality theory to include the aspects of social and technical dynamics in the research. Machine learning algorithms were used to analyze and predict GBV at HEIs, while sentiment analysis helped identify trends and patterns in online discussions related to GBV. The study developed a comprehensive framework for preventing GBV that incorporates AI-driven insights and stakeholder engagement. By engaging students, staff, and the broader community through social media platforms, HTEIs can foster dialogue, advocacy, and collective action against GBV. This study highlights the potential of social media and AI in creating safer learning environments and promoting gender equality in higher and tertiary institutions.

Chapter 5 observes gender-based violence as a worldwide occurrence that distresses women undesirably, including women in higher education and tertiary institutions. The menace of gender-based violence is increasing in Zimbabwe notwithstanding the substantial consideration and increasing awareness of gender-based violence. The consequences of gender-based violence in academic cultures are severe particularly for women who bear the brunt of the menace. Zimbabwe has ratified a number of international and regional instruments which identify the importance of curbing gender-based violence in order to contribute to gender equality. Even though the enactment of several gender-responsive laws and policies, such as the Domestic Violence Act of 2007, women and girls in Zimbabwe, continue to be the victims in 99% of gender-based violence including those in higher and tertiary education institutions. Does Zimbabwe have a strengthened legal and policy framework that sufficiently prevents incidences of GBV at gender based violence including those women in higher and tertiary education institutions? The research aims to critically analyse the legislative and policy frameworks the prevention on gender-based violence in Higher and Tertiary Institutions in Masvingo Province. The research adopted descriptive and comparative perspectives. Gaps in the legislative and policy frameworks on gender-based violence in Higher and Tertiary Institutions in Masvingo Province were identified. Recommendations for the amendment of legislative and policy reforms were made to relevant authorities. Conclusion was made to have a robust legislative and policy framework to curb gender-based violence is a vibrant strategy to minimise the occurrence of gender-based violence in higher and tertiary education institutions in Zimbabwe. The contribution of this study is the gender-based violence transformative legislative and policy frameworks it proposes to curb the menace. Proffering recommendations for legislative and policy framework to prevent the occurrence of gender-based violence can assist significantly in the reduction of gender-based violence in higher and tertiary education institutions in Zimbabwe.

Chapter 6 investigates gender-based violence (GBV) and its societal impact in Mucheke A, a high-density suburb of Masvingo City. GBV is a global issue that affects individuals across diverse demographics, manifesting in forms such as physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse. Its pervasive nature impacts various aspects of society, including relationships, health, the economy, education, and human rights. The study explored the prevalence and underlying causes of GBV, as well as its far-reaching effects on individuals and the wider community. A qualitative research

design was employed, with a focus on prevention, survivor care, and promoting gender equality. Data was gathered through focus group discussions with community members, and interviews with healthcare workers at Mucheke Clinic. The findings indicate that understanding the complex mechanisms of GBV is crucial for creating safer, more equitable communities. The study recommends that authorities develop reliable tools to assess changes in social norms and individual beliefs that perpetuate GBV, alongside methods to evaluate shifts in attitudes toward gender roles and violence. Additionally, the integration of chat-based support systems for survivors is proposed to improve access to care and resources.

Chapter 7 captures a comprehensive study on the prevalence, causes, consequences, and interventions related to drug and substance abuse among students in Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions (HTEIs) in Masvingo Province. This follows highlights from institutions in Masvingo, through the implementation of 03 PLUS project initiated by UNESCO, on drug and substance abuse. Thus drug and substance abuse among students in Masvingo Higher Tertiary Education Institutions (HTEIs) is a growing concern, with potential consequences on academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being. The research delves into the complex nature of drug and substance abuse and its effect on the academic, social, and psychological well-being of students within the HTE setting. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gather data from a diverse sample of students from two HTE institutions. A survey questionnaire was administered to 300 young adults aged 18-35 years. Interviews were employed to 20 individuals (students and staff from the institutions). Through this rigorous methodology, the research seeks to distinguish the underlying factors contributing to drug and substance abuse, such as peer pressure, stress, accessibility, and individual vulnerabilities. Furthermore, it identified the specific drugs and substances most commonly abused within the HTE community, shedding light on emerging trends and patterns. Findings indicated that cannabis/marijuana, mutoriro, spirits and alcohol were commonly abused among Higher and Tertiary Education institutions. The consequences of drug and substance abuse were also examined, encompassing academic performance, mental health, interpersonal relationships, and future career prospects. By examining these consequences, the research endeavors to underscore the urgent need for proactive interventions and support systems within HTEIs, as well as the broader community. In exploring potential interventions, the study assesses existing prevention and treatment programs, evaluating their effectiveness and relevance in the context of HTEIs so as to foster a safe, supportive, and conducive environment for the holistic development of students within the HTE landscape. Additionally, it investigated the role of institutional policies, peer support networks, counseling services, and educational initiatives in addressing and alleviating drug and substance abuse, which in some institutions was not adequately done. The study contributes towards UNESCO 03 PLUS project goal of making campuses safe and inclusive. The results can also be used in making drug and substance abuse policies in HTEIs. Policy makers may change or improve the policies towards sustainable measures to drug and substance abuse in HTEIs and the society at large. The study will also be of significant to HTEIs students who will find other ways to deal with college or university lives other than resorting to drug use. Students will be aware of the dangers and effects of drug and substance abuse. The research will also be of benefit to students who are already affected or addicted to drugs with ways to tackle the problems. Staff from tertiary institutions will also benefit if student behavior is controlled and less behavior problems are encountered in and around campus.

Chapter 8 focuses on the prevalence, causes, consequences, and interventions related to drug and substance abuse among students in Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions (HTEIs) in Masvingo province. This follows highlights from institutions in Masvingo, through the implementation of 03 PLUS project initiated by UNESCO, on drug and substance abuse. Thus drug and substance abuse among students in Masvingo Higher Tertiary Education Institutions (HTEIs) is a growing concern, with potential consequences for academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being. The research delves into the complex nature of drug and substance abuse and its effect on the academic, social, and psychological well-being of students within the HTE setting. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews and focus groups to gather data from a diverse sample of students from two HTE institutions. A survey questionnaire was administered to 500 young adults aged 18-35 years. Interviews were employed to 20 individuals (students and some authorities from the institutions). Through this rigorous methodology, the research seeks to distinguish the underlying factors contributing to drug and substance abuse, such as peer pressure, stress, accessibility, and individual vulnerabilities. Furthermore, it aims to identify the specific drugs and substances most commonly abused within the HTE community, shedding light on emerging trends and patterns. The consequences of drug and substance abuse are also examined, encompassing academic performance, mental health, interpersonal relationships, and future career prospects. By examining these consequences, the research endeavors to underscore the urgent need for proactive interventions and support systems within HTEIs, as well as the broader community. In exploring potential interventions, the study assesses existing prevention and treatment programs, evaluating their effectiveness and relevance in the context of HTEIs so as to foster a safe, supportive, and conducive environment for the holistic development of students within the HTE landscape. Additionally, it investigates the role of institutional policies, peer support networks, counseling services, and educational initiatives in addressing and alleviating drug and substance abuse.

Chapter 9 focuses on addressing drug and substance issues by developing and exploring the potential of an AI-powered chatbot as an innovative and accessible tool to support students struggling with substance abuse. This research is grounded in the theoretical framework of technology acceptance model, aiming to bridge the gap between evidence-based substance abuse information and at-risk populations. The primary objectives were to develop a chatbot capable of delivering accurate information on substance abuse and to evaluate its usability and performance. Utilizing a dataset of 373 question-answer pairs, the chatbot was developed using the Llama-2-7b generative pre-trained model and tested for accuracy and user interaction. Findings indicate a 95% accuracy rate in response accuracy, highlighting the chatbot's effectiveness in addressing substance abuse inquiries. Key implications include the potential for chatbots to enhance accessibility to support resources, reduce stigma, and engage users in a non-threatening manner. This research underscores the role of AI in promoting student well-being and suggests directions for future enhancements in usability and knowledge expansion.

Chapter 10 analyses the effectiveness of the laws and regulations of HTEIs and whether they are a hindrance or an aid in preventing teenage pregnancies. The aim of this study is to explore whether the laws and regulations of HTEIs in Masvingo sufficiently aid in combating teen pregnancies and zoom in on the unwritten and null policies that fuel the proliferation of unwanted pregnancies in Masvingo. A doctrinal approach is used to investigate the national legislative framework, the regulations, and policies of three institutions within Masvingo. The institutions are Great

Zimbabwe University, Masvingo Polytechnic College, and Masvingo Teachers College. An intersectional analysis of the policies of the HTEIs will show the interconnectedness of the various disadvantages that accumulate to create a unique abusive experience for female learners learning in HTEIs in Masvingo. Though the policies have their own deficiencies, the combination of deficient policies, and the socio—economic, and religious disadvantages create a distinct disadvantage to females in Masvingo Province. The article reflects on the inevitable underlining disadvantages faced by female learners because of explicit and hidden policies of HTEIs in Masvingo. The article uses a human rights-based approach as well as the intersectional approach to show the human rights abuses that are created by inefficient regulations and the interconnectedness of the violations with other disadvantages that are already plaguing female students in Masvingo. Last, the article proffers recommendations for policy reform of HTEIs that acknowledges social, religious, and economic factors that disadvantage students, and policies which are not blind to the differences in the socio-economic and religious standing of female students in Masvingo.

Chapter 11 focuses on strategies for preventing unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students in Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions. The findings reveal an array of factors that influence unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students in HTEIs. The study proffers strategies that can be used to prevent unwanted pregnancies and recommends various policy changes to prevent unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students in HTEIs.

Chapter 12 focuses on unexpected pregnancies for students on teaching practice. The chapter explores and identifies the challenges with unwanted pregnancies in an effort to solve and reduce them from recurring.

Chapter 13 provides a synthesis of research conducted by various stakeholders to tackle gender based violence, drug and substance abuse, STIs and unintended pregnancies in higher and tertiary institutions (HTIs) in Masvingo Province. These issues are critical as they influence performance of students in tertiary education institution and their success and failure later in life - post the education phase. The different studies employed a myriad of approaches including literature reviews, desk studies, action oriented approaches, qualitative and quantitative surveys and observations. Some studies were descriptive in nature and unveiled the breadth and depth of the problems faced around the four key focal themes. Others, in addition, implemented innovative interventions in an action-oriented-fashion (e.g. the use of ICTs in preventing gender based violence in this) and show case the pros and cos of the different strategies used under the four themes. From these studies, it is clear that there is hope for HTIs in Masvingo province – what is now needed going forward is for the successful innovations to be up scaled in the province and the nation at large.

KEY MESSAGES

The conference aimed to attract papers on Masvingo Province. Masvingo Province houses seven higher and tertiary institutions namely, Great Zimbabwe University, Zimbabwe Open University, Reformed Church University, Masvingo Polytechnic, Masvingo Teachers, Bondolfi Teachers College and Morgenster Teachers College. A bumper harvest of sixteen institutions responded as a demonstration of the critical need for such discussions in the sector in question. Four were from

outside Zimbabwe, six from outside Masvingo and six were from Masvingo. The focus of the conference was to share experiences under the four sub-themes and then map out intervention strategies to assist staff and students in the problematic matters.

This paper is an overview of the proceedings of the conference, the representation of institutions in Masvingo Province, experiences from the different institutions as well as the myriad interventions proffered. The editors were interested in giving an analysis of the suggested interventions. Out of the 59 abstracts initially submitted, 23 dealt with issues to do with Gender Based Violence, 18 were on drug abuse, 4 were based on STIs and 7 were on unwanted pregnancies. The challenges that the theme addresses are global and seriously affecting productivity in most institutions, workplaces, homes, communities and nations. As a collaboration between GZU and UNESCO, the conference sought first and foremost to benefit students, the leadership of institutions and the nation. The analysis of what obtains in tertiary institutions in Masvingo Province is usable beyond the province.

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CHAPTER 2: Exploring the Forms and Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence in Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions in Masvingo: Implications for Policy and Prevention Strategies

Ngoni Progress Jemwa and Nyevero Maruzani

INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) stands as a pervasive global issue, casting a shadow across societies and impacting individuals of all ages and backgrounds. Its consequences are profound, not only for the immediate victims but also for the broader societal fabric, hindering progress towards equality and development (World Health Organization, 2013). While educational institutions are intended to be spaces of learning, growth, and empowerment, they are unfortunately not immune to this pervasive problem. This study embarks on a critical examination of the forms and prevalence of GBV in higher and tertiary education institutions in Masvingo, Zimbabwe. The research aims to understand the complexities of this issue within the specific context of Masvingo, higher and tertiary institutions exploring the unique challenges and experiences faced by students, educators, and stakeholders. By shedding light on the multifaceted nature of GBV within these institutions, the study seeks to contribute to the development of effective interventions and policy strategies aimed at creating safer learning environments for all. The urgency of this research stems from the alarming reality that GBV in educational settings often goes unreported and unaddressed, leaving victims feeling isolated, silenced, and vulnerable. This culture of silence and impunity perpetuates harm, hindering academic achievement, personal development, and the overall well-being of students (UNESCO, 2016). Understanding the specific forms of GBV prevalent in Masvingo's higher and tertiary educational institutions, the factors contributing to its prevalence, and the experiences of those affected is crucial for developing targeted and effective interventions.

Defining Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) is defined as any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, men, girls, or boys, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life (United Nations, 2013). This definition encompasses a wide range of behaviours, including physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, and economic violence.

Overview of Gender-Based Violence and its Impact on Education

Gender-based violence (GBV) casts a long shadow over educational settings, undermining the very foundation upon which learning and personal growth are built. Higher and tertiary institutions, spaces intended to nurture intellectual curiosity, foster creativity, and empower individuals, are often marred by the presence of GBV, creating a climate of fear, insecurity, and distrust. This pervasive issue not only violates the fundamental human rights of students but also hinders their ability to fully engage in the learning process, ultimately impacting their academic achievements and future prospects. If the system goes unintercepted, the cultivated culture will destroy generations and generations to come.

In Masvingo, higher and tertiary institutions, GBV poses a significant threat to the safety and well-being of students, hindering their academic progress and undermining the fundamental principles of education (Fulu et al. 2013). The prevalence of GBV in Masvingo's higher and tertiary

educational institutions reflects a broader societal issue, where power dynamics and harmful societal norms create an environment in which violence against individuals based on their power status is more likely to occur. This reality underscores the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing GBV, one that tackles both the immediate symptoms and the underlying root causes.

GBV encompasses a range of harmful behaviours, including physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse, all of which create a hostile environment that impedes learning and personal development (Fulu et al. 2013). Physical violence, such as hitting, slapping, kicking, or punching, can leave lasting physical and psychological scars. Sexual violence, including rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment, can have devastating consequences for victims, often leading to trauma, fear, and social isolation. Emotional abuse, which involves threats, intimidation, humiliation, and manipulation, can erode self-esteem, confidence, and the ability to form healthy relationships. Economic abuse, such as controlling finances or restricting access to education and employment, can further disempower victims and limit their opportunities for growth and independence. More so, the increasing use of digital technologies in education, students and educators are becoming more vulnerable to various forms of online GBV, such as cyberbullying, online harassment, and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images.

The consequences of GBV in educational institutions are far-reaching and deeply troubling. Research indicates a strong correlation between GBV and decreased school attendance, poor academic performance, and increased dropout rates among students (UNESCO, 2016). Victims of GBV often experience fear, anxiety, and trauma, leading to absenteeism from school. The emotional and psychological distress caused by GBV can significantly impact concentration, focus, and overall academic engagement, resulting in lower grades and academic difficulties (UNESCO, 2016). In extreme cases, GBV can force students to abandon their education altogether, leading to a cycle of poverty and limited opportunities. This underscores the urgent need to address GBV in Masvingo's educational institutions to ensure a safe and conducive learning environment that promotes equality, respect, and dignity for all individuals in higher and tertiary institutions.

Prevalence of GBV in Higher and tertiary education institutions in Masvingo

A 2019 study by the Zimbabwe Gender Commission revealed that 34% of women in Zimbabwe had experienced physical violence, highlighting the widespread nature of GBV within the country (Zimbabwe Gender Commission, 2019). This data, while not specific to educational settings, underscores the pervasiveness of violence against women in Zimbabwe, suggesting that higher and tertiary educational institutions are likely not immune. Furthermore, the study found that young women were disproportionately affected, indicating a particular vulnerability within this demographic. This trend is concerning, as it suggests that young women entering higher and tertiary education may carry with them experiences of violence and be at increased risk of experiencing further abuse within the academic environment.

Global research paints an equally concerning picture. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that up to 50% of female students worldwide have experienced some form of sexual harassment in educational settings (World Health Organization, 2018). This statistic underscores the alarming prevalence of sexual harassment as a form of GBV within educational institutions globally. While this data does not reflect the specific situation in Masvingo, it provides a crucial context for understanding the potential scale of the issue and the need for urgent action. The

alarming global figures suggest that the problem is not confined to specific countries or regions but is a pervasive issue that requires a global response.

The national and international data, while not directly addressing Masvingo's higher and tertiary institutions, provides a powerful backdrop for understanding the potential prevalence of GBV within these settings. The high rates of violence against women in Zimbabwe and the global prevalence of sexual harassment in educational institutions suggest that Masvingo's higher and tertiary institutions are likely facing similar challenges. This context underscores the urgency for further research, data collection, and targeted interventions to address GBV within these institutions.

Gender Dynamics and Power Structures in Masvingo's Higher and Tertiary Institutions

Gender dynamics and power structures are not merely abstract concepts, they are deeply embedded in the fabric of Masvingo's higher and tertiary educational institutions, shaping the prevalence and response to gender-based violence (GBV). This complex interplay of factors creates a fertile ground for harmful behaviours, unequal power relations, and social norms that condone violence against individuals based on their gender (Nyoni & Mapfumo, 2020). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective strategies to prevent and address GBV in Masvingo institutions, promoting a culture of safety, equality, and respect for all members of the educational community.

Traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms often permeate educational institutions, creating power imbalances that can contribute to GBV (Nyoni & Mapfumo, 2020). These deeply ingrained societal beliefs often dictate that men hold a position of authority and dominance over women, leading to a hierarchy where women's voices are less likely to be heard and their experiences are often minimized. This can manifest in various ways, such as a lack of female representation in leadership positions, a tendency to prioritize the perspectives of men over women, and a reluctance to acknowledge or address the unique challenges faced by women and girls in higher and tertiary educational settings. This power imbalance can create a climate where women are more vulnerable to abuse, as they may feel less empowered to speak out or resist violence (World Health Organization, 2018). Furthermore, the lack of female leadership can create a sense of isolation and vulnerability for women and girls, making them more susceptible to abuse and less likely to seek support. Challenging these traditional gender roles and promoting gender equality in leadership positions are crucial steps towards creating a more inclusive and equitable educational environment where women and girls feel empowered to speak out and seek help.

Institutional hierarchies, often dominated by male leadership, can create a climate where women and girls are less likely to be heard, their concerns dismissed, and their experiences of GBV minimized (Chikwava & Marume, 2019). This power imbalance can manifest in various ways, such as a lack of representation of women in leadership positions, a tendency to rank the perspectives of men over women, and unwillingness to acknowledge or address the unique encounters faced by women and girls in educational settings. This can lead to a culture of silence, where women and girls feel discouraged from speaking out about their experiences of GBV, fearing that their voices will not be heard or taken seriously (Chikwava & Marume, 2019). The underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within educational institutions can compound the challenges faced by female students and staff. This power imbalance can foster a climate of

isolation and vulnerability, where women and girls may feel less empowered to voice their concerns or seek the necessary support when confronting issues of gender-based violence. Addressing these hierarchical structures and actively promoting gender equality in positions of authority is a vital step towards cultivating a more inclusive and equitable educational setting. When women and girls are given a greater voice and agency in the leadership of their institutions, they are more likely to feel empowered to speak out against abuse and access the resources they need to stay safe and thrive.

Perpetuating traditional gender stereotypes, such as the notion that men are inherently dominant and women are submissive, can contribute to a culture where violence against women is seen as acceptable or even expected (Nyoni & Mapfumo, 2020). These harmful stereotypes can be deeply ingrained in societal norms, influencing how individuals perceive gender roles and relationships. For example, the belief that men are naturally aggressive and entitled to control women's behaviour can normalize violence against women, making it more likely to occur and less likely to be challenged. Furthermore, Chikwava and Marume, (2019) posit that, the expectation that women should be passive and subservient can create a climate where women are less likely to assert their rights or resist abuse, making them more vulnerable to violence. Challenging these harmful stereotypes through education, awareness campaigns, and promoting gender equality in all aspects of society is crucial for creating a culture where violence against women is not tolerated.

Societal norms that tolerate and even justify violence against women, such as the notion that men are entitled to dictate women's behavior, can foster an environment of fear and suppression, hindering victims from coming forward and reporting gender-based violence (Chikwava & Marume, 2019). These deeply rooted cultural beliefs have the effect of normalizing violence against women, rendering it more acceptable and less likely to be challenged by the broader community. For example, the notion that a man can discipline his wife or girlfriend through physical force, or that a woman should tolerate abuse to maintain family harmony, can create a culture where violence is seen as a legitimate means of resolving conflict. This can lead to a reluctance to report abuse, as victims may fear being blamed, ostracized, or even punished for speaking out (Chikwava & Marume, 2019). Furthermore, the fear of retaliation from the perpetrator or their family can further discourage victims from seeking help. In the context of higher and tertiary institutions, female students usually fear to report their educators and fellow learners in fear of further victimisation.

The prevalence of GBV in Masvingo's educational institutions is not simply a matter of individual actions, it is deeply intertwined with the social, cultural, and economic realities of the region. Poverty, unemployment, and limited access to resources can exacerbate existing power imbalances and create an environment where violence is more likely to occur (Nyoni & Mapfumo, 2020). For example, families struggling to make ends meet may be more likely to resort to violence as a means of resolving conflict, and girls may be forced to drop out of school to contribute to household income, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (Chikwava & Marume, 2019). Furthermore, the lack of economic opportunities for women can limit their ability to escape abusive relationships, perpetuating a cycle of violence (Nyoni & Mapfumo, 2020). Addressing these underlying social and economic factors is crucial for creating a more just and equitable society where GBV is less likely to occur. However, with the culture of GBV that is manifesting in tertiary institutions, the economic opportunities for women are continuing to dwindle.

The stigma and shame surrounding GBV can act as a powerful deterrent, preventing victims from seeking help and perpetuating a cycle of silence and suffering. Victims may fear being ostracized by their families, communities, or peers, especially in societies where traditional gender roles and norms often place blame on women for the violence they experience (Nyoni & Mapfumo, 2020). The fear of being labelled "promiscuous," "weak," or "deserving" of the abuse can be overwhelming, leading victims to internalize the shame and blame, making it even more difficult to come forward (Chikwava & Marume, 2019). This societal pressure can create a culture of silence, where victims are afraid to speak out for fear of social repercussions, further isolating them and making them more vulnerable to continued abuse. Dealing with the stigma and shame surrounding GBV entails a concerted effort to contest harmful societal norms, stimulate empathy and indulgence, and create a culture where victims feel safe and supported to speak out.

A lack of trust in authorities and institutions can be a significant barrier for victims of GBV seeking help. Past experiences of inadequate responses, indifference, or even victim-blaming by law enforcement, school officials, or community leaders can erode trust and make victims hesitant to report incidents (Nyoni & Mapfumo, 2020). Furthermore, a lack of awareness about available support services, coupled with a perception that reporting GBV will lead to further stigma or retaliation, can reinforce a sense of powerlessness and discourage victims from seeking assistance (Chikwava & Marume, 2019). Building trust requires a fundamental shift in how institutions respond to GBV, prioritizing victim-centred approaches, ensuring accountability for perpetrators, and demonstrating a genuine commitment to creating a safe and supportive environment for survivors.

Forms of Gender-Based Violence in Higher and tertiary education institutions in Masvingo

Gender-based violence (GBV) within Masvingo's educational institutions is a complex issue that requires a nuanced understanding of its various forms and prevalence. While research on GBV in Zimbabwe is limited, existing studies provide insights into the types of violence experienced and the factors contributing to its occurrence. GBV in Masvingo institutions manifests in various forms, each with its own unique impact on survivors. These forms include physical violence, a stark and often visible form of GBV which encompasses acts of bodily harm or force, ranging from slapping and punching to more severe forms of assault (Fulu et al. 2013). While less prevalent than other forms of GBV in higher and tertiary institutions, physical violence can occur in various contexts, particularly when power dynamics are at play. Physical violence can occur in situations where a lecturer abuses their power and authority over a student. This could involve physical assault, pushing, shoving, or other forms of physical aggression. Such acts can leave lasting physical and psychological scars on survivors, impacting their well-being and ability to participate fully in their education (Fulu et al. 2013).

Physical violence can also occur between students, often stemming from a power imbalance or a culture of violence. This could involve bullying, harassment, or even assault, particularly in situations where one student feels threatened or intimidated by another. Such acts can create a hostile and unsafe learning environment for students, impacting their academic performance and overall well-being (Chikwava & Marume, 2019). Physical violence can also occur in situations where staff members abuse their power over students. This could involve physical assault, intimidation, or other forms of physical aggression. Such acts can create a climate of fear and

silence, making students hesitant to report abuse or seek help (Nyoni & Mapfumo, 2020). The lack of adequate security measures and safety protocols on campus can contribute to a climate where physical violence is more likely to occur. This could involve inadequate lighting, insufficient security personnel, or a lack of clear procedures for reporting incidents of violence. Such shortcomings can make students feel vulnerable and unsafe, hindering their ability to participate fully in their education (Chikwava and Marume, 2019).

Physical violence can leave lasting physical and psychological scars on survivors, impacting their well-being and ability to participate fully in their education (Fulu et al. 2013). It is essential for institutions to create a safe and supportive environment where students feel empowered to report physical violence and receive the support they need. This includes implementing clear policies and procedures for reporting physical violence, providing comprehensive support services for survivors, and fostering a culture of respect and accountability.

Sexual violence, a pervasive and devastating form of GBV, encompasses any non-consensual sexual behaviour, ranging from unwanted sexual advances and harassment to rape and sexual assault (Fulu et al. 2013). Within the context of higher and tertiary institutions in Masvingo, the power dynamics between lecturers, staff, landlords, and students can create a climate where sexual violence is more likely to occur and less likely to be reported. Lecturers, landlords and staff may engage in unwanted sexual advances or make inappropriate comments or gestures towards students. This can create a hostile and uncomfortable learning environment, making students feel unsafe and vulnerable. Such behaviour can also damage their self-esteem and confidence, impacting their academic performance and overall well-being (Chikwava & Marume, 2019). In some cases, lecturers, staff, or even fellow students may engage in acts of sexual assault or rape against other students. This can have devastating and long-lasting consequences for survivors, including physical injuries, trauma, anxiety, depression, and difficulty forming healthy relationships (Fulu et al. 2013). Furthermore, the power imbalance inherent in the relationship between lecturers, landlords, staff, and students can make it difficult for students to report sexual violence, fearing retaliation or being dismissed. This can create a culture of silence, where victims are afraid to speak out, perpetuating a cycle of abuse (Nyoni & Mapfumo, 2020). Institutions may lack adequate support services for survivors of sexual violence, such as counselling, legal aid, and medical care. This can make it difficult for students to access the resources they need to heal and recover from their experiences (Chikwava & Marume, 2019). More so, fear of discrimination may also result in students and even staff not willing to report or seek help within the campus facilities.

Emotional abuse, a subtle yet insidious form of GBV, involves threats, intimidation, manipulation, and other behaviours designed to control and undermine the victim's emotional well-being (Fulu et al. 2013). Within the context of higher and tertiary institutions in Masvingo, the power dynamic between lecturers and students can create a fertile ground for emotional abuse. Lecturers may use their position of authority to intimidate students, making them fear repercussions for speaking out or challenging their views. This could involve threats to lower grades, withhold recommendations, or even jeopardize their academic standing. Such intimidation can create a climate of fear and silence, making students hesitant to report abuse or seek help (Chikwava & Marume, 2019). More so lecturers may engage in manipulative behaviours, such as making students feel responsible for their own abuse or questioning their perceptions of reality. This can lead to self-doubt, confusion, and a sense of isolation, making it difficult for students to recognize and address the abuse they

are experiencing (Nyoni & Mapfumo, 2020). Additionally, lecturers may engage in inappropriate behaviour, such as making unwanted advances, sending inappropriate messages, or making sexually suggestive comments. This can create a hostile learning environment for students, making them feel uncomfortable and unsafe. Such behaviour can also damage their self-esteem and confidence, impacting their academic performance and overall well-being (Chikwava & Marume, 2019). Lecturers may publicly humiliate or shame students in front of their peers, undermining their self-esteem and confidence. This can create a culture of fear and silence, making students hesitant to participate in class or ask for help. Such behaviour can also damage their reputation and make them feel isolated and vulnerable (Nyoni & Mapfumo, 2020). However, this can be the other way round and lecturer being the victims. It is not all the times that students find themselves to be victims, lecturers and staff also face the same challenges from the students or their fellow staff members. Emotional abuse can be just as damaging as physical violence, leading to feelings of worthlessness, isolation, and fear (Fulu et al. 2013). It can have long-term consequences for both students, and staff, impacting their academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being.

Economic abuse, a form of GBV often overlooked, involves restricting the victim's financial independence and resources, creating a cycle of dependence and control (Fulu et al. 2013). This can manifest in various ways, the abuser may control the victim's access to money, limiting their ability to meet basic needs, purchase necessities, or make independent financial decisions. This can leave the victim financially vulnerable and dependent on the abuser (Nyoni and Mapfumo, 2020). In the context of higher education, this could involve an abuser controlling a student's allowance, scholarship funds, or even access to their bank account, making it difficult for them to manage their finances and potentially leading to academic difficulties.

In some instances, students may be pressured into exchanging sexual favours or other forms of abuse in exchange for academic assistance, such as having assignments printed or getting help with coursework. This exploitation of academic needs creates a power imbalance and further reinforces the abuser's control over the victim (Chikwava & Marume, 2019). The abuser may interfere with the victim's employment opportunities, preventing them from pursuing education or work, or forcing them to quit their jobs or school. This can further limit the victim's financial independence and make it harder to escape the abusive relationship (Chikwava & Marume, 2019). For students, this could mean the abuser discouraging them from taking on part-time jobs or internships, hindering their ability to earn income and become financially independent. The abuser may isolate the victim from family and friends, limiting their support network and forcing them to rely solely on the abuser for financial support. This creates a sense of powerlessness and dependence, making it more difficult for the victim to leave the abusive situation (Nyoni and Mapfumo, 2020). In a university setting, this could involve the abuser controlling the student's social interactions, limiting their access to support from peers, mentors, or family members, making them more reliant on the abuser for emotional and financial support.

The rapid proliferation of digital technologies has ushered in new forms of gender-based violence (GBV), commonly referred to as online gender-based violence (OGBV). OGBV encompasses a wide range of abusive behaviours perpetrated through the use of digital platforms and technologies, including cyberbullying, online harassment, nonconsensual sharing of intimate images, and digital stalking (Woodlock, 2017). Recent studies have highlighted the alarming prevalence of OGBV, particularly within educational settings. A survey of university students in

the United Kingdom found that over 50% of respondents had experienced some form of OGBV, with female students being disproportionately affected (National Union of Students, 2018). Similarly, a study conducted in the United States revealed that 40% of female students had experienced online harassment, compared to only 25% of their male counterparts (American Association of University Women, 2017). The impacts of OGBV can be far-reaching and devastating, leading to a range of negative mental health outcomes, such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Baynes & Douglas, 2012; Gámez-Guadix et al. 2020). Additionally, OGBV can have serious academic and professional consequences, as victims may experience decreased productivity, absenteeism, and even withdrawal from educational or career opportunities (Lenhart et al. 2016).

Theoretical underpinning

The Ecological Systems Theory, also known as the Bioecological Model, provides a robust framework for understanding the complex interplay of factors contributing to gender-based violence (GBV) in educational settings. Developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), this theory posits that human development is a product of interactions within multiple interconnected systems, including the individual, family, community, and society (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This framework highlights the importance of addressing GBV at multiple levels to create lasting change. It emphasizes that interventions must target individual behaviours, family dynamics, school policies, and societal norms to effectively address the root causes of GBV. By acknowledging the interconnectedness of these systems, the Ecological Systems Theory provides a comprehensive lens for understanding the complex web of factors that contribute to GBV within educational institutions.

METHODOLOGY

To explore the forms and prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) in higher and tertiary education institutions in Masvingo, a comprehensive data collection process was employed in July 2024. A team of three researchers utilized a mixed-methods approach, incorporating in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) to gather rich and nuanced data. Purposive sampling was employed to select 41 participants, ensuring that those with specific knowledge and experience related to GBV in educational settings were included in the study (Robinson, 2014). This approach allowed for the exploration of diverse perspectives and experiences. A total of 35 young women, drawn from Great Zimbabwe University and Masvingo Polytechnic, participated in four FGDs. These discussions aimed to gain insights into the prevalence and forms of GBV experienced within educational institutions. Additionally, six key informants, including lecturers, and non-lecturing staff, were selected through purposive sampling. These individuals provided valuable insider perspectives on the implementation, successes, and challenges related to addressing GBV within the educational context. All participants provided informed consent prior to their participation, ensuring ethical research practices. To protect the identities of participants and acknowledge the sensitive nature of GBV, all contributions were anonymised. Thematic analysis was then applied to the collected data, identifying recurring patterns and themes that shed light on the forms and prevalence of GBV in Masvingo's educational institutions. The findings of this analysis are presented in the following sections.

RESULTS

Forms of GBV in Higher and tertiary education institutions in Masvingo

The study established that the reality for many students and staff in Masvingo institutions is marred by the pervasive presence of gender-based violence. This study delves into the hidden realities of GBV within these institutions, shedding light on the diverse forms it takes and the profound impact it has on individuals and the learning. The research established that the most prevailing forms of violence include economic abuse, sexual harassment, physical violence and stalking. The study also established that rapid digitalization of modern society has led to the emergence of online gender-based violence (OGBV) as a prevalent and concerning form of gender-based violence (GBV). OGBV encompasses a wide range of abusive and discriminatory behaviours perpetrated through the use of digital technologies, including cyberbullying, online harassment, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, and digital stalking.

Most of the students here are from other towns and they rent out apartments. However, with the economic hardships some of the students are being sexually exploited by people who can pay rent for them. It's not only common to girls and women students, even boys and man are also victims of sexual exploitation by either landlords or rich sugar mums from the community.

Sexual Harassment is the most prevalent form of GBV in, Masvingo. They are a lot of requests for sexual favours, propositions, or other unwelcome sexual attention from lecturers, staff, landlords and fellow students that goes unreported.

The most tactic that some staff and lecturers use is sexual coercion. They at times pressure someone into sexual activity through threats, intimidation, or manipulation. Some lecturers threaten to fail you if you do not conform to their requests.

Since we do not have accommodation at school campus, we usually get accommodation at boarding houses where we stay mixed with boys. Most of the boys impose themselves on us through unwanted touching. Non-consensual physical contact of a sexual nature usually happens during study and in the corridors as we walk.

Sexually suggestive comments or jokes are usually taken for granted but to me it's a form of sexual harassment. This is common with the majority of people both on and off campus. They make inappropriate remarks or jokes about someone's appearance or sexual behaviour.

Cyberbullying is now prominent with boys sharing our nudes and at times voice notes without our consent. The most worrying thing is the increasing number of WhatsApp groups that are being formed where nude pictures circulate.

The study reveals a disturbing reality of gender-based violence (GBV) in Masvingo's higher and tertiary institutions, where various forms of abuse are prevalent. Economic hardships force students into vulnerable situations, leading to sexual exploitation by individuals offering financial assistance, including landlords and wealthy individuals from the community. Sexual harassment is rampant, with students facing unwanted sexual advances, propositions, and coercion from lecturers, staff, landlords, and fellow students. The tactics employed include threats of academic

failure and manipulation, creating a climate of fear and silence. Physical violence, particularly unwanted touching, is common in shared accommodation spaces and corridors, while sexually suggestive comments and jokes, often dismissed as harmless, contribute to a culture of disrespect and normalization of sexual harassment. These findings highlight the need for comprehensive interventions that address economic vulnerabilities, challenge power imbalances, and create a culture of respect and accountability within these institutions.

Factors Contributing to GBV in Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions in Masvingo

From the study, it was established that there are a lot of factors that contribute to gender based violence in higher and tertiary institutions in Masvingo. This study explores the complex factors contributing to this alarming issue, revealing the interconnected web of power dynamics, drug abuse cultural norms, economic hardships, shortage of on campus accommodation and inadequate support systems that perpetuate GBV within these institutions. More so, the study revealed that the misuse of drugs and alcohol is a significant contributing factor to the alarming high rates of GBV experienced by students, particularly women.

The hierarchical structure of higher education institutions creates power imbalances between lecturers, staff, and students, making us students more vulnerable to abuse. Due to the power imbalances, we are unable to report some of the abuses and at times when we report, we end up facing victimisation. I was once told by one staff member that you cannot fight your boss and win.

Drug abuse is mayhem within the tertiary institutions here in Masvingo. A lot of students are engaging in drug abuse, and they fail to control themselves when they are under the influence of drugs. This is resulting in both genders being abused.

Here at our institution, there is a popular statement of saying “thigh for a pass”. Most of the girls get abused for them to pass assignments and get distinctions.

Economic hardships also make both students and lecturers to be vulnerable to sexual and other forms of abuse by those who will be financial strong. Some of the students are finding themselves engaging in prostitution and or co-habiting with other male students who will be financially strong.

Printing cost are also so high in Masvingo that some of the students fail to meet the costs. This also resulst in some of the students offering themselves to the guys who do printing or they end up being sexually exploited when they fail to pay for the services rendered.

Some of the student are lazy to do their assignments hence they end up being sexually abused to get their assignments done by either fellow students, staff members and or the lecturers.

Landlords also take advantage of students if they fail to pay rentals on time, or even fail completely. Some of the landlords will end up asking for sexual favours to cancel your rental dues.

The study reveals a complex interplay of factors contributing to gender-based violence (GBV) in Masvingo's higher and tertiary institutions. The inherent power imbalance within the hierarchical structure, where lecturers and staff hold authority over students, creates a climate of vulnerability and fear of retaliation, hindering reporting and perpetuating a culture of silence. The disturbing phrase "thigh for a pass" exposes a deeply ingrained culture of sexual exploitation, where academic success is linked to sexual favours. Economic hardships further exacerbate the situation, pushing students into precarious situations where they are vulnerable to exploitation by those with financial resources, including landlords demanding sexual favours in exchange for rent. The interplay between substance abuse and GBV creates a complex and multifaceted challenge, where the altered mental states and impaired judgement associated with drug and alcohol use can lower inhibitions, increase aggression, and exacerbate underlying power dynamics that enable abusive behaviours. The lack of adequate on-campus accommodation and insufficient support systems for survivors further contribute to the problem, leaving victims feeling isolated and powerless. These interconnected factors create a toxic environment where GBV thrives, highlighting the urgent need for systemic change to address power imbalances, economic disparities, and inadequate support systems.

Discussion

The study paints a disturbing picture of gender-based violence (GBV) in Masvingo's higher and tertiary institutions, revealing a complex interplay of factors that contribute to its prevalence. The research highlights the diverse forms of GBV, from economic abuse and sexual harassment to physical violence and stalking, demonstrating the multifaceted nature of this issue.

The study shines a stark light on the intersection of economic hardship and gender-based violence (GBV), revealing how financial vulnerability can create a breeding ground for exploitation. Many students in Masvingo's higher and tertiary institutions come from disadvantaged backgrounds and face significant financial constraints. This economic hardship makes them particularly vulnerable to exploitation by individuals who offer financial assistance, often with strings attached. Landlords, for example, may exploit students' desperate need for housing by demanding sexual favours in exchange for rent, turning a basic necessity into a tool for abuse. Wealthy individuals from the community, known as "sugar mummies" or "sugar daddies," may also exploit students' financial desperation, offering financial support in exchange for sexual relationships.

This pattern highlights the dangerous intersection of economic vulnerability and GBV. When students are struggling to meet basic needs like rent, food, or tuition, they are more likely to accept offers of financial assistance, even if it comes with the cost of their safety and dignity. This creates a cycle of abuse, where financial desperation fuels exploitation, and the experience of exploitation further exacerbates economic hardship. The study underscores the need to address the root causes of this cycle by providing students with financial support, affordable housing options, and access to resources that can alleviate their economic vulnerability. Only by addressing these underlying issues can we truly begin to break the cycle of abuse and create a safer and more equitable environment for students in Masvingo's higher and tertiary institutions.

The hierarchical structure of educational institutions inherently creates power imbalances, placing lecturers and staff in positions of authority over students. This power dynamic fosters a climate of vulnerability and fear, making it incredibly difficult for students to report abuse without fearing

retaliation. The very structure of the institution, with its emphasis on grades, assessments, and the need for good standing, creates a system where students feel dependent on those in positions of power. This dependence can be exploited, leaving students feeling powerless to speak out against abuse for fear of jeopardizing their academic progress or facing disciplinary action.

The chilling phrase "thigh for a pass" exemplifies the normalization of sexual exploitation within this power dynamic. This phrase, often casually uttered and accepted within the institution, reveals a deeply ingrained culture where academic success is linked to sexual favours. It exposes a disturbing reality where sexual exploitation is not perceived as a serious offense, but rather as a transactional exchange where academic achievement is bartered for sexual gratification. This normalization of sexual exploitation further reinforces the abuse of power, making it more difficult for victims to speak out and seek justice. The power imbalance, coupled with the normalization of sexual exploitation, creates a toxic environment where perpetrators feel emboldened and victims feel silenced.

The study underscores a critical gap in support systems for survivors of GBV within Masvingo's higher and tertiary institutions, highlighting how this lack of support perpetuates a cycle of silence, shame, and impunity. The absence of adequate counselling, legal aid, and medical care for survivors creates a significant barrier to their recovery and empowerment. Victims may feel overwhelmed, isolated, and unable to access the resources they need to heal and rebuild their lives. This lack of support can also contribute to a sense of shame and self-blame, discouraging victims from seeking help and leaving them vulnerable to further abuse.

Furthermore, the absence of safe and accessible reporting mechanisms within these institutions creates a culture of fear and silence. Students may be hesitant to report abuse due to concerns about retaliation, fear of being ostracized, or a lack of faith in the institution's ability to respond effectively. This fear is exacerbated by a lack of trust in the reporting process, with concerns about confidentiality and the potential for further victimization by authorities. The absence of clear policies and procedures for reporting GBV, coupled with a lack of training for staff on how to respond appropriately, further discourages victims from coming forward.

The study also highlights how traditional gender roles and societal attitudes towards women and violence contribute to the normalization of GBV. Sexually suggestive comments and jokes, often dismissed as harmless, contribute to a culture of disrespect and trivialize sexual harassment. These attitudes create an environment where GBV is tolerated, and perpetrators are less likely to be held accountable. This normalization of abuse makes it more difficult for victims to recognize and challenge harmful behaviour, further perpetuating a cycle of silence and impunity.

CONCLUSION

This study, exploring the forms and prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) in higher and tertiary education institutions in Masvingo, Zimbabwe, has revealed a complex and troubling reality. While these institutions are intended to be spaces of learning and growth, they are unfortunately not immune to the pervasive issue of GBV. The research has shed light on the diverse forms of GBV experienced by students, educators, and stakeholders, highlighting the need for a comprehensive and multifaceted approach to addressing this critical issue. The findings underscore the urgent need for policy changes and prevention strategies that can effectively address GBV and

create safer learning environments for all students in Masvingo. The study's recommendations, informed by the experiences and perspectives of those affected, aim to contribute to the development of a more inclusive and equitable educational system that prioritizes the safety, well-being, and academic success of all students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the recommendations from this study:

- Educational institutions must develop and implement clear policies and procedures for reporting, investigating, and addressing GBV, ensuring that victims have access to support services and that perpetrators are held accountable.
- Raising awareness about GBV, its impact, and how to prevent it is crucial. This includes educating students, educators, and the wider community about gender equality, consent, and healthy relationships.
- Access to counselling, legal assistance, and medical care for victims of GBV is essential. Educational institutions should establish partnerships with local organizations and agencies to provide these vital services.
- Addressing the underlying social and cultural norms that contribute to GBV is essential. This requires challenging gender stereotypes, promoting gender equality, and fostering a culture of respect and empathy.
- Empowering students and educators to recognize and challenge GBV is crucial. This includes providing training on bystander intervention, conflict resolution, and promoting a culture of open communication and support.

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CHAPTER 3: Exploring how survivors of sexual harassment comprehend and interpret their lived experiences in institutions of higher learning: A phenomenological approach
Chinangure F., Sibanda E., and Nkomo N.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the extensive research conducted on sexual harassment in Zimbabwe, there are still other areas that have not been thoroughly explored. Chireshe and Chireshe (2009) concentrated on sexual harassment targeting female high school students, utilizing counsellors and peer educators as primary sources of data. In contrast, Matina (2002) examined sexual harassment incidents among female students in higher education, while Nhundu and Shumba (2001) focused on documented cases. Magwaza et al. (2024) concentrated on coping strategies of community women in Harare. The current study focused on individuals who have experienced sexual harassment during their days as university students by drawing insights from their firsthand experiences. The findings of the study inform interventions to assist students at risk.

In studies conducted by Hooks (2000) and Chinangure and Mapanga (2024), it was established that sexual harassment cases are intertwined with the social and patriarchal constructs prevalent in various human cultures worldwide. Most of these gender constructs result in sexual exploitation of women which Chinangure and Mutekwe (2014) perceived as a violation of their human rights. It was also noted that in most African countries, gender-based inequalities and lack of economic opportunities for university students leave them vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse by individuals wielding economic power (Chinangure & Mutekwe, 2014). Research indicates that poverty places women, as well as many university students, in vulnerable positions where they are subject to control, manipulation, and sexual violation (Chinangure & Mutekwe, 2014). Shockingly, sexual harassment has become normalised in many universities, despite the majority of victims experiencing trauma and distress that significantly impact their academic pursuits and well-being (Chinangure & Mapanga, 2024).

Zimbabwean societies have normalised certain forms of sexual harassment, particularly against women, contributing to the proliferation of HIV and AIDS (Chinangure & Mutekwe, 2014). Consequently, higher education institutions face the challenge of curbing infection rates by addressing cases of sexual harassment and gender-based violence (Female Student Network Trust, 2015). Norms, attitudes, and behaviours rooted in various African cultures and globally tend to promote male dominance and entitlement over women (Bloom, 2018). Examples of such entitlement are evident in Shona and Ndebele cultures, where men are encouraged to engage in behaviours like *chiramu* and *chikudo* (fondling of breasts and patting buttocks) without consent (Chinangure & Mutekwe, 2014). These cultural norms, attitudes, and values not only fail to discourage sexual harassment but actually endorse and accept it. Some Zimbabwean cultures persist in practices like giving daughters to wealthy older men to replace deceased wives against their will (*chimutsa mapfihwa*) and offering young women to men to appease avenging spirits (*kuripa ngozi*) without their consent (Chinangure, 2017). Consequently, gender stereotypes and cultural beliefs perpetuate the objectification of women within patriarchal societies (Chinangure & Mutekwe, 2014).

In addition, to the above, studies have shown that religious beliefs also play a significant role in shaping perceptions of how women should be treated sexually (Hairsine, 2019). With Africa being considered one of the most religious regions globally, the influence of religious groups can inadvertently encourage the sexual abuse of women (Chinangure & Mutekwe, 2014; Hairsine, 2019). It is against this background that this study seeks to explore how individuals who have experienced sexual harassment understand and reflect on their lived experiences in selected institutions of higher education in Zimbabwe, and its impact on the mental well-being of affected victims.

Statement of Problem

While sexual harassment has attracted the attention of both international and local scholars, it remains inadequately addressed due to being ingrained in the socialisation process that perpetuates normalised gender roles in societies (Chinangure, 2018). This normalisation, fueled by patriarchal structures, has historically depicted women as objects of male pleasure, contributing to the acceptance of sexual abuse and harassment in many societies. Sexual harassment experiences especially among university students has been on the rise, a trend that must be challenged. This study, therefore, sought to explore how individuals who have experienced sexual harassment understand and reflect on their lived experiences in selected institutions of higher education in Zimbabwe and its impact on the mental well-being of affected victims.

The main aim of this study was to determine how victims of sexual harassment in Zimbabwean higher education institutions understand and interpret their lived experiences. Specifically, the study sought to document the specific lived experiences of victims of sexual harassment within Zimbabwean higher education institutions, evaluate the impact of sexual harassment on the overall well-being of victims within the educational context, identify the support needs of victims of sexual harassment in Zimbabwean higher education institutions. The findings of this study are expected to inform the development of effective support systems and interventions, and provide insights to inform interventions, and support services aimed at supporting victims in higher education institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Mapayi (2023) sexual harassment includes requests for sexual favours, verbal or physical activities in exchange for sex, and if the advances are rejected, a hostile environment is created. Literature has different classification of sexual harassment. Mapayi (2023) identified two forms which are exchanging sex for benefits usually for performance or academic favours, demotion at work or academic failure and creation of hostile environment that is intimidating or humiliating to the victim. Other researchers singled out sexist or offensive remarks or jokes to seduce a victim. Usually this is done through inappropriate flirting and sexual advances without threat of sanctions and usually is a mind game. This form of sexual harassment is very difficult to deal with but it is the most common.

Sexual harassment has also been categorised into three, comprising gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion (Zhou & Peterson, 2024). Researchers explain that gender harassment involves making unkind comments and remarks with the intention of insulting individuals based on their gender (Zhou & Peterson, 2024). Unwanted sexual attention is characterised by behaviours that are meant to express the harassers' sexual desires or interests

without consent (Zhou & Peterson, 2024). Sexual coercion entails using physical or psychological pressure to coerce individuals into engaging in sexual activities (Zhou & Peterson, 2024). The current generation that is techno savvy has experienced a lot of online sexual harassment and abusers often hide their identity. Although online interaction provides a sense of community and networking, there is a need to avoid strangers and socialise with people one is familiar with.

Sexual harassment is one of the worst cases of violation of human rights and a serious impediment to achievement of equality (UNESCO, 2013). Universities by their very purpose of advancing knowledge should be safe from sexual harassment, yet they are some of the worst environments where the majority of people have experienced sexual harassment. The U.S. Department of Education (2020) observed that in most institutions, sexual harassment was still very high. This study seeks to further explore how victims perceived and interpreted their experiences. Most scholars concur that sexual harassment is under-researched and underreported (UNESCO, 2013; Hollad, et al. 2022; Brock et al. 2018). A study by UNICEF (2015) reported that out of 560 students who participated in the study 70 % experienced sexual harassment and only less than 1 % reported their abuse to authorities. The cases of sexual harassment increase in countries with unstable political climate and poverty.

The discourse on sexual harassment shows that sexual harassment results in self-blame, anxiety and distress. The majority of abusers are men (Zhou & Peterson, 2024). In 60% of women who experience sexual harassment, only 20 percent would report due to fear of victimization. Sexual harassment in public spaces and on streets is perpetrated by strangers. Chinangure and Mapanga (2024) highlighted the underreporting of sexual harassment cases in American universities. Rennison and Addington (2014) found that the prevailing trend in numerous studies on sexual harassment within American university settings often occurred between acquaintances. The primary offence observed was rape directed at women. Data revealed that one in five women encountered rape during their college years (Peterson and Planty, 2016). Instances of student sexual harassment were frequent, during casual interactions in students' leisure time and social gatherings aimed at unwinding. Research by CHE (2019) on gender-based violence in South Africa established that sexual harassment went beyond just instances of male-on-female violence but encompassed incidents by heterosexual students who targeted homosexual students who adhered to unconventional norms of sexuality. Many students resorted to using homophobic stereotypes to harass members of the LGBTQI community and they engaged in corrective rape, a heinous act aimed at altering the sexual orientation of LGBTQ individuals (Chinangure, 2018).

Such cases of sexual harassment negatively impact, not only on the victims' self-esteem and self-image, but also severely affected their ability to protect themselves against HIV and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (Chinangure, 2018). Most of the victims felt so humiliated that they ended up dropping out of the universities and even ended up turning to substance abuse as a coping mechanism to deal with the psychological trauma (Chinangure, 2018). Previous studies have indicated that cases of sexual harassment were underreported because the victims feared stigma and discrimination (Chireshe and Chreshe, 2009). According to Chinangure (2018), the surge in sexual harassment incidents could be linked to the influence of technology and societal transformations. In a study examining the impact of celebrities on student behaviour, Chinangure (2018) found that the dissemination of sexualised content on media platforms exposed students to

stimuli that heightened their sexual impulses. Those students who identified with celebrities exhibiting sexually abusive behaviours tended to mimic such conduct (Chinangure, 2018).

Chinangure (2018) also found that media outlets exploited women for financial gain, portraying them as objects of male desire in advertising videos. This exploitation was evident in various video clips where men appeared formally dressed in suits while naked women performed to entertain male viewers. Among Zulu and Swati cultures, initiation ceremonies that symbolised the transition of girls into marriageable women perpetuated harmful beliefs. These cultures view women solely as objects of male pleasure, thus contributing to gender-based violence and sexual harassment in all its forms (Chinangure, 2018).

Literature has shown that sexual harassment does not target any specific people. According to Mapayi (2023), anyone can be a survivor or perpetrator. However, studies have found that more women than men are victims of sexual harassment and that more men than women are likely to be perpetrators. There are also cases of same-sex sexual harassment in tertiary institutions (Chinangure, 2018). A study of survivors of sexual harassment by Lissmann et al. (2023) highlighted that the universities did not try to check if their students were survivors. Any unusual situation triggered or mirrored the harassment and having unmet mental health care needs led to serious traumatic experiences that resulted in poor concentration and performance. Research conducted by Chinangure and Mutekwe (2014) revealed students exposed themselves to situations that made them vulnerable due to poverty currently affecting Zimbabwe. The same study found that a lack of clear policies aimed at preventing sexual harassment was the main challenge for institutions. Even where such policies do exist, mechanisms for their enforcement are often absent. It was noted in one study that certain tertiary institutions lacked any sexual harassment policies.

METHODOLOGY

The research involved individuals who have experienced sexual harassment in different settings, including verbal, physical, or online harassment. The study was carried out in three higher education institutions in Masvingo. A total of 82 students were randomly recruited, who were using an online google application form to participate in the study. Data was collected through self-testimonials, where participants share their personal stories and experiences of being sexually harassed. In addition, focus group discussions were conducted to facilitate group interactions and generate collective insights into the impact and implications of sexual harassment within higher education institutions. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns, themes, and perspectives that emerged from the data.

Ethical Considerations

The study is of a sensitive nature, data collection process for self-testimonies of survivors of sexual harassment was done after ensuring that participants fully understood the purpose of the study, their role in it, and the potential risks and benefits involved before they provided testimonies. To safeguard their identities from potential harm, codes were used. Researchers made sure that participants had access to support services and resources such as counseling and debriefing after sharing their experiences.

RESULTS

This study involved 20 male and 20 female students who volunteered to share their experiences either as witnesses of sexual harassment or as victims. The participants were students from three institutions from Masvingo Province and their numbers per age are shown below.

Table 1 Age ranges and gender of participants

Age of participants	Number	Gender		Total
		Males	Females	
20-29	22	4	18	22
23-30	18	3	15	18
25-35	42	4	38	42

The data revealed that victims were mainly young adults who naturally were building their careers and aged between the ages of 20 and 35.

Nature of Sexual Harassment

Table 2: Rate at which each type of sexual harassment was reported

Type of sexual harassment	Number of cases reported
Making sexual requests	40%
Making comments about appearance of the body	20%
Sending explicit images without consent/sex videos	50%
Making highly sexual remarks	13%
Continuously expressing sexual feelings	24%
Forcing oneself on someone without consent(rape)	95%
Glorified hug	2%
Sanctioning	30%
Slapping bums	30%
Fondling breast	15%
Drugging or spiking a drink	14%

Table 2 captures the different cases that were very common in university settings and participants pointed out that these cases happened regularly. After the incident took place the victims indicated that it was very difficult to prove and have evidence to support that one was sexually harassed. For instance, perpetrators who passed comments such as your legs are sexy, your lips and others did

not pass the comments in public but waited for opportunities when no one was in earshot. They are already fantasizing about your body or the act. Based on the study only 20 % of the cases were reported.

Comments such as making highly sexual remarks and continuously expressing sexual feelings were also not passed in public but when victims were alone. Perpetrators continued to do as long as one showed that they were not offended. By merely passing out such comments the interpretation is the perpetrator regards you as a loose woman or as a sex object. According to this study the study it was observed that most cases of this nature were reported.

Regarding hugs, a glorified hug is not an innocent hug, but a long hug that appears as if the person wants to crush you. Some perpetrators press themselves into a person so that the person being hugged feels their entire anatomy and the body temperature. Some of the victims who were hugged that way pointed out that they felt dizzy, confused and sometimes they felt something strange in their bodies. If the person continued to stalk them they would quickly fail to resist due to euphoria associated with such embraces. Thus only 2% of these cases of glorified hug were reported.

The slapping of bums was common among students and victims also claimed that men of authority abused them because they paid their salaries. According to the study only 30% of the cases were reported. To avoid being fired one had to pretend to enjoy it. The only way to avoid that abuse was to avoid cleaning the office and saving the bosses tea or walking around them. It was one of the most common abuse.

Drugging or a lace of wine in one 's drink was a common strategy used by both students and other males who needed to abuse students. The victims claimed that during welcome parties most female students who were not familiar with alcohol ended up in a colleague's bed the next morning or had unprotected sex after drinking sprees. This form of abuse was not taken seriously as only 14 % of the cases were reported

Fondling of breasts was a common abuse perpetrated against females by male students and lecturers. Only 15 % of the cases were reported. According to victims this was normally happening in queues and closed doors by friends or people of authority such as lecturers. One of the victims said,

While standing in the queue one male student leaned backwards to brush my breasts and pretended not to be noticing yet it was intentional. This has happened a lot and most of them get away with it after feeling you. Sometimes they rub so hard that you see that they already are turned on.

The sanctioning was practiced mostly by lecturers who set conditions for passing their modules. ***No love no passing mark. No sex no passing mark. In some cases, the victim could also sanction lecturers with the same condition.***

The next section discusses personal experiences and impact of sexual harassment on wellbeing of victims

Personal Experiences and Impact of Sexual Harassment on Wellbeing of Victims

Isolation and ill health

After the incident, I spent the entire week locked up in my room. I could not face the world after having been used and dumped to die of HIV and AIDS. My parents had so much hope in me but I let them down. I started isolating myself and self-pity took the better of me. My work deteriorated. (Participant 15)

Suicide Ideation

I felt used and useless after having slept with five men in the same room. Each had sex with me without a condom. By merely looking at the touts I could tell that these were men who worked at the local bus terminus loading buses to various destinations. These were men who lived under the influence of substances and would never dream of any family. I only thought of nothing except suicide (Participant 18).

Trauma and Confusion

After the incident, I broke down when the pastor was giving a sermon on sexual harassment and sex before marriage. The senior student who had abused me sexually was present in the church. He was on record saying he would get five lovers per semester where he would entice new students and rape them after parties (Participant 26)

Fear and Loss of Concentration

During attachment a lecturer who had tried to abuse me visited the organization where I was doing industrial attachment. The lecturer appeared in the office wanting to assess me during this work related learning period. Luckily, I had told my deputy principal about the abuse and they hid me in the office and told the lecturer that I was off sick. (Participant 13).

Psychological Trauma

I was abused by my lecturer who then covered the case by marrying me when I became pregnant. I am now stuck in a loveless polygamous marriage. How can I raise a family with a man who sexually abused me? It is mental torture for my whole life. (Participant 17).

Exploitation and Fear of Failure

A lecturer gave me a failing mark and asked me to get to his office for help. This lecturer was upfront as he simply said he wanted to have sex with me if I had to pass. He warned me that if I reported this issue to anyone he would make sure that I failed. He took my script and wrote 84% and then he started fondling me.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The results showed that most victims experienced sexual harassment in different forms but did not report these cases to authorities. These findings aligned with previous research that reported fondling of breasts; highly sexual remarks and continuously expressing sexual feelings (Mapayi, 2023); spiking a victim's drink and sleeping with them (Chinangure & Mutekwe, 2014), slapping victim's bums (Liesmann et al. 2023); and sanctioning and abnormal hugging (Chinangure, 2018) as some forms of sexual harassment. Hollad et al. (2022) also identified the same forms of sexual harassment. The victims did not report cases because of lack of awareness, and fear that no action would be taken, as well as fear of stigma and victimization, and lack of a clear procedure and

attitude of the authorities. Although there were policies on sexual harassment, they were on paper and were not fully supported by action. The authorities to whom reports were to be made were the perpetrators of the sexual harassment. Therefore, as was also observed by Liesmann et al. (2023), education and awareness on issues of sexual harassment are very important in institutions of higher learning.

This study established what was reported previously, that sexual harassment targets more women than men, and that most perpetrators are men although the number of women involved in committing cases of sexual harassment is increasing (Mapayi, 2023). The current study found that sexual harassment was underreported in institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe due to a number of factors. One of the factors was unequal power relations (Chinangure & Mapanga, 2024), the fear of loss of status (Mapayi, 2023), issues to do with academic marks (Chinangure & Mapanga 2023); and the associated stigma that it brings (Chinangure, 2023).

In confirming what Hollad et al. (2022) found out, the current study found that the close working relationships between students, faculty members and other students made disclosing an experience of sexual harassment difficult and stigmatizing. Most victims suffered quietly. Concerning the second research question, that sexual harassment had a serious negative impact on the psychosocial wellbeing of victims, given the foregoing findings from the current study, sexual harassment could account for significant trauma, psychological harm, and mental distress upon victims. This finding aligns with previous research by Pretorius and le Roux (2014) and Chireshe and Chireshe (2009), who highlighted the detrimental impact of sexual harassment on the psychological well-being of victims.

A similar study by Zhou and Peterson (2024) established that students who experienced sexual harassment developed a range of negative emotions, including constant anxiety, fear, and a sense of hopelessness. Similarly, this study identified distress and negative emotions often triggered by presence of males and traumatic memories, leading to further distress. The testimonies highlighted an incident in which a woman burst out crying after she could not resist internal pain after the pastor reminded her of a previous abuse.

In tandem with previous studies (Zhou & Peterson, 2024; Liesmann et al., 2023), this study found that sexual harassment often resulted in social isolation, leading some students to turn to substance abuse as a coping mechanism. This further exacerbated their problems and negatively impacted their behaviour. For instance, one of the testimonies revealed that the victim lived in perpetual isolation.

Some of the victims ended up with damaged self-esteem. For instance, victims often suffer from a damaged self-image and low self-esteem (Liesmann et al., 2023). They feel worthless and struggle to find meaning in their lives and eventually settle for suicide. The current study also revealed that sexual harassment could lead to impaired mental health, including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. This, in turn, can significantly impact their academic performance. This aligns with Brock, Garde, & Weldon (2018) who pointed out that sexual harassment affected the academic performance of victimized students of victims. Concurring with the above scholarly views (Chinangure & Mapanga, 2024), it was also very difficult for abused students to trust anyone.

Victims of sexual harassment live in constant fear and mistrust, making it difficult to form healthy relationships and trust others. They often feel insecure and vulnerable.

Previous studies shed light on a concerning pattern of harm originating from sexual harassment (Ciccarell & White, 2013). The research revealed that victims of sexual harassment are more prone to substance abuse as a coping mechanism for the trauma they experience (Chinangure, 2018). The current study found that sexual harassment caused painful trauma, psychological harm and mental breakdown on the victims. Pretorius and le Roux, 2014, Chireshe and Chireshe (2009) and Brock, Garde, & Weldon (2018) who pointed out that sexual harassment affected the psychological wellbeing of victims. This, in turn, elevates their risk of engaging in risky sexual behaviours, which can lead to an increased likelihood of contracting HIV, AIDS, and other sexually transmitted infections. Evidence found in the current research established a bizarre practice where some students were hooking up fellow students for sexual abuse by youth leaders and rich sugar daddies. In view of this, scholars concur that out of desperation for financial support, some students ended up getting involved, resulting in internally suppressed emotions (Pretorius & le Roux, 2014). As a coping strategy, students would turn to substance abuse. Substance abuse has been found to negatively impact cognitive function such as thinking, perception, and memory, resulting in poor academic performance (Brock, Garde, & Weldon, 2018). The current study emphasises the urgent need for comprehensive interventions that address both the immediate and long-term effects of sexual harassment.

In other studies, (Hollad, et al. 2022), people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual reported their experiences. In contrast, in this study, there were no people who identified as members of these vulnerable groups meaning that people whose gender is not legally recognised in the laws of the country are suffering quietly. In tandem with what was established by other researchers this study established that sexual harassment in tertiary institutions has serious adverse effects such as academic failure, withdrawal from studies (Mapayi, 2023); psychological problems ranging from depression, stress and anxiety, self-stigma, lowered self-esteem. People affected by sexual harassment also experience physical health issues such as headaches, exhaustion, sleep problems, muscle pain and weight loss or gain (Mapayi, 2023).

In line with the response to the third research question, Brock, Garde, & Weldon (2018) established that most cases were not reported not because they were no trustworthy channels, but because there was no independent system with personnel with the proper skills to conduct swift investigations. The fact that students did not report the cases does not mean the cases were non-existent. The lived experiences of victims of sexual harassment showed that victims suffered from negative psychological and social effects but there was very little done to support the victims from the institutions. This finding was also confirmed by a study carried by Mapayi, (2023). Therefore, the best intervention was to support the victims and educate them fully on what constituted sexual harassment and procedures to report. The results of this study are also supported by prior studies (Lissmann et al., 2023); Hollad, Rieger & Callaghan, 2022) who indicated that there are no systems in place to find out if students who face mental health problems are survivors of sexual harassment. Institutions are not ready to support victims of sexual harassment. Additionally, in line with what was established by Hollad et al. (2022), this study established that cases of sexual harassment that were reported and acted on did not result in any meaningful deterrent punishment. Some reported cases were not taken seriously. Thus victims saw it as a waste of time to report cases.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made

- There is a need to train staff and students to enable them to recognise and respond to sexual harassment and how to assist victims.
- The institutions should create platforms for open dialogue to encourage open discussions about sexual harassment and create a safe space for students to report incidents without fear of retaliation.
- Institutions should provide resources and support to victims of sexual harassment.
- There should be clearly laid down reporting procedures so that students would decide on which options to take when reporting.

CONCLUSION

Conclusions drawn are that introduction and effective implementation of a sexual harassment policy within institutions of higher learning can significantly reduce incidences of harassment through a combined educational and deterrent impact. However, without a fair and just application of the policy, there is a likelihood that cases of sexual harassment can be perpetuated. There is a need to revisit policies currently in place to further sensitise the community, empower victims, and work towards the complete eradication of sexual harassment through proactive measures and corrective actions when necessary.

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CHAPTER 4: Innovative mechanisms for preventing Gender Based Violence in Higher and Tertiary Institutions in Masvingo Province

Paul Sambo

INTRODUCTION

Gender Based Violence (GBV) is a pervasive and insidious issue in higher and tertiary institutions worldwide, with far-reaching consequences for victims, including physical harm, emotional trauma, and academic disruption (UNESCO, 2019). The World Health Organization (2013) reports that 35% of women globally have experienced physical or sexual violence, with young women in educational settings particularly vulnerable. In the United States, 23% of female undergraduates' experience sexual assault or misconduct (AAU, 2019). Similarly, in South Africa, 51% of female students' experience GBV (Hollis, 2017). Closer home, in Zimbabwe, a 2020 report by the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprise Development reveals a disturbing trend of GBV in higher and tertiary institutions, with 1 in 5 students experiencing physical or sexual violence.

Comparative Analysis of GBV in HEIs Regionally and Internationally

The prevalence and dynamics of GBV in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) vary across regions and countries, reflecting diverse cultural, social, and economic contexts.

Regional Variations

Regional variations in Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) highlight the importance of contextualizing solutions to address local dynamics. In Africa, GBV is often deeply rooted in traditional gender roles and power imbalances, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and behaviors (O'Mullan, C., 2024). In contrast, Asia has seen a rise in GBV perpetuated through online platforms and social media, necessitating innovative solutions to address digital harassment and cyberbullying (Kumar et al., 2020; Seraj et al., 2024). Meanwhile, in Europe and North America, GBV is often tied to campus culture and binge drinking, emphasizing the need for initiatives addressing alcohol-facilitated sexual assault and promoting healthy campus norms (Krebs et al., 2016). These regional variations underscore the importance of understanding local contexts and adapting strategies to effectively prevent and respond to GBV in HEIs worldwide.

International Comparisons

International comparisons reveal alarming rates of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across different countries. In the United States, a study conducted by Cantor et al. (2019) found that 1 in 5 women experience sexual assault during their college years, highlighting the prevalence of GBV on American campuses. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, a report by Universities UK (2019) revealed that 1 in 3 students experience GBV, emphasizing the need for urgent action to address this issue. In Australia, the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) reported that 1 in 2 students experience GBV, indicating an even

higher incidence of GBV in Australian HEIs (AHRC, 2017). These striking statistics demonstrate that GBV is a pervasive issue affecting students worldwide, necessitating a global response to prevent and address GBV in HEIs.

Similarities and Contrasts

Despite regional and international variations, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) shares common themes, including power imbalances, gender inequality, and cultural normalization. These underlying factors contribute to the persistence of GBV across different contexts, highlighting the need for comprehensive and nuanced solutions. While the manifestations of GBV may differ across regions and cultures, the root causes remain strikingly similar, emphasizing the importance of addressing these shared underlying factors.

Artificial intelligence (AI) driven solutions can be adapted to address region-specific challenges, offering a promising approach to GBV prevention and response. However, it is crucial that these solutions consider local contexts and nuances, ensuring that they are effective and respectful in diverse settings. By acknowledging and incorporating regional differences, AI-driven initiatives can be tailored to address specific needs and concerns, increasing their potential impact. This contextualized approach enables AI-driven solutions to navigate complex cultural dynamics, power structures, and social norms, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive and effective response to GBV in HEIs worldwide. Personal anecdotes and case studies illustrate the devastating impact of GBV. For example, a 2022 report by the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum documented the story of a female student who was sexually assaulted by a lecturer, leading to her withdrawal from university. Such incidents underscore the urgent need for innovative solutions to prevent GBV in higher and tertiary institutions.

This study aims to explore the potential of sentimental analysis and AI algorithms in analyzing social media data to prevent GBV in Masvingo Province's higher and tertiary institutions. By leveraging technology and social media, we can better understand online conversations and behaviors related to GBV, identify high-risk scenarios, and inform targeted interventions to create safer learning environments.

GBV in higher and tertiary institutions is a complex issue, influenced by factors such as gender stereotypes, power imbalances, and institutional culture (UNESCO, 2019). Social media has become a critical platform for discussing GBV, with online conversations often reflecting offline attitudes and behaviors (Henry & Powell, 2015). AI algorithms, including Random Forest and SVM, have been successfully applied to analyze social media data and predict high-risk scenarios (Nock et al., 2019). However, there is a need for more research on the application of AI-driven approaches to prevent GBV in higher and tertiary institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in higher and tertiary institutions is a complex issue, deeply rooted in societal power dynamics and gender stereotypes (UNESCO, 2019). Feminist theories, particularly the social constructivist perspective, highlight the role of patriarchal norms and power imbalances in perpetuating GBV (Connell, 2009). The theory of intersectionality further

emphasizes the need to consider multiple forms of oppression, including race, class, sexuality, and disability, in understanding GBV experiences (Crenshaw, 1991).

Theoretical Framework

The concept of power dynamics is crucial in understanding GBV. Power imbalances between perpetrators and victims, as well as within institutional structures, can perpetuate GBV (McCarthy, et al., 2018). Feminist scholars argue that power is not solely held by individuals but is embedded in institutional and societal structures (Foucault, 1980). Therefore, addressing GBV requires a comprehensive approach that challenges these power dynamics.

The intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991) highlights the importance of considering multiple forms of oppression, including race, class, sexuality, and disability, in understanding GBV experiences. This framework is critical in analyzing how different forms of oppression intersect to create unique experiences of GBV. Social media has become a critical platform for discussing GBV, with online conversations often reflecting offline attitudes and behaviors (Henry & Powell, 2015). A study in the United States found that social media can perpetuate rape culture and victim-blaming attitudes (Keller & Hertzog, 2018). In contrast, a study in Australia highlighted the potential of social media to facilitate support and solidarity among GBV survivors (Powell & Henry, 2017).

AI algorithms, including Random Forest and SVM, have been successfully applied to analyze social media data and predict high-risk scenarios (Brú et al., 2021). A study in Canada used machine learning to identify GBV-related tweets and detect early warning signs (Alam et al., 2020). However, there is a need for more research on the application of AI-driven approaches to prevent GBV in higher and tertiary institutions. Recent studies highlight the importance of addressing GBV in educational settings. In South Africa, a study found that GBV prevention programs can reduce incidents of violence (Hollis, 2017). In India, a study emphasized the need for inclusive policies and support services for GBV survivors (Bali et al., 2024).

Despite these efforts, gaps exist in the literature regarding the use of AI in GBV prevention. Few studies have explored the ethical considerations of using AI in GBV prevention, such as data privacy and bias (Chen et al., 2020). Additionally, more research is needed on the effectiveness of AI-driven approaches in diverse cultural contexts. Feminist scholars have long argued that GBV prevention requires a transformative approach that challenges patriarchal norms and power dynamics (MacArthur et al., 2022.; Leung 2019; Duvvury et al., 2024). This includes addressing institutional culture and policies that perpetuate GBV (Banyard et al., 2017). The use of AI-driven approaches must be situated within this broader feminist framework to ensure that technology is used to empower, rather than further marginalize, GBV survivors.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a content analysis approach to explore the potential of sentimental analysis and AI algorithms in preventing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in higher education institutions. The researcher employed a machine learning framework, incorporating Random Forest, Support

Vector Machine (SVM), and Natural Language Processing (NLP) algorithms to identify high-risk scenarios and detect early warning signs of GBV.

Data Collection

The researcher gathered social media data from Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram using keywords related to GBV. The selected platforms are popular among the target population, providing a vast amount of data for analysis. These platforms also offer a wealth of data, with Twitter generating over 500 million tweets daily <https://www.creatosaurus.io/blog/twitter-statistics>.

Data Preprocessing

Collected data underwent preprocessing to remove irrelevant information and noise. This included removing stop words, punctuation, and special characters to enhance data quality.

Selection of Keywords

Keywords related to GBV were selected based on a comprehensive review of existing literature and expert input. The keywords include English words: #GBV, #rape, #sexual assault, #insult, and #sexual harassment and Shona words: These keywords were used to collect social media data from the selected platforms.

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in line with the Zimbabwean laws and regulations for GBV such as the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission Act (Chapter 10:30), Freedom of Information (Chapter 10:33), Data Protection Act (Chapter 11:12), Sexual Offences Act (Chapter 9:21) and the Zimbabwe National Gender Policy (2013). Informed consent was not obtained from individual users, as the data is publicly available in anonymized form. However, the study ensured anonymity and confidentiality by aggregating data and avoiding personal identifiable information.

Synthetic data which resembles real - world data was generated using Generative AI Engines. Generating synthetic data for GBV research was used to enhance the understanding of underlying patterns and support the development of predictive models. By following the structured approach, the researcher was able to effectively utilize Generative AI while being mindful of ethical responsibilities and the realistic portrayal of GBV scenarios.

Data Analysis

In this study, NLP (Natural Language Processing) was used to analyze and understand language patterns and sentiment in social media data related to GBV. It helped to identify key words and phrases related to GBV, as well as the overall sentiment expressed in online discussions. This information was then used to inform the development of the AI-driven framework for preventing GBV.

The study's methodology involved a multi-step approach to analyze social media data and predict high-risk GBV scenarios. First, social media data was collected using relevant keywords and Application Programmable Interfaces (APIs). Next, the collected data went through preprocessing to remove irrelevant information and noise, ensuring high-quality data for analysis. Then,

sentimental analysis was conducted using NLP algorithms, categorizing posts as positive, negative, or neutral. Following this, relevant features were extracted from the preprocessed data, including keywords, hashtags, and user engagement metrics. These features were used to train machine learning models, specifically Random Forest and SVM algorithms, to predict high-risk scenarios and detect early warning signs. Finally, the performance of the machine learning models was evaluated using metrics such as accuracy, precision, and recall, ensuring the effectiveness of the predictive models.

RESULTS

Sentimental analysis of the synthetic data reveals a predominantly negative sentiment towards GBV, indicating a strong adverse reaction to gender-based violence. The emerging themes, both in English and Shona, further highlight the severity of the issue.

Themes:

Table 1. Common English words associated with GBV

Word	Meaning
Silence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> implying a sense of shame, stigma, or intimidation that prevents victims from speaking out
Trauma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> suggesting a profound and lasting impact on victims' lives
Coercion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> indicating a sense of force, manipulation, or control
Entrapment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> revealing a feeling of being trapped or unable to escape
Humiliation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> implying a sense of degradation, shame, or embarrassment
Intimidation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> suggesting a sense of fear, threat, or power imbalance
Objectification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> implying a sense of reducing individuals to mere objects for exploitation
Vulnerability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> indicating a sense of susceptibility, weakness, or exposure
Bite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> implying a sense of hurt and vulnerability
Fear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> indicating a pervasive sense of anxiety and apprehension
Frustration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> revealing a feeling of powerlessness and exasperation

There were also strong GBV words that were used to analyze data, and these are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Strong GBV words used in the analysis

Word	Meaning
Assault	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical assault (hitting, pushing) Sexual assault (rape, unwanted touching) Verbal assault (threats, insults) Emotional assault (manipulation, gas lighting)
Sexual Harassment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catcalling or wolf-whistling

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inappropriate touching or grabbing • Sexual comments or jokes • Displaying sexually explicit images or materials • Sending unwanted sexual messages or images • Coercion or bribery for sexual favors
Insult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belittles or demeans a person's identity, particularly their gender, sexuality, or body • Uses derogatory language or tone to humiliate or degrade using written words on social media (e.g., online comments, messages, or posts) • Attacks a person's self-worth, dignity, or reputation • Creates a hostile or intimidating environment

Table 3. Shona words used in the data analysis

Word	Meaning
Kutya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "to fear" or "to be afraid," emphasizing the fear associated with GBV
Tuka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "to insult"
Rova	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "to bite or hit," implying a sense of hurt and vulnerability
Manikidza	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "to force or coerce" revealing a feeling of powerlessness and exasperation.

Emerging themes from the sentimental analysis included insult, sexual harassment, and assault, highlighting the severity of GBV. Predictive modeling achieved an accuracy of 85% in detecting early warning signs of GBV, demonstrating the effectiveness of the AI-driven approach.

AI Algorithm Results

The AI algorithms analyzed online discussions and identified high-risk scenarios that posed a significant threat to individuals and communities. These scenarios included the use of gender-based slurs, which aimed to demean and dehumanize individuals based on their gender identity or expression. Threats were also detected, which included explicit or implicit warnings of harm or violence against individuals or groups. Furthermore, derogatory language was identified, which encompassed insults, put-downs, and other forms of verbal abuse that sought to erode individuals' self-worth and dignity. Lastly, hate speech was detected, which involved language that promoted intolerance, discrimination, or violence against individuals or groups based on their gender, race, religion, or other characteristics. These high-risk scenarios were flagged for immediate attention and interventions to prevent online harassment, bullying, and violence from escalating into real-world harm. These scenarios indicate a potential escalation of GBV and highlight the need for prompt intervention.

Predictive Modeling Results

The predictive modeling achieved an accuracy of 85% in detecting early warning signs of GBV, demonstrating the effectiveness of the AI-driven approach. The model's ability to identify potential GBV incidents before they occur enables proactive measures to prevent or mitigate harm.

DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates the potential of AI-driven approaches to prevent GBV in higher and tertiary institutions, aligning with existing literature highlighting the importance of technology in GBV prevention (Henry & Powell, 2015; Brú et al., 2021 Rodríguez-Rodríguez et al., 2020). Social media data analysis reveals valuable insights into online conversations and behaviors related to GBV, consistent with studies emphasizing the role of social media in shaping attitudes and behaviors (Keller & Hertzog, 2018; Powell & Henry, 2017). The predictive model's ability to inform targeted interventions and support services for victims supports existing research on the effectiveness of data-driven approaches in GBV prevention (Alam et al., 2023., Gupta et al., 2023). However, limitations include the reliance on self-reported data and the need for ongoing monitoring and evaluation, echoing concerns raised by Chen et al. (2020) regarding data privacy and bias.

The findings of this study unequivocally indicate that Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a pervasive and deeply ingrained issue, eliciting a strong negative sentiment across social media platforms. Notably, AI-driven approaches have demonstrated remarkable efficacy in identifying high-risk scenarios and detecting early warning signs of GBV, enabling proactive measures to be taken. By leveraging these innovative solutions, higher education institutions can predict and prevent GBV incidents, fostering a safer and more supportive learning environment. This proactive stance not only empowers institutions to respond promptly to GBV-related concerns but also sends a resounding message that such behavior will not be tolerated, ultimately contributing to a cultural shift towards greater respect, inclusivity, and empathy. By harnessing the potential of AI-driven GBV prevention, institutions can create a transformative impact, safeguarding the well-being and academic success of their students and staff. By leveraging these findings, higher and tertiary institutions can develop targeted interventions, support services, and policies to address GBV, fostering a culture of safety, respect, and inclusivity.

Implications for Stakeholders

The implementation of AI-driven GBV prevention initiatives has significant implications for various stakeholders in higher education institutions. For students, AI-driven solutions can provide a safe and anonymous reporting mechanism, allowing them to share their experiences without fear of retribution or judgment. Additionally, AI-driven support services can offer immediate assistance and connect students with resources, promoting a safer and more supportive learning environment. This can lead to increased reporting, earlier intervention, and more effective support for students affected by GBV. Faculty members can also benefit from AI-driven solutions, as they can inform training programs and policies, enhancing faculty's ability to prevent and respond to GBV. AI-driven tools can provide faculty with the necessary knowledge and skills to identify early warning signs, respond appropriately, and create a culture of respect and inclusivity in their classrooms and departments.

Policymakers can leverage AI-driven solutions to inform evidence-based policies and allocate resources effectively, promoting a comprehensive approach to GBV prevention. By analyzing data and trends, policymakers can identify high-risk areas and develop targeted interventions, ensuring

that resources are allocated efficiently and effectively. This can lead to a reduction in GBV incidents and a safer learning environment for all students.

Stakeholder Engagement and Policy Recommendations

The results infer that GBV is a pervasive issue, with a strong negative sentiment towards it. AI-driven approaches can effectively identify high-risk scenarios and detect early warning signs of GBV. Proactive measures can be taken to prevent or mitigate GBV, promoting a safer learning environment. Stakeholders, including students, faculty, and policymakers, must engage in developing targeted interventions, support services, and policies to address GBV. Policy recommendations include integrating AI-driven GBV prevention mechanisms into institutional policies and protocols, establishing dedicated teams for monitoring and responding to GBV-related social media activity, and developing guidelines for ethical AI use in GBV prevention.

Implications for Global Implementation:

The implementation of AI-driven GBV prevention initiatives in higher education institutions (HEIs) globally necessitates a multifaceted approach, emphasizing international collaboration, cultural sensitivity, and contextual understanding. By sharing knowledge and best practices across borders, institutions can leverage collective expertise to develop more effective AI-driven solutions, tailored to diverse cultural contexts. Recognizing the complexity of GBV, a comprehensive strategy must be adopted, integrating technology, policy, and cultural change to create a holistic framework for prevention and response. This includes adapting AI-driven tools to accommodate linguistic and cultural nuances, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility. Moreover, institutions must prioritize cultural sensitivity, acknowledging the unique socio-cultural dynamics that influence GBV in different regions, to ensure that AI-driven initiatives are effective and respectful. By embracing this comprehensive approach, HEIs worldwide can harness the potential of AI to create safer, more inclusive learning environments, ultimately contributing to a global reduction in GBV.

Educational settings are critical microcosms for societal issues, reflecting and shaping broader social norms and attitudes. As such, they offer a unique opportunity for GBV prevention and intervention. The impact of GBV on individuals and communities cannot be overstated. For instance, a study by the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (2019) found that GBV survivors are more likely to experience mental health issues, drop out of education, and face economic hardship.

Barriers to Implementation

The implementation of AI-driven GBV prevention initiatives in higher education institutions can be hindered by two primary barriers: (i) limited resources and infrastructure, and (ii) data privacy and ethical concerns. Institutions often lack the necessary financial resources, technological infrastructure, and specialized personnel to develop and maintain AI-driven GBV prevention tools, limiting the scope and effectiveness of these initiatives and making widespread adoption and impact challenging. Furthermore, AI-driven solutions raise important ethical considerations, including data privacy, security, and potential biases in algorithmic decision-making, which institutions must navigate to ensure sensitive information is protected and AI-driven initiatives do not perpetuate harm or discrimination. Addressing these concerns requires careful planning, transparent communication, and ongoing monitoring to establish trust and ensure the responsible

use of AI in GBV prevention, ultimately enabling institutions to overcome these barriers and create a safer and more supportive learning environment.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the potential of AI-driven approaches to prevent GBV in higher and tertiary institutions, offering a novel solution to a persistent problem. By leveraging sentimental analysis and AI algorithms, institutions can proactively identify and respond to GBV-related concerns, fostering a safer and more inclusive learning environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Recommendations

To effectively prevent and address GBV in higher and tertiary institutions, policymakers should integrate AI-driven GBV prevention mechanisms into institutional policies and protocols, enabling proactive identification and response to GBV-related concerns. Dedicated teams should be established to monitor and respond to GBV-related social media activity, ensuring timely and effective support for victims. Guidelines for ethical AI use in GBV prevention should be developed, prioritizing data privacy and security to safeguard sensitive information. Furthermore, resources should be allocated for AI-driven GBV prevention initiatives and training programs, empowering faculty, staff, and students with the necessary skills and knowledge to prevent and respond to GBV. By implementing these measures, institutions can foster a culture of safety, respect, and inclusivity, ultimately reducing the prevalence of GBV and promoting a supportive learning environment.

Practice Recommendations

Practice recommendations include implementing AI-driven GBV prevention tools in higher and tertiary institutions, focusing on social media monitoring and predictive analytics. Collaborations between institutions, AI developers, and GBV experts can enhance solution effectiveness. Training and capacity-building programs for faculty, staff, and students on AI-driven GBV prevention and response are crucial. Establishing feedback mechanisms for continuous improvement of AI-driven GBV prevention initiatives is also essential.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future research directions include investigating the effectiveness of AI-driven solutions in diverse educational settings, exploring the role of AI in addressing intersectional forms of GBV, and developing more sophisticated AI models incorporating multiple data sources and variables. Additionally, research should focus on social media platforms that involve all Zimbabwean vernacular languages to ensure inclusivity.

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Chapter 5: An analysis of the legislative and policy frameworks for the prevention of gender-based violence in Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions in Masvingo Province
D. Musebenzi

Introduction

Gender-based violence has reached pandemic proportions (Brink et al., 2021). It is a fundamental violation of human rights and a threat to the health and livelihood of those affected (World Bank, 2023). Globally gender based violence is a major cause for apprehension as it has developed as a critical global health, human rights and development problem (Mashiri & Mawire, 2013). Gender-based violence is a worldwide public worry (Puigvert et al., 2019). Even though gender-based violence is generally recognised as a violation of human rights, there is little knowledge on understanding its occurrence in higher and tertiary education institutions.

Gender based violence is violence that is directed against an individual based on their gender (Hewett et al, 2023). Gender-based violence refers to any type of harm that is perpetrated against a person because of their sex or gender. In higher and tertiary institutions of education gender base violence refers to acts of physical, sexual, verbal, visual and psycho-emotional abuse impacted on students (Chauraya, 2022). It incorporates different forms of abuse, like physical, sexual, and psychological and disproportionately affects females (Ojo et al ,2023). Gender-based violence includes harassment and discrimination, resulting in physical, sexual, or psychological abuse. (Ojo et al,2023). Gender based violence has been recognised as an important impediment on development (Alim, (2021). It is a form of discrimination that happens among all societies and age groups (Hadi, 2017). It is inhuman and violates fundamental human rights of victims. It causes inequality between women and men. As reported by the World Health Organization (2021) gender-based violence (GBV) is a universal epidemic, with one in three women experiencing it (Matolwandile, 2023, UN Women, 2019; Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020). The Universal Declaration of the United Nations identifies gender equality as a fundamental human right (Zvavahera, 2021) The global conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993 highlighted that more women than men being deprived of their human rights as a result of gender based violence (United Nations, 1993; Chauraya, 2022). Gender-based violence has been spreading as a result of societal failure to embrace common values of equality (Samako et al, 2023).

Gender based violence is widespread in institutions of higher learning like universities where hierarchical relations remain predominant (Puigvert et al, 2019). In higher and tertiary institutions, it is not a new phenomenon (Otuya et al, 2016). It continues to show its ugly face despite concerted efforts by government and its institutions. To curb gender based violence related issues, wide-ranging measures are desirable that include reviewing policies, reinforcement of reporting mechanisms, instituting robust support systems and promotion of gender-sensitive education (Pietersen & Langeveldt,2024). Studies world over show that gender based violence occurs in institutions of higher learning (Menon, 2009, UNDP & UNESCO, 2010 (Otuya et al, 2016). Menacing as it is, gender based violence in Zimbabwean's higher and tertiary institutions has shown its ugly face more prominently. In higher and tertiary institutions, it is silent and has been viewed by many as normal. The menace of gender-based violence has been underscored in several studies and statistics have shown that gender based violence is increasing rather than decreasing (Makhene, 2022). Institutions of higher and tertiary education institutions have recorded high cases of gender-based violence regardless of all efforts put in place to fight the menace (Samako et al,

2023). The female students in higher and tertiary institutions are utterly confronted by lecturers who make unwelcome sexual advances where refusals face dire consequences. Undeniably, some female students have allowed sexual advances from some lecturers out of pressure and fear of failing. This malicious phenomenon has over decades established inappropriate scopes. Some lecturers harass unsuspecting female students by prejudicially failing or grading them and others influencing their coworkers to fail unyielding students.

The high occurrence of gender based violence at higher and tertiary institutions suggest that educated persons are more susceptible to committing acts of gender based violence on the notion that they will get away with it. The institutions of higher and tertiary education are expected to uphold and sustain tenets of high moral fabrics as they are among the most informed sections of society (Samako et al, 2023). The phenomenon of gender-based violence affects women negatively in higher and tertiary institutions education (Makhene, 2022) Underreporting is most commonly cited by victims as they do not know what to do after experiencing gender based violence. A survivor of gender based violence is not sure of the reporting mechanism and who to approach largely due to a lack of clarity of institutional mechanisms. Gender based violence is visible in the Sustainable Development Goals numbers 4 and 5 which are on Quality Education and Gender Equality, respectively (Zvavahera, 2021). The Sustainable Development Goal Number 5 of the United Nations aims at eliminating all forms of violence against all women in public and private spheres (UNDP 2020) (Samako et al, 2023).

Gender-based violence is a prevalent public health, social and economic concern that is deeply rooted in institutions (Hewett et al, 2023). Nine of the world's countries have laws against gender based violence but almost six out of ten lack adequate laws against gender based violence in higher and tertiary education institutions (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020). Institutions of higher and tertiary education seem not to have adequate laws on gender based violence. This is the aim of this research, to analyse the extent to which the laws on gender based violence are in place at the higher and tertiary institutions in Masvingo Province. A robust legislative framework is a major mechanism crucial in the reduction of the incidence of gender based violence in higher and tertiary institutions in Masvingo Province. Gender-based violence is a nasty phenomenon that requires everyone's effort in order to effectively fight it (Muzvidziwa, 2022). Students exhibit gender based violence behavioural inclinations in a higher and tertiary education environment where gender based violence regulations are weak or are absent (Cardey, 2010; Samako et al, 2023). In order to effectively address gender based violence cases, there is a need to put in place gender based violence policies (Chauraya, 2022; Bondestam, 2024). One way to addressing gender based violence is through a critical investigation of policy application of measures aimed at ending gender-based violence.

Methodology

The methodology used for this study was the doctrinal desk-top research. Desk research is a research technique mainly used to acquire information online, or from books, documents and reports (Muzvidziwa, 2022). The study was also based on a qualitative descriptive approach focusing on policies as the mechanism to reduce gender based violence in tertiary education institutions (Otuya et al, 2016). The doctrinal desk research was carried out on the international, regional and domestic legislative and policy frameworks in Zimbabwe. A comparative analysis

was also carried out with South Africa. A qualitative descriptive approach was adopted for the study through the use of a questionnaire. Higher and tertiary education institutions in Masvingo Province formed the locus of the study. A questionnaire was given to forty students, twenty from a university and twenty from a Teachers College. The participants were purposively selected from the two institutions of higher and tertiary education. The qualitative research approach was needed to capture the participants' opinions, attitudes, emotions and feelings towards gender based violence at the institutions of higher and tertiary education with the intention establishing recommendations for remedy and preventive mechanisms of the menace.

Theoretical Framework

The Social Learning Theory, The Feminist Theory and The Socio-Cultural Theory were used in this article. The Social Learning theory states that people learn patterns of behavior from other people surrounding them. The theory accepts that the social environment makes people to behave in certain ways (Mshelia, 2021). Social learning theory, states the attitudes and values individuals hold concerning the morality of the law and the wrongfulness of deviant behaviors. (Sellers et.al, 2005). The proponents of the social learning theory indicate that aggressive behaviour is attributed to external conditions; hence the psychology of law talks about extenuating factors when evaluating the intent of a crime (Muchuchuti, 2015). Bandura developed the social learning theory to explain the role that violence plays in relationships and posits that violence is a learned behavior and people model behaviors they have been exposed to (Sikamikami et al, 2023).

The Feminist theory uses the fight approach to scrutinize the strengthening of gender roles and inequalities. Feminist Theory amplifies the conflict approach to examine gender roles and inequalities and the dynamics of men's dominance and women's subordination (Zvavahera et al, 2021). The feminisation of gender-based violence comes as a manifestation of the defensive attitude by men due to confrontational (Kanjiri & Nomngcoyiya, 2021). Social learning theory predicts that behavior is likely to increase as association with individuals with a tendency to commit a crime outweighs association with noncriminal individual (Powers et al, 2017). The socio-cultural theory examines the wider socio-political context in which gender based violence occurs. This theory views that gender based violence is about dominance, power, control and authority (Kapila, 2017). Gender based violence is anchored in the gender-based power inequities and inequalities emanating from gender discriminations. Sociocultural theory highlights the importance of several immediate world contexts in which surroundings, colleagues, and a social activity context affect behavior (Grageda et al, 2022)

International Legal Framework

The international legal framework is critically important in the protection and promotion of human rights and how to combat gender based violence. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action are some of the legal instruments that inform national legislation when crafting legislation on gender based violence.

At Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that

. *"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights . . .*

It goes further in Article 2 to state that

"Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) recognizes respect for human dignity and ability to make responsible decisions. The UDHR informs almost all the legal instruments on human rights. Since gender based violence is a human rights issue, it is also informed by a number of provision in UDHR.

The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) created international principles ensuring equality between women and men. CEDAW is an essential legal instrument that requires States to ensure that men and women have the right to equality. Article 2 of CEDAW for example, instructs states parties 'to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women' (Hodson, 2014). The Convention is the major and inclusive international instrument on the human rights of women (Nazish, 2024). CEDAW is an important legal instrument on the protection of women rights.

CEDAW provides for a mandatory reporting mechanism, as it states that

"States parties are required to submit a periodic report on the progress made every four years", allowing for monitoring of legislative and regulatory changes in combating gender based violence.'

The Convention defines discrimination against women as any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms (Anitha & Lewis, 2018), CEDAW uses an expansive approach to rights that recognises the equal importance of economic, social, and cultural rights (Hodson, 2014). The Convention is the most important binding international treaty for women (Vijayarasa, 2021). Although specific provisions on gender-based violence were not included in CEDAW, the issue was recognised by the CEDAW Committee in *General Recommendation 19* in 1992. *General Recommendation 19* broadens the meaning of 'discrimination' as articulated in Article 1 of CEDAW to include gender-based violence (Jivan & Forster, 2009). Effective legal protection against gender-based violence requires, according to the Committee, the incorporation of specific and targeted violence legislation into national criminal and civil law frameworks (Jivan & Forster, 2009). Article 2 explicitly prohibits discrimination against women and ensures that states take all appropriate measures, including legislation' to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women (Jivan & Forster, 2009). CEDAW mandates fundamental change at the legal, institutional, and individual levels (Englehart & Miller, 2014). CEDAW demands an end to gender discrimination. Thus, CEDAW is a crucial legal instrument in the fight of gender based violence.

In 1989 the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women issued the General Recommendation No. 12 on violence against women in order to strengthen the CEDAW by safeguarding women's human rights in the aspect of violence against women. In 1992, the Committee on CEDAW embraced General Recommendation No. 19 and 32, that reaffirmed that Violence Against Women created discrimination against women. The General Recommendation

No. 19 stated that domestic violence was included in the Convention even though not precisely mentioned. The Recommendation mentioned that discrimination included gender based violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman. The General Recommendation castigated that gender based violence included the infliction of physical, mental or sexual harm. The Recommendation required States Parties to embrace specific legislation on gender based violence. The general Recommendation 19 on gender based violence recognised gender based violence as a form of discrimination and recommended states take appropriate measures to prevent and respond to it. This established the foundation for the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in 1993.

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defined as

‘any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.’

The Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Women was the first international instrument to denote solely violence against women. Notwithstanding the notion that it was a declaration and not legally binding it established tangible obligations of the UN Member States to fight gender based violence. The significance of the declaration is that it emphasized actions that states should take with respect to the elimination of gender based violence and to provide support services for survivors of gender based violence. The Declaration ensured that States prevent and punish acts of violence against women. General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women sustained the international consensus that violence against women as an expression of traditionally unequal power relations between men and women, leading to discrimination against, women (UNICEF Innocent Digest, 2000:3). The committee also suggested that States parties develop and implement multi-sectoral action plans and strategies to curb violence against women. It also advocated for the establishment of institutional mechanisms to organise and evaluate measures taken. The General Recommendation No. 35 on Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) requires States Parties to have an effective and accessible legal and services framework in place to address all forms of gender-based Violence (United Nations, 2017). The UN efforts have therefore, been effective in the promotion of women’s rights as human-rights. The human rights approach is being used by international organisations to put pressure on governments globally to improve laws and gender policies to protect women and to advance women’s access to justice.

During the UN Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, a number of states adopted the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). *The Beijing Platform for Action* urges governments and all sectors to take integrated measures to prevent and eliminate gender based violence. The BPFA recognised that women’s rights are human rights. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action’s strategic fourth goal includes the elimination of all forms of violence against women. It also castigates that measures should be taken by states to prevent violence against women. It recommends the review and revision of legislation and the establishment of appropriate mechanisms to protect women against gender based violence. The Beijing Declaration revealed the universal commitment on the fight against gender based violence. Zimbabwe has not yet ratified this Convention.

The ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) is central in addressing sexual harassment and its ratification will be a momentous step in Zimbabwe's efforts in fighting sexual harassment which is a form of gender based violence. The Convention obligates State Parties to follow a policy of "zero tolerance to violence and harassment". The Convention sets out standards for protection of people from violence and harassment and enforcement mechanisms and remedies for survivors. The Violence and Harassment Convention recognises the right to a world of work free from gender-based violence. It castigates that gender based violence represents human rights violence. It proposes for an integrated and gender-responsive approach in curbing gender-based violence. The Convention aims at a global outreach to provide a framework to promote policy initiated measures at national to combat gender based violence.

The 2015 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) includes a reference to gender based violence. Goal 5 of the SDGs purports to accomplish gender equality and to empowerment of women. The targets of Sustainable Development Goal 5 are "ending all forms of violence against all women" and is considered to be instrumental for the achievement of all other SDGs. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action presented the gender based violence as a universal problem. The Declaration sought the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on gender based violence. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights to appointed a Special Rapporteur to seek and receive information on gender based violence and make recommendations to curb gender based violence.

Regional Legal Framework

Zimbabwe is a signatory to various continental instruments on gender based violence which include among others the African Charter on Human and Peoples' rights, The Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa; The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women, the AU Agenda 2063 (World Ban, 2023).

The African Charter contains both civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights, and both of these two generations of rights are justiciable (Ayeni, 2016). African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights 1981 provides for the elimination of discrimination against women. The Banjul Charter has been labelled as a wide-ranging and progressive providing a foundation for the protection of peoples' rights individually and collectively (Abubakar, 2022). The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights reflects the recognition by African states of the urgent need to eliminate gender-based discrimination (Adesina, 2024)

The Maputo Protocol, under Article 4 states that parties should legislative and take administrative measures to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women. The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa provides for the protection of rights of women and against all forms of violence. The Maputo Protocol addresses human rights issues like violence against women (Ayeni, 2016). It provides for all women the rights to dignity, freedom from violence, access to justice and equality before the law (Abubakar, 2022). It incorporates a wide range of rights aimed at advancing gender equality in Africa. (Adesina, 2024)

The AU Agenda 2063 has a Strategy for Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment. The strategy purports to reduce, and criminalise all forms of violence against women. Despite Africa's commitment to fight gender based violence, Beyene et al. (2019) highlighted the high prevalence of incidences of gender based violence in African universities and seemingly lack of sincerity and wholeheartedness in institutional response and prevention of gender based violence (Chauraya, 2022). The lack of institutional responsiveness to gender based violence in African universities was also noted by Molla and Cuthbert (2014), and Chauraya (2022). The half-heartedness of African universities in dealing with gender based violence is ascribed to the quandary that the institutions find themselves in fighting gender based violence (Warton & Moore, 2022; Chauraya, 2022). Warton and Moore (2022) reported that African universities were making water-tight responsiveness to gender based violence, (Chauraya, 2022).

Sub-Regional Commitments

At sub-regional level Zimbabwe has signed the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development towards curbing gender based violence. The Protocol has castigated gender based violence as a priority under Articles 20 to 25. These Articles provide for the implementation of strategies in the form of enacting, reviewing and enforcing laws that purport to eliminate gender based violence. This protocol provides for the prevention of violence against women and children through legal, social, economic and cultural policy changes. According to the SADC Gender Protocol Barometer, the protocol clearly sought all SADC states to enact and enforce legislation on gender-based violence by 2015 (SADC, 2012:162).

Zimbabwe Legislative

National legislative and policy frameworks and related institutional policy frameworks, are enabling forces in the fight of gender based violence (Bondestam, 2024). Zimbabwe has signed and ratified a myriad of global and regional legal instruments and frameworks on gender based violence. Zimbabwe has demonstrated a strong commitment to eradicating GBV through signing and ratifying several global legislative instruments on GBV like CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and the 2019 ILO Violence and Harassment Convention. (World Bank, 2023). Zimbabwe also has a progressive national legal framework, anchored in the 2013 National Constitution which outlaws all forms of gender based violence (World Bank, 2023). Regardless of Zimbabwe having made giant progress in reducing gender based violence by enshrining gender equality into its legal frameworks, gender inequalities continue to be found across sectors (World Bank, 2023). In 2019, around 42.5 percent of women experienced physical and sexual violence (World Bank, 2023).

6.1. Constitutional Provisions

Zimbabwe's commitment towards the empowerment of women has been articulated through the 2013 Constitution which created founding values and principles of fundamental human rights and freedoms and gender equality. The Constitution enshrines the rights of all and principles of human dignity and gender equality (Sithole & Dziva, 2019). The 2013 transformative Constitution provides better protection of women's rights. Section 17 is devoted to gender and provides that the state should promote participation of women on the basis of equality. The section addresses elimination of gender based discrimination through legislative and policy frameworks. Section 17(2) states that:

“The State must take positive measures to rectify gender discrimination and imbalances resulting from past practices and policies.”

Section 80 focuses on the rights of women and highlights the provision for equal opportunities, in political, social and economic activities. Section 56 focuses on equality and non-discrimination. A wide ranging equality and non-discrimination clause in Section 56(3) states that:

“Every person has the right not to be treated in an unfairly discriminatory manner on such grounds as their nationality, race, colour, tribe, place of birth, ethnic or social origin, language, class, religious belief, political affiliation, opinion, custom, culture, sex, gender, marital status, age, pregnancy, disability or economic or social status, or whether they were born in or out of wedlock.”

Section 23 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sex and gender. Section 52 provides for protection and freedom from all forms of violence from public and private sources. Section 53 protects women from physical or psychological torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. Section 25 (b) of the constitution calls upon the Government to adopt measures for the prevention of domestic violence. The provisions of the Constitution include the establishment of the Zimbabwe Gender Commission, Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission, among others which provide remedy to people who have their rights violated. Zimbabwe Gender Commission has a constitutional mandate to protect and enforce women’s rights against gender based violence (Sithole & Dziva, 2019). It is therefore, submitted that the transformative Constitution of Zimbabwe is a supreme law fighting gender based violence. The Constitution of Zimbabwe in terms of Section 2 is the supreme law and any law or practice inconsistency with it is invalid. The Constitution proclaims its supremacy by providing that any law, and practice inconsistent with it is invalid to the extent of the inconsistency (Sithole & Dziva, 2019). The entrenchment of various provisions on gender based violence in the Constitution is enough evidence to show the commitment of the government of Zimbabwe in the fight of gender based violence.

Supporting Legal Frameworks

Zimbabwe has enacted a number of pieces of legislation on gender based violence. Domestic Violence Act [Chapter 5:16] provides for the protection and relief of victims of domestic violence. Prior to the promulgation of the Domestic Violence Act there had not been any law in Zimbabwe that dealt specifically with domestic violence in general and violence against women in particular. (Sithole & Dziva, 2019). The definition of domestic violence is very wide and includes abuse derived from any cultural practices that discriminate against or degrade women among others. The laws do not provide for mechanisms like counselling to deal with such sexual harassment. The Domestic Violence Act is not comprehensive. It does not criminalise emotional and psychological abuse. Emotional and psychological abuse can lead to suicide and it is prudent to criminalise these gender based violence acts to ensure that all aspects of gender based violence are protected by appropriate pieces of legislation. The Act provides for the protection of victims of domestic violence and measures for prevention of domestic violence. The Domestic Violence Act [Chapter 5:16] outlaws physical, sexual, psychological violence in addition to economic abuse. It also protects the rights of those persons with disabilities.

The Labour Act makes provision for sexual harassment in the workplace. Zimbabwe does not have a minimum mandatory sentence for rape and sexual violence. Sexual harassment is seen as a light offence in Zimbabwe where it is classified as unfair labour practice under section 8 of the Labour Act. There is no definition of sexual harassment in the workplace in the Labour Act. An employer can be held liable to civil remedies only. Penalties for unfair labour practices in terms of 6 (1) (2) as read together with Section 89 of the Labour Act are compensation and criminal sanctions. These remedies are general penalties which apply to all unfair labour practices.

In terms of the institutional framework for fighting gender based violence there is weak coordination among stakeholders in the multi sectoral approach. Key legislative gaps include inadequate implementation of gender based violence laws due to cross-cutting factors, including patriarchal attitudes, limited awareness of laws and lack of financial resources among gender base violence survivors. There are weak accountability mechanisms for implementation of gender based violence laws. Though there is the Sexual Harassment Bill under discussion, currently there is no specific legislation dealing with sexual harassment which is a prominent form of gender based violence occurring in Zimbabwe's institution of higher and tertiary education.

Policy Framework

Policy frameworks are documents that provide a common vision to guide policy and programme development, such as national action plans, policy statements, and strategic plans (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016). Key national policy frameworks for gender based violence include the framework and national action plans on violence against women (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016). Policies refer to declared purposes and create a wide-ranging strategy that answer to the problems of gender-based violence. Policies are tailored made to suit each institution's requirement but they must be consistent with national legal framework. The National Gender Policy (2013-2017) was designed for the reduction of violence against women (Sithole & C Dziva, 2019). The vision of the 2012-2017 NGP aimed for:

“A gender just society in which men and women, boys and girls, enjoy equity, contribute and benefit as equal partners in the development of the country” and its goal is to “eradicate gender discrimination and inequalities in all spheres of life and development”.

The National Gender Policy is currently being revised to align it with evolving trends of gender based violence and with the modernised national social, economic, political, and legal situation of the Zimbabwe. The Policy acknowledges the importance of international instruments ratified by Zimbabwe, including the African Women's Protocol (Sithole & Dziva, 2019). The government of Zimbabwe is still developing a new gender policy. The new policy would replace the second National Gender Policy (NGP 2013-2017). The new policy has a dedicated pillar on gender based violence. The new National Gender Policy aims to curb gender based violence through adopting legislative and administrative measures for the prevention and punishment of all forms of gender based violence and the redress to be provided to survivors of gender based violence, including financial compensation.

The current economic development blueprint for Zimbabwe is the National Development Strategy (NDS) 1 (2021-2025). The NDS 1 recognises that there has been limited gender mainstreaming across sectors. As a mechanism to curb gender based violence the strategy seeks to consolidate the

implementation of the Domestic Violence Act. Zimbabwe has established a strategy for the Elimination of Sexual Harassment and Gender-Based Violence in the Workplace in Zimbabwe (2021-2025). The strategy purposes to lead workplace environments to fight against gender based violence. To effectively combat gender based violence stronger legislative frameworks and policies are paramount. A multi-sectoral approach on the full implementation of existing policy and legal frameworks and support to response and prevention mechanism is imperative (World Bank, 2023). In October 2021, the President of the Republic of Zimbabwe launched the f High-Level Political Compact (HLPC) on Ending Gender Based Violence and Harmful Practices (2021-2030) in Zimbabwe. Stakeholders that are committed to the eradication of gender based violence have agreed to fight gender based violence at the highest level in Zimbabwe. Under the HLPC there is need to fast track the enactment, alignment and implementation of legislation and policies on gender equality and gender based violence. The HLPC also strives to strengthen accountability mechanisms for the implementation of the legal and policy framework on gender based violence. The HPLC also strives to prevent gender based violence through GBV prevention, through raising awareness of constitutional and international human rights instruments that promote the fight of gender based violence. The HLPC ensures that the is compliance with all State Party reporting commitments on international and regional instruments and conventions on women's rights.

Zimbabwe has also developed a strategy for the Elimination of Sexual Harassment and Gender Based Violence in the Workplace in Zimbabwe (2021-2025). The strategy is a mechanism to guide the public and private sector organizations in fighting against gender-based violence. Consistent with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention No. 190, the strategy aims to protect workers and other persons against sexual harassment and gender based violence. The strategy puts emphasis on the protection of female employees, who are the victims of sexual gender based violence. The vision of the strategy is to ensure that Zimbabwe's workplace is free from gender based violence.

The Public Service Sexual Harassment Policy (2022) seeks to combat sexual harassment in the Public Service and provide a safe working environment that is free from sexual harassment. It put in place mechanisms for redress in situations of sexual harassment in the Public Service. It is noted that the policy applies to all public service institutions. The National Disability Policy (2021) provides for the protection of persons with disabilities from gender based violence. It must also be noted that the policy purports for the prosecution of individuals and institutions that subject persons with disability to gender based violence.

Despite all these national policy initiatives on gender based violence the incidence of gender based violence in institutions of higher and tertiary education is still high. The prevalence of gender based violence in Zimbabwe's higher and tertiary education institutions has been so high to the extent of petitioning the government of Zimbabwe to formulate a new law that criminalises gender based violence (Mashininga, 2021; Chauraya, 2022). The Joint Committee on Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development and Women Affairs visited the tertiary institutions in the country to establish and get a clearer understanding of the extent and nature of the phenomenon and the committee affirmed that indeed gender based violence was on the rise higher and tertiary education institutions (Mashininga, 2021; Moyo, 2022). Therefore, the government should expedite the process of enacting a legislation to protect women against gender based violence in higher and tertiary institutions.

Findings and Discussion

Gender based violence in higher and tertiary institutions is not a new occurrence (Graaff, 2021). Literature indicates that unequal power relations is one of the key issues that cause gender based violence as propounded by the feminist theory. Findings from the research demonstrate that there is need to mainstream a gender based violence in higher and tertiary education institutions. A holistic approach to eradicate gender based violence in higher and tertiary education institutions has been identified as a critical component in the fight of this menace. There is need for justice and fairness to prevail at institutions of higher learning on issues related to gender based violence. Findings from research indicate that gender based violence in higher and tertiary institutions is often ignored and left unattended. Protective laws and policies are fundamental for addressing gender based violence (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016). It is therefore, imperative for the government and higher and tertiary institutions to promulgate legislation and policies which eradicate the menace of gender based violence.

International and Regional Framework on Gender Based Violence

Although legislation alone will not eradicate gender based violence, comprehensive legal frameworks that protect women from all forms of gender based violence are a critical step in ending impunity of gender based violence. Comprehensive legal frameworks should ensure that women are protected from all forms of gender based violence, and laws and policies should have an intersectional approach to curb gender based violence. Gender based violence is protected at international level through treaty law and through persuasive declarations. The CEDAW is a foundational treaty which protects women against the negative impacts of gender based violence. There are a number of declarations at international level, for example the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The International legislative framework shows the commitment by the international community to combat gender based violence. The international community has noted that legislative instruments are key in the fight of gender based violence. The Regional framework also has a vibrant legislative framework in the form of the Maputo protocol which is key in the promotion and protection of gender based violence. Zimbabwe must incorporate all the provisions in the international and regional legislative frameworks so as to enhance its legal instruments in the fight against gender based violence.

National Legislative and Policy Frameworks on Gender Based Violence.

Zimbabwe needs to have additional efforts to improve implementation of gender based violence legislation and to adopt frameworks to criminalise gender based violence acts (World Bank. 2023). Legislative frameworks are necessary to ensure that states meet their international obligations to respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of all people (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016). Zimbabwe has a vibrant national legislative and policy framework on gender based violence. The Constitution of Zimbabwe which is a key instrument in the promotion and protection of women's rights has entrenched a number of provisions advocating for the elimination of gender based violence. However, pieces of legislation like the Labour Act do not criminalise sexual harassment. This is a huge gap in the fight of gender based violence in Zimbabwe. Though the government has taken a step to enact sexual harassment legislation, it must be noted that the Sexual Harassment Bill must be expedited to be law.

Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions Policy Framework

According to Joseph (2015), the efficiency of gender based violence policies is determined by how well they are implemented by colleges and universities (Makhene, 2022). Currently there is no Policy from Ministry of gender based violence though there are noted efforts in the drafting of a sexual harassment policy.

Availability of Gender Based Violence Policies

It noted from the research that the two institutions that were used in the research do not have a policy on gender based violence. However, it was noted in one institution that there was a draft on sexual harassment. This gap in policy making process for gender based violence policy is a worrying situation in the fight of gender based violence in higher and tertiary education institutions. Policies are critical instruments in the mechanism to eradicate gender based violence in the institutions. Absence of the gender policy is enough evidence that gender based violence is trivialised in most institutions. Institutions of higher and tertiary education should have policies on gender based violence.

Accessibility to Gender Based Violence Policy

Absence of gender based violence policies translate to lack of accessibility of these policies. Students are not able to access policies on gender based violence. It is imperative for the institutions to avail the policies to students in the event that they institutions craft them. Accessible policies are vital in the fight of gender based violence. In the event that the students have access to the gender based violence policies they will use the policy to protect and promote their rights and this will result in the eradication of gender based violence at these institutions. In the event that policies are not accessible the victims may not be able to seek redress as they will not be fully aware of the remedies available for them from the policy. Gender based violence policies must be readily accessible on the websites, through the use of hard copies or even on social media platforms so that all the students have the access to the policies.

Availability of the Complaint Committee on Gender Based Violence

The research noted that the institutions of higher and tertiary education in Masvingo do not have a Complaint Committee on Gender Based Violence. The Committee is useful as the reporting mechanisms at the institutions. The Complaint Committee on Gender Based Violence is also important in enhancing independence on the reporting structure of complaint by students. Public universities must prioritise the establishment of influential sexual complaint committees to address misconduct, safeguard individuals' rights, and prevent legal and reputational repercussions (Islam & Ferdous, 2023). Although it was noted that a Complaint Committee could scare away students from reporting as they might be victimized, the independence of the Complaint Committee is important in the fight of gender based violence at the institutions.

Awareness Programmes on Gender based Violence

Campus-wide campaigns must provide a clear message about gender based violence's intolerance and the support and services available to victims (Makhene, 2022). Institutional knowledge and action to tackle sexual harassment is sparse in most university led initiatives (Anitha & Lewis, 2018). Gender based violence prevention initiatives in higher education are not yet well-developed

(Anitha & Lewis, 2018). The research noted that there were no vibrant awareness programmes at institutions of higher and tertiary education. Lack of awareness campaigns is detrimental to the fight of gender based violence in the institutions. The reason of the lack of the campaigns could be due to the trivialising of gender based violence in the institutions. It is therefore prudent for the institutions to have vibrant awareness campaigns on gender based violence as a way of educating the students on the benefits of having the knowledge of the issues related to gender based violence. Capacitating students with vital knowledge will be an important initiative in the fight of gender based violence.

Reporting Mechanism for Gender based violence survivors

The identification and reporting of gender based violence is important in the fight of the impact of gender based violence (Connor et al, 2021). While a study by Bystrynski and Allen (2017) registered 86% of the university students having confidence in their institutional reporting structures, and handling of gender based violence complaints, this study found out there were no reporting structures and grievance handling systems in the institutions of higher and tertiary education in Masvingo Province. Orfan, Ibrahim and Noori's (2022) study on 'sexual harassment of female students in Higher Education in Afghanistan' students indicated that they had no trust in the reporting system of higher and tertiary institutions. The research noted there were no reporting mechanisms for gender based violence for survivors. It is increasingly difficult to fight gender based violence in the institutions if there are no effective reporting mechanisms. Vibrant reporting mechanisms are crucial in enhancing the realization of the right of students in the fight of gender based violence. Absence of the reporting mechanisms impede the effective eradication of gender based violence. If students do not have a mechanism to report incidences of gender based violence, occurrence of gender based violence can go unreported and this is detrimental in the process of eradicating gender based violence. The absence of transparent reporting and investigation procedures leaves victims without adequate support and discourages reporting (Islam & Ferdous, 2023).

Services for Gender Based Violence Survivors

Policies on sexual harassment in higher and tertiary education institutions have the perspectives of perpetrator missing (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020). There is need for developing new and innovative, preventive and relevant support structures, to curb gender based violence at higher and tertiary institutions. Although laws do exist to protect women from violence on campus, they are hardly used by survivors and regularly ignored by the institutions (Anitha & Lewis, 2018). From the research it was noted that there are no services to cater for survivors of gender based violence. There is a huge gap in the reporting mechanism of gender based violence. Absence of services to assist survivors is an impediment in the reporting mechanisms. If students note that there will not be offered services in the event of gender based violence, the students might as well not report the cases. Medical and legal services and psychosocial support should be provided to student as a way to eradicate and eliminate gender based violence. Academics, university administration, personnel and students must all support preventative efforts (Makhene, 2022).

Comparative Analysis with other Jurisdiction-South Africa

The *Constitution* entrenches a number of rights that are directly relevant to the context of gender-based violence (Tameshnie, 2018). For example, Section 12(1)(c) of the *Constitution* of SA provides that

“every person has the right to freedom from all forms of violence from either public or private sources.”

South African courts have recognised that sexual violence is a violation of women’s rights (Tameshnie, 2018). In the case *S v Chapman*, the Supreme Court of Appeal emphasized the seriousness of the offence of rape wherein it stated that it represents a humiliating, degrading and brutal invasion of the privacy, the dignity and the person of the victim” (par 344I-J).

The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act prescribes certain minimum sentences for certain acts of sexual violence (Tameshnie, 2018). The *Protection from Harassment Act* protects women from harassment (Tameshnie, 2018). South Africa has a dedicated legislation on Harassment which is a milestone step in the fight of gender based violence. It also acknowledged in a number of decided cases that the State bears an obligation to take positive steps to address gender based violence, the most prominent of which was the case of *Carmichele v Minister of Safety and Security and Another* (Tameshnie, 2018). Constitutional court jurisprudence on gender based violence is noted in South Africa which is enough evidence to demonstrate the judiciary’s commitment to curb gender based violence.

In South Africa the establishment of a GBV Command Centre and promulgation of new legislation are critical initiatives to curb the scourge of gender base violence (Makhene, 2022). The Government’s strategy is the 2020 Gender-based Violence and Femicide National Strategic Plan (GBVF-NSP) (Mboyisa & Chelin, 2020). According to Joseph (2015), the effectiveness of gender based violence laws is influenced by how successful colleges and universities enforce them. The establishment of the GBV Command Centre shows the seriousness of the government in South Africa in curbing gender based violence. In South Africa, the most accountable institution in the fight against GBV is the government as the policy maker and the most affected in financial expenditure. South Africa has advanced laws and policies such as the Domestic Violence Act, 116 of 1998 (DVA) and the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 32 of 2007 (Sexual Offences Act) (SOA) (Matolwandile, 2023).

The South African laws appear aligned to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966 (ICESCR), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979 (CEDAW), and the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, 1981 (African Charter) (Matolwandile, 2023). The alignment of South African laws to international and regional legislative instruments should be a lesson for Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe must ensure that all its laws are aligned to the international and regional legal frameworks. South Africa’s Policy Framework to address Gender-Based Violence in the Post-School Education and Training System is an important commitment by government to fight gender based violence at the institutions of higher and tertiary eradication. It is important for the government of Zimbabwe to have a policy framework on dealing with Higher and tertiary education institutions to demonstrate its commitment in the fight of gender based violence at these institutions. South Africa has a specific piece of legislation on Harassment and Zimbabwe should emulate this South African stance by enacting a dedicated legislation to curb gender based violence in Zimbabwe.

Recommendations

To the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs

Broad and specific legal frameworks of gender based violence should be enacted. Sexual harassment must be criminalised. Though there is currently a Bill on Sexual Harassment, it is submitted that there should be a standalone Act on Sexual Harassment. The government of Zimbabwe should commit to signing and ratifying any outstanding regional and international agreements related to gender based violence. Laws relating to sexual harassment should be regularly updated to meet new challenges and technologies.

To Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education

The Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education must formulate a policy on gender based violence which will inform the institutions of higher and tertiary education when they craft their policies. The parent ministry must regularly issue policy direction on gender based violence so that the institutions are whipped in by the parent ministry's policy direction.

Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions

The institutions of higher and tertiary education must craft policies on gender based violence as a mechanism to reduce high incidences of gender based violence. The institution must have vibrant reporting mechanisms including the creation of a Complaints Committee of gender based violence. The institutions must also raise awareness campaigns to educate the students on the provision of the gender based violence policies. Support services in the form of medical, legal and psycho-social support must be instituted. Institutions must also ensure that policies are available to the students so that they can use them in the event that they encounter gender based violence.

To Zimbabwe Gender Commission

The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission must conduct awareness campaigns and attend to complaints by students on the issues related to gender based violence. The Commission must also provide legal, medical and psycho- support to the students who will have encountered gender based violence at their institutions.

Conclusion

Gender based violence is a human rights violation that cannot be ignored and legitimated by silence and impunity. Zimbabwe has ratified international and regional instruments combating gender based violence, and it is paramount for Zimbabwe to fully incorporate the international and regional framework of gender based violence. Though Zimbabwe has a legislative and policy framework on gender based violence, it is worrying to note that there is a high incidence of gender based violence in Zimbabwe's higher and tertiary education institutions due to the notion that most institutions do not have robust policy frameworks addressing gender based violence. Sexual harassment currently in the Zimbabwe's legislative framework has not been criminalized and this major weakness is a huge contributing factor to the proliferation of gender based violence at higher and tertiary institutions. Gender based violence cases in the institutions do not have support services to assist the survivors. Awareness campaigns are not enough to educate the students. A number of students demonstrated that they had no or lacked sufficient knowledge on the existence of gender based violence policies, and this is a worrying revelation. How then can the laws and policies protect students if you are not even aware of the existence of them? There is widespread underreporting of gender based violence at institution of higher and tertiary education largely

caused by the normalization and trivialization of gender based violence. There is also lack of confidence in the reporting system, hence students would prefer not to report the cases as they believe that their cases will be dismissed without any investigation or fear that they will face repercussions and backlash if they report cases of gender based violence. It is recommended that Zimbabwe have a robust legislative and institutional framework to fight gender based violence. The institutions of higher and tertiary education must have policies on gender based violence and also the parent ministry for higher and tertiary education institutions must regularly issue policy directions on gender based violence.

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**CHAPTER 6: Gender- based violence and its implications on the society: A case study in
Mucheke A Section 1 and 2 Masvingo Urban**

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Mashokoh**

Introduction

The paper is divided into several sections, covering topics such as the prevalence and trends of gender-based violence (GBV) in society, its underlying causes and risk factors, the cultural, societal, and economic factors that both encourage and impede efforts to end it, the ways in which advocacy groups, support agencies, and community organisations assist and support victims, and strategies and recommendations for doing so.

Background to the Study

Gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the most prevalent and persistent issues that women and girls experience globally (UNICEF, 2022). Women and girls are more vulnerable to various forms of GBV when there are conflicts or other humanitarian disasters (Drumtra, 2014). Global data on the prevalence of GBV during humanitarian crises is still scarce. Garcia-Moreno et al. (2022) reported that a comprehensive review discovered that roughly one in five women who were displaced or were refugees in complex humanitarian contexts had been sexually abused. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) produced Guidelines for Integrating GBV Interventions in Humanitarian Action in 2015. Somalia is home to one of the biggest populations of internally displaced persons in the world. One of the world's longest-running humanitarian relief initiatives has been located there since the late 1980s (Drumtra, 2014). There are presently 518,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) in Mogadishu as a result of conflict and starvation (The New Humanitarian, 2022). Women who have migrated are known to be more vulnerable to gender-based violence (GBV), (Asgary, et al., 2013). Despite the lack of a formal structure to protect residents, abuses against civilians are uncommon. Nonetheless, due to government limitations and ongoing communal strife, gender-based violence against women and girls has increased in Somalia in recent years (The New Humanitarian, 2022). Women and girls in Somalia endure significant levels of pain, suffering, and horrifying violations of their right to a life free from abuse, torture, and discrimination. After the conflict, Somalia has not succeeded in eradicating the severe, discriminatory social and gender norms that bar women and teenage girls from all areas of human development (Brief, 2020). Furthermore, the recent rises in rape, sexual exploitation, intimate partner violence, and sexual harassment have made gender-based violence (GBV) for women and girls increasingly dangerous (The New Humanitarian, 2022). It includes acts of inflicting physical, sexual, or mental pain or suffering, threats of coercion, and other types of deprivation of liberty. These harmful actions are visible in both public and private spheres (Drumtra, 2014). The questions have generally been successful in capturing varying degrees of endorsement of IPV within and between settings, and respondents frequently modify their responses depending on the transgression mentioned.

However, investigators have questioned whether respondents' personal views about whether beatings are acceptable or whether women's perceptions of the societal norm that governs their

setting are reflected in the DHS questions. For instance, cognitive interviews with women in Bangladesh revealed that the women's interpretation of the attitude questions alternated between normative and personal beliefs. However, it is unclear if this is a common occurrence in other contexts or if it was a result of the particularly low levels of literacy and female mobility in rural Bangladesh (The New Humanitarian, 2022).

Globally, efforts to combat gender-based violence (GBV) involve governments, civil society organisations, and individuals using strategies such as awareness campaigns, education, and legal frameworks. Legal measures play a critical role by passing and enforcing laws that criminalise GBV, protect victims, and hold offenders accountable. Additionally, educational programmes on consent, healthy relationships, and gender equality are essential. These initiatives emphasise the importance of voluntary, enthusiastic, and ongoing consent in all interactions. They also promote candid discussion about healthy relationships and consent including dispelling the myths and conventional gender norms that support the continuation of GBV.

A comprehensive approach to combating gender-based violence (GBV) includes promoting gender equality, challenging rigid standards, and fostering tolerance for diverse identities. It is important to raise awareness about available resources, such as GBV prevention organisations, helplines, support centres, legal assistance, counselling, and safe spaces for survivors. Additionally, men and boys should be encouraged to take an active role as allies in the fight against GBV by engaging in discussions on respectful relationships, consent, and healthy masculinity. Men should also challenge harmful attitudes and behaviours, recognising that ending GBV is a shared responsibility. Furthermore, implementing strict policies that support marginalised individuals' access to leadership, education, and economic empowerment is essential to reducing GBV. Global organisations such as the United Nations, should support initiatives and conventions that address GBV, promote gender equality, and protect human rights. It is important to recognise that GBV is a complex and deeply rooted issue that requires a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to address effectively.

Despite that, and considering the numerous obstacles that survivors face when disclosing GBV, its true occurrence may actually be underestimated. In a recent population-based study, 2376 women (15 years of age and older) from the three regions of Somalia participated in order to analyse the typology and extent of GBV victimisation (Garcia-Moreno, et al. 2022). Women who are most vulnerable to gender-based violence (GBV), including intimate partner violence (IPV) and non-partner violence (NPV), often belong to minority clans, are displaced due to violence or natural disasters, have partners who use stimulants such as chewing or drinking certain leaves, or have experienced childhood abuse. GBV has profound negative impacts on women's physical, mental, and reproductive health (Drumtra, 2014). However, these health and social effects are often overlooked because women do not report the violence. This is due to social norms that blame women for assaults allegedly to do with dressing immodestly, going out alone after dark, or working outside the home and prioritisation of family honour over the survivor's safety. Additionally, institutional acceptance of GBV as a common part of displacement and conflict further discourages women from seeking protection, legal assistance, or other services (Drumtra, 2014).

A study in Uganda, reported by The New Humanitarian (2022), explored how different question phrasings affected attitudes and social norms regarding wife battering. Researchers found that participants' perceptions of intimate partner violence (IPV) changed when contextual information about the wife's intent was included, highlighting the influence of intentionality on attitudes and norms surrounding IPV, based on their perception of the offence's justifiability. Fulu et al. (2013) state that in the vignettes, wives who deliberately deviated from expectations of appropriate wifely conduct had a significant impact on the number of things that made wife beating acceptable. The scenario that showed the wife as inadvertently breaking social standards, on the other hand, had a negligible impact on the number of items where IPV was assumed as acceptable (Garcia-Moreno, et al. 2022).

Physical violence, including sexual assault, rape, domestic abuse, and female genital mutilation is a common form of gender-based violence, often leading to physical harm or death. Garcia-Moreno et al. (2022) define physical abuse as kicking, punching, slapping, beating, and using weapons against a partner or family member (WHO, 2015). Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a prevalent form of gender-based violence, affecting individuals of all genders, particularly women. It involves physical and non-physical abuse, often resulting from a desire for power. Intimate partner violence (IPV) involves emotional and psychological abuse, including verbal abuse, humiliation, threats, and intimidation. Sexual violence involves forced non-consensual sexual behaviour, while economic abuse involves manipulating financial resources to maintain power and authority. These forms of abuse can result in discomfort, harm, and even death.

Purpose of the study

The study sought to assess gender-based violence and its implications on the society at Mucheke A high density suburb in Masvingo.

Statement of the problem

After having observed a number of incidences of GBV at Mucheke A, the researchers decided to assess the root cause of gender-based violence there. Physical violence is the most common kind of gender-based violence in Mucheke 'A' and includes acts such as sexual assault, rape, intimate relationship violence, domestic abuse, and female genital mutilation that triggered the researchers to discover the causes and ways they can be reduced. These violent crimes were reported and it has been observed that usually they result in physical harm or even death. Physical violence is a fundamental component of gender-based violence (GBV) and takes many different forms. This research aims to assess the causes of gender-based violence and its implications in the Mucheke A community.

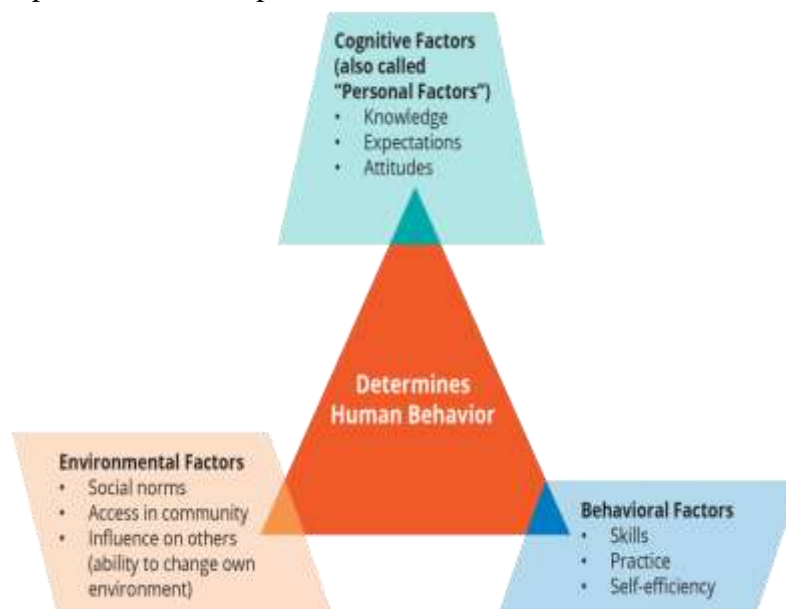
Objectives of the study

- To understand the widespread patterns of gender-based violence (GBV) in the society
- To combat damaging gender norms and stop GBV
- To examine underlying causes and risk factors causing gender-based violence
- How advocacy groups, support agencies and community organisations help and support victims of gender-based violence
- Strategies, for preventing and addressing gender-based violence and promoting a safer and more equitable society.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The Social Learning Theory was used to explain behaviours that are significantly influenced by a person's physical and social environment. The idea holds that creating an environment that supports the intended behaviour change is essential (Heise, 2019). The social learning theory suggests that people learn behaviours such as gender-based violence, through media, community, family experiences and imitating others. Theories such as ecology, exchange, resource, and feminism focus on the evolution of violence, its genetic roots, and the historical context of violence, highlighting the complex nature of violence in intimate relationships. These theories explore various dimensions, from the environmental and social factors that shape violent behaviour to the power dynamics and gender inequalities that contribute to abuse in relationships. Therefore, understanding the concepts and effects of gender-based violence is crucial for developing effective preventive tactics. It demands a comprehensive approach that addresses the societal, psychological, group, and individual problems that lead to GBV.



Source: Social learning theory by Bandura 1977.

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory suggests that people learn habits through observation and modelling, which can be applied to address gender-based violence. The theory reveals that witnessing or experiencing violence increases the likelihood of participation, suggesting applying solutions that promote non-violent behaviour and positive connections. The Social Learning Theory suggests that modelling and observing can alter attitudes and beliefs, particularly in relation to violence, by promoting positive role models and challenging harmful stereotypes. Environmental factors have a significant impact on the incidences and prevalence of gender-based violence (Heise, 2019). The Social Learning Theory highlights the social, cultural, political, and economic factors that perpetuate gender-based violence. It encourages bystanders to intervene, speak out against violence, and support survivors, while addressing gender inequality. Heise (2019) suggests that rigid gender roles, beliefs in male supremacy, and the acceptability of violence

as a means of resolving conflicts are examples of these norms. Jewsel (2002) states that poverty, unemployment, and income inequality are socioeconomic factors that increase the risk of GBV. Economic inequality and financial stressors can exacerbate power dynamics and escalate violent relationships.

Media representations of gender and violence have the power to shape attitudes and behaviours related to gender-based violence. Fulu et al. (2013) pointed out that the presentation of women as objects or victims, along with the praising of violence, can have an impact on a society that normalises and perpetuates gender-based violence.

Strong social support networks and societal cohesion can operate as GBV preventive factors. Communities that actively reject violence and support survivors prevent and confront abusive behaviour (Abramsky et al. 2011). Social Learning Theory is crucial for modelling nonviolent behaviour, emphasising the importance of positive role models. Interventions like community projects, media campaigns, and educational programmes can help individuals develop non-violent attitudes. Programmes to prevent gender-based violence can also focus on positive communication, conflict resolution, and interpersonal connections. Treatments based on the Social Learning Theory reduce the incidence of gender-based violence by teaching individuals new coping mechanisms and ways to express their emotions. Participating in the community is essential because it emphasises the significance of social settings in shaping behaviour (Abramsky et al. 2011). Thus, addressing gender-based violence requires involving the whole community. The Social Learning Theory can aid community-led efforts to prevent and resolve gender-based violence by raising awareness, promoting dialogue, and promoting non-violent behaviour. This strategy helps target root causes of violence, promoting positive behavioural change, and creating safer, more equal communities (Abramsky et al. 2011).

Understanding the widespread patterns of gender-based violence (GBV) in the society

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a pervasive issue affecting people of a certain gender or is committed primarily against them due to their gender identity. It includes physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, coercive behaviours, threats, and deprivations of liberty occurring in public or private settings (UNHCR-Gender based violence, 2022).

The most prevalent yet least evident violation of human rights worldwide has been gender-based violence. Drumtra (2014) propounds that it is estimated that one in three women may experience sexual or physical abuse at some point in their lives. In times of displacement and disaster, gender-based violence presents a serious risk to women and girls (UNHCR-Gender based Violence, 2022). Somalia has spent almost thirty years without a functioning government, which has resulted in long-lasting political instability and a series of humanitarian catastrophes.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) involves acts of emotional, sexual, or financial abuse, physical assault, coercive sexual behaviour, harassment, and rape, and female genital mutilation. According to Garcia-Moreno et al. (2022), it is a harmful traditional practice that is common in several cultures and primarily targets young girls and women. It can have serious physical and psychological repercussions. Violent crimes against women who are believed to have caused shame or dishonour to their families or communities are known as honour killings. Family members are often the ones who conduct these atrocities. Murder and other severe injuries are

possible outcomes of these crimes. When someone throws caustic materials, typically acid, on someone's face or body, it's known as an acid attack (Heise, 2019). Serious physical injury, deformity and, occasionally, even long-term psychological and physical problems might result from this. Victims, often women and girls, are disproportionately affected. Legal frameworks, awareness campaigns, support services, and empowerment programmes address physical violence, promoting prevention, protection, and rehabilitation. Emotional and psychological abuses such as verbal threats, humiliation, intimidation, stalking, and controlling behaviours are also included in the category of gender-based violence (The New Humanitarian, 2022). Gender-based violence (GBV) can significantly impact a person's mental and physical health through emotional and psychological abuse. Verbal abuse involves using insults, threats, and derogatory language to control or denigrate the victim. Emotional abuse involves disparaging remarks about the victim's appearance, IQ, or skills, and "gas lighting" involves questioning their sense of reality.

The New Humanitarian (2022) pointed out that this control may take the form of keeping tabs on the victim's whereabouts, limiting their access to resources, or imposing rules on their conduct and appearance. When it comes to their victims' emotional needs, emotional abusers never show them any love, support, or empathy.

According to Drumtra (2014), forced prostitution, rape, sexual assault, and harassment are examples of sexual violence which is considered a significant part of gender-based violence. Sexual assaulters use victims to establish authority and control, committing non-consensual sexual acts based on gender. Rape involves penetration of sexual organs without consent, often using force, threats, coercion, or incapacity to give consent. Any non-consensual sexual act, including unwanted touching, groping, or oral sex..... According to Garcia-Moreno et al. (2022), sexual harassment occurs in various settings, often involving unwelcome advances or intimidation. Forced marriage and marital rape can lead to gender-based violence, particularly for women and girls. Coerced marriages can result in sexual violence such as marital rape if the victim is coerced into it. According to Drumtra (2014), human trafficking involves the enlistment, conveyance, or accommodation of individuals for sexual exploitation through coercion, fraud, or force. Legal frameworks, awareness campaigns, support services, sex education promotion, and bystander intervention are essential to combat sexual violence and promote gender equality.

Economic abuse is another way that GBV can appear. Economic abuse can occasionally take the form of behaviours such as managing finances, denying help, or limiting access to jobs (The New Humanitarian, 2022). This can involve managing finances, denying help, or limiting access to jobs. Victims may be denied access to financial resources, leaving them vulnerable and unable to meet necessities, leading to a dependent and unbalanced financial situation. Economic abusers use numerous strategies to obstruct their victim's employment or education, such as discouraging them from pursuing education or professional options, undermining their job chances, or applying pressure to abandon their job or studies.

According to Drumtra (2014), when the victim and the abuser are financially dependent on one another, the abuser may take advantage of this need to keep the victim under control and manipulate her. Economic abuse in GBV can lead to severe financial hardships and future difficulties in obtaining credit or other services. Victims may be cut off from support systems, hindering financial management and decision-making. To address this, initiatives include raising

public awareness, offering financial empowerment programmes, providing financial resources, and pushing for legislation labelling economic abuse as a form of domestic violence.

Supporting survivors in gaining financial independence and access to economic resources is crucial in breaking the cycle of abuse and promoting their long-term well-being.

Patterns of GBV

Intimate partner violence (IPV) can limit financial resources, hinder work or education opportunities, and undermine the victim's ability to support themselves, often leading to stalking and intimidation. When an abuser separates their victim from their social support systems such as friends, family, or the community in an effort to keep them under control, this is known as social isolation (Garcia-Moreno, et al. (2022). Seclusion in abusive relationships can hinder assistance and support. IPV has a cyclical pattern, with periods of honeymoon, explosion, and tension-building. Victims face challenges in seeking help, and legal protections are should be pushed for. Women are particularly susceptible to GBV due to discriminatory laws, cultural norms, and gender inequity. GBV impacts women and girls of all ages, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds, with marginalised communities such as racial minorities, disabled individuals, and those from poorer backgrounds being more vulnerable.

Underlying causes and risk factors causing gender-based violence

According to Fulu et al. (2013), gender-based violence (GBV) is a complicated problem with a number of underlying causes and risk factors. It is more prevalent in societies with persistent power imbalances. Acceptance of male dominance and women's subservience contributes to GBV normalisation. These norms and social attitudes uphold the idea of authority over women (Garcia-Moreno, et al. 2022).

Cultural standards and gender stereotypes often justify violence against women, promoting the idea that women are submissive and men are dominant. These expectations can lead to abusive relationships, often supported by religious rituals and traditional gender roles (Bryson, 2018). Gender-based violence (GBV) is prevalent due to cultural customs regulating women's sexuality, such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Males perform these acts to maintain social standing. GBV persists due to lack of laws and inadequate enforcement, and socioeconomic conditions like poverty, unemployment, and income inequality increase the risk of GBV. Harmful cultural practices support GBV.

Abuse of substances such as alcohol and drugs is frequently linked to a higher risk of GBV. Abuse of substances can deteriorate judgement and self-control, which increases aggressiveness and hostility in relationships.

The Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (2020), Ana Peláez Narváez, stated at the UN General Assembly that conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) is increasing globally due to increasing conflicts. Women are more susceptible, and extended violence often disintegrates social safeguards, leading to GBV without accountability. Men often feel helpless due to stress and lack of control; challenging their masculinity.

People who were exposed to or experienced violence as children are more likely to engage in GBV later in adulthood, either as perpetrators or victims (The New Humanitarian, 2022). Insufficient social support networks and community responses to gender-based violence increase vulnerability and persistence. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive strategies to promote gender equality, dismantle harmful practices, strengthen legal frameworks, improve support services, and raise public awareness (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2014). Gender-based violence (GBV) perpetrators are mostly victims of their environment, and they require assistance to transform.

Girls aged 15-18 are often forced into marriages, often outside war zones, to lower financial burdens and receive financial assistance from their sons-in-law. This often leads to gendered violence, sexual abuse, and assault. Poverty and gender-based violence are linked, creating cycles of violence and poverty, particularly for males?

Cultural, societal, and economic elements that support gender-based violence and obstruct efforts to stop it

Cultural and economic factors significantly contribute to the perpetuation and persistence of gender-based violence, with cultural norms, economic disparities, and inefficient legal systems complicit in the violence against women (GBV) (Garcia-Moreno, et al. 2022). For example, beliefs about masculine dominance, rigid gender standards, and concepts of respect and shame can all contribute to the acceptance or rationalisation of violent action.

Long-standing traditions such as female genital mutilation, child marriage, and dowry violence stem from social and cultural standards, potentially perpetuating and obstructing efforts to reduce violence against women, as survivors may be reluctant to report incidents. Fulu et al. (2013) state that attempts to effectively address gender-based violence may be hampered by social norms that stigmatise survivors and hold them accountable for the abuse.

The economic disparity and gender-based discrimination at work have the potential to worsen GBV. Survivors of abuse often face financial dependence, limited economic options, and poverty, which can hinder their ability to seek support. Insufficient access to courts, insufficient legal systems, and low conviction rates for GBV charges also hinder efforts to stop violence. Lack of awareness and education on consent, gender equality, and respectful interactions contribute to destructive attitudes and behaviours.

In order to combat gender-based violence, strategies like questioning norms, advancing gender equality, strengthening legal frameworks, providing support services, and raising awareness are needed. The UN (2019) reports that women in 195 countries lack laws forbidding domestic abuse, highlighting the need for comprehensive solutions.

The UN reports that as of 2023, 50 countries still have gender discrimination in their national statutes, leading to women's rights being less equal to men's, and many women becoming stateless. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls argued these laws constitute violence against them (Coates, 2019).

How advocacy groups, support agencies and community organisations help and support victims of gender -based violence

Helping and assisting victims of gender-based violence is a critical function of advocacy groups, support organisations, and community organisations. They offer a variety of services, such as campaigning for policy changes, emotional support, counselling, and legal aid, in addition to housing. In addition to hotlines and helplines, counselling and treatment, advocacy and legal support, safe havens and shelters, community outreach and education, and other services, a number of organisations assist victims.

The Finnish police, during the COVID-19 pandemic, implemented measures to prevent and respond to GBV, including community awareness campaigns, regular contact with support services, and efficient GBV policing training (OECD, 2020). During the pandemic, police in other nations took comparable actions.

Hotlines and helplines provide confidential assistance to victims of gender-based abuse, like the National Domestic Violence Hotline in the US. Police departments' culture and policies should promote gender-sensitive professional development and human resources policies, aiming for gender parity and a non-discriminatory environment. Increased awareness of gender-based violence can help combat it (Coates, 2019).

Advocacy groups and support organisations offer counselling and therapy services to survivors of gender-based violence, focusing on trauma-informed treatment. RAINN in the US provides such services. Organisations also provide advocacy and legal support, assisting victims in navigating the legal system and enforcing their rights (Bates, 2017).

The Legal Aid Society in the UK provides free legal advice to survivors of domestic abuse. Community organisations run shelters and safe houses for victims of gender-based abuse. The Women's Aid Federation of England offers a network of refuges. Organisations promote prevention techniques, public awareness, and support services through community outreach and education. The White Ribbon Campaign encourages violence against women??? (Coates, 2019). Training programmes aim to equip judges with soft skills to communicate with survivors and victims respectfully, avoiding blame and victimisation. They help formulate better questions and rulings, preventing victimisation and minimising wrongdoers' actions. Dedicated courts can be established to handle gender-based violence (GBV) cases fairly and promptly, as seen in some countries (Bryson, 2018). Among the practices that have arisen with these specialised courts is the establishment of integrated courts for domestic abuse and intimate partner violence.

Strategies for preventing and addressing gender-based violence and promoting a safer and more equitable society

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a global human rights violation and public health concern. Effective public governance requires strategic planning to address the problem and improve decision-making processes. A well-thought-out strategy framework can be useful in achieving clear government goals and a strategic vision for addressing GBV across all spheres of life (Bryson, 2018).

Coates (2019) opines that to foster a more just and secure society, strategies include education, awareness campaigns, legislative changes, safe spaces, economic empowerment, data gathering, and cooperation. The GBV framework should address different types of GBV, addressing

underlying causes, prevalence, and effects. Proactive measures, including eradicating harmful gender norms and stereotypes, and addressing governance flaws such as institutionalised court access, are essential for addressing gender inequality. This is because different forms of GBV occur in different circumstances and often call for different or extra modes of intervention.

The implementation of education and awareness campaigns is meant to challenge gender stereotypes and promote healthy relationships. Focus on schools, universities, and community setting, implement legal reforms and laws against harassment, sexual assault, and domestic abuse to criminalize gender-based violence (WHO, 2020).

Safe spaces and support services for victims of gender-based violence, including hotlines, shelters, counselling, legal assistance, and medical attention, are essential (UNFPA, 2019). Positive masculinity, confronting gender stereotypes, and involving men and boys in the fight are crucial. Economic empowerment, entrepreneurship, equitable compensation, and respectable employment can reduce vulnerability to violence (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2019). Therefore, addressing gender-based violence requires collaboration among government agencies, civil society organisations, and community leaders that promote multiculturalism and involve social welfare, health, and justice sectors.

Most advocacy groups use hotlines, counselling, legal support, shelter, and community outreach. The effectiveness of these measures varies based on implementation, enforcement, and cultural context. Promoting economic empowerment for marginalised genders through skill development, education, and resource access can prevent gender-based violence. UNDP (2018) suggests prioritising entrepreneurship and job development for women's inclusion.

The use of advanced technologies such as Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Machine Learning within chatbot systems presents a promising avenue for addressing gender-based violence. These advanced AI models offer 24/7 virtual therapy support, allow anonymous reporting, confidentiality, and immediate aid for those in need. Furthermore, these chatbot system serve as invaluable tools in advancing safety and equity agendas within the society (Wei,2023).

The Research Methodology

The study used a mixed research model, a research design that outlines data collection, instruments, and analysis methods. In this research, the researchers sought to interact with people in Mucheke A, a high-density suburb in Masvingo City, for knowledge production or policy development.

Population

Bless, Fligson-Smith and Sithole (2019:162) defined a population as the focus on a specific group of individuals. In this study, the population covered Mucheke high density suburb Section 1 and 2 in Masvingo, and considered factors influencing home practices and participants.

Sample and sample size

The research utilised a 20-participant sample size, employing random sampling techniques such as simple, stratified, and cluster sampling to ensure representativeness and minimise bias.

Sampling procedures

The researchers chose non-probability sampling for their research study due to its suitability and the need for in-depth study of the sample.

Research instruments.

The study utilised a mixed research design, employing questionnaires, interviews, and observations to gather data from purposively selected participants, utilising statistical methods and analysis for data collection and analysis.

Data collection procedure

The data collection procedure was important since it allowed the researchers to prepare the undertakings in collecting the data in time. Arrangements were made with the people concerned in regard to actual dates of observations of the participants selected. The researchers distributed the questionnaires randomly to the participants, focus groups of 8 people were formulated for accurate data collection. The researchers conducted a thorough data collection procedure, ensuring timely and accurate data collection from participants through a personal gathering.

The researchers wanted to assess the gender of the respondents.

The gender profile of the participants in the study indicates that the majority of the respondents was evenly balanced 40(40%) were males and 60(60%) were females. The dominance of female respondents is a reflection of the higher proportion of females in the study about gender-based violence and its implications on the society at Mucheke A, Section 1 and 2 in Masvingo.

The researchers wanted to find out about the age group of the respondents.

The response on showed that 5(25%) of the respondents was aged less than 20 years, whereas, 7(35%) were aged between 21 -30 years. However, 6(30%) of the respondents were aged between 31 -40 years and only 2(10%) of the respondents were aged above 41 years.

What is your religion?

The respondents were asked to identify their religion and the outcome clearly showed that 11(55%) of the respondent were Christians, 4(20%) of the respondents were traditionalists, whereas 3(15%) of them were Moslems and 2(10%) belonged to unspecified other religions.

Level of Education of Respondents

The respondents were asked to identify their highest level of education and the outcome clearly showed that tertiary graduates had a considerable presence in the gender based violence study; they constituted 8(40%). The primary qualified respondents constituted 4(20%) of the respondents whereas 7(35%) of the respondents had secondary education; only one had other unspecified educational qualifications.

How many years have you been in Mucheke A Section 1 and 2 in Masvingo?

The respondents were asked to identify their years staying in Mucheke A Section 1 and 2 in Masvingo; 3(15%) of the respondents revealed that they had less than 5 years, 4(20%) indicated that they had been living in Section 1 or 2 between 6 and 10 years whilst 8(40%) had between 11 and 15 years. Lastly, 5(25%) of the participants had been in section for a period above 15 years.

What is your employment status?

The researchers wanted to get an understanding of their employment status; whether it can contribute to gender based violence. The results revealed that 3(15%) of the respondents were employed, 4(20%) were formally employed, whereas 8(40%) of them were informally employed; of these, 5(25%) had unspecified employment statuses.

What is your marital status?

The researchers wanted to find out the marital status of the participants under study. The results showed that 10(50%) of the respondents were married, 5(25%) divorced, whilst 3(15%) were single, 2(10%) were widowed.

Discussion of the findings

What are the underlying causes and risk factors causing gender- based violence?

The researchers wanted to find out the causes of gender-based violence in Mucheke A Section 1 and 2 in Masvingo. The results showed that 15(75%) of the respondents agreed that the acts of inflicting physical, sexual, or mental pain or suffering, threats of coercion, and other types of deprivation of liberty is high, whereas 5(25%) of the participants disagreed.

The findings of the study showed that 15(75%) of the respondents agreed that abuse of substances such as alcohol and drugs is frequently linked to a higher risk of GBV, 1(5%) showed that they were not sure while 5(25%) disagreed.

The results showed that 25(5%) of the respondents agreed that victims of economic abuse may be denied access to financial resources or support, which leaves them unable to satisfy necessities like clothing, food and shelter.

When asked about the underlying causes and risks factors causing gender- based violence, some of the respondents stated that; *“societies that uphold unequal power dynamics between genders should contribute to the prevalence of gender-based violence.”*

The researchers pointed out that there are discriminatory social norms, patriarchal systems and rigid gender roles that can reinforce power imbalances, leading to violence.

The other respondent said:

“Cultural norms and practices that condone violence, such as acceptance of domestic violence or harmful traditional practices, might contribute to a climate that perpetuates gender-based violence.”

Socialisation processes that promote aggression and dominance can also play a role.

Some other respondents pointed out that: *“Economic disparities and poverty can exacerbate gender-based violence. In other words, financial dependence, limited economic opportunities, and unequal access to resources might increase vulnerability and perpetuate abusive situations.”*

Some of the participants stated that, *“the use of substance abuse, including alcohol and drugs, can contribute to an increased risk of gender-based violence.”*

One other participant opined that: *“Substance use can impair judgment, lower inhibitions, and contribute to aggressive behaviour, increasing the likelihood of perpetrating violence.”*

What are the cultural, societal and economic elements that support gender- based violence and obstruct efforts to stop it?

The information showed that 9(45%) of the respondents agreed that cultural and economic variables play a significant role in perpetuating gender-based violence, whereas 6(30%) of the respondents disagreed that rigid gender standards and concepts of respect, including shame can all contribute to the acceptance or rationalisation of violent action. 2(10%) showed that they were not sure. 9(45%) disagreed.

The findings show that 15(75%) of the respondents agreed that families who are struggling financially will use this to lower their expenses and get financial assistance from their new sons-in-law based on cultural, societal, and economic elements that support gender- based violence and obstruct efforts to stop it; whereas 1(5%) were not sure. 4(20%) of the respondents disagreed.

The results showed that 15(75%) of the respondents agreed that the absence of laws that criminalise gender-based violence and legally codify other rights that eliminate gender imbalance based on cultural, societal, and economic elements that support gender based violence and obstruct efforts to stop it; 1(5%) were not sure.

When asked about the cultural, societal and economic elements that support gender- based violence and obstruct efforts to stop it, one participant said that,

“there are some cultural norms and beliefs that can support and justify gender-based violence, which include traditional gender roles that emphasise male dominance and female subordination which perpetuate power imbalances and normalise violence against women.” The researchers observed that cultural practices such as child marriages or female genital mutilation might also contribute to the prevalence of gender-based violence.

Some of the participants expressed the view that: *“Societal attitudes that blame victims of gender-based violence instead of holding perpetrators accountable can hinder efforts to stop it.”*

Some participants supported the view that *“Victim blaming shifts responsibility onto survivors and discourages them from seeking help or reporting the incidents.”* This perspective highlights how societal attitudes can create barriers for survivors, making them hesitant to speak out due to fear of judgment, stigma, or further victimization. When responsibility is placed on the survivor rather than the perpetrator, it not only discourages reporting but also allows cycles of abuse to continue unchecked. However, during the interviews, other participants pointed out that *“Insufficient awareness and education about gender-based violence can hinder efforts to address and prevent it.”* A lack of understanding about the causes and consequences of GBV often leads to ineffective intervention strategies. Additionally, limited awareness of the broader dynamics of violence, including its intersectionality with other forms of discrimination, can reinforce harmful stereotypes and misconceptions. Without comprehensive education and awareness initiatives, these misunderstandings persist, making it difficult to foster a culture of accountability and support for survivors.

One participant said: *“Economic disparities and poverty sometimes obstruct efforts to stop gender-based violence. Economic stressors can also contribute to increased tensions within relationships, escalating the risk of violence.”*

Socialisation and media influence processes that normalise aggression, objectification of women, and toxic masculinity usually contributes to the perpetuation of gender-based violence. Media portrayals that glamorise violence or depict women in subordinate roles can reinforce harmful stereotypes and attitudes.

How do advocacy groups, support agencies and community organisations help and support victims of gender based violence?

Community organisations play a crucial role in providing emotional support and housing to variety of victims of gender-based violence. These organisations offer a range of services, including campaigning for policy changes, counselling, and legal aid, housing and ensuring a comprehensive support system for victims.

The survey indicates that 55% of respondents believe numerous organisations provide quick assistance to victims of gender-based abuse, while 45% disagree, indicating a lack of consensus.....

Seventy percent (70%) of respondents agreed that organisations offer advocacy and legal support to victims of gender-based violence, while 30% disagreed.

The study revealed that 60% of respondents agreed that awareness campaigns, training sessions, and workshops can help promote an inclusive and respectful culture in communities, while only 5% were uncertain and 35% disagreed, suggesting that these methods are crucial in supporting victims of gender-based violence.

During the discussion one of the participants pointed out that;

“support agencies should operate shelters or safe houses where survivors can seek refuge from abusive situations” the other respondent said, *“these shelters should provide temporary housing, safety, and support services such as counselling, legal aid, and medical assistance.”*

Some of the members who participated were of the view that; *“advocacy groups and support agencies should offer counselling and therapy services to survivors for the benefit of the community under study.”*

The researchers advised that these services help survivors process their experiences, heal from trauma, develop coping mechanisms, and rebuild their lives. In other words, they may also provide group therapy or support groups to facilitate peer support and solidarity.

One of the respondents argued that; *“organizations need to provide legal support and advocacy for survivors navigating the legal system.”* The other advised that, *“they include assistance with obtaining protection orders, legal representation, and guidance throughout legal proceedings.”*

“Advocacy groups and community organizations should conduct awareness campaigns and educational programs to address gender-based violence” said one of the participants.

The researchers observed that these initiatives aim to raise awareness about the issue, challenge harmful norms, promote gender equality, and educate individuals about prevention, consent, and respectful relationships.

What are the strategies and recommendations for preventing and addressing gender-based violence and promoting a safer and more equitable society?

Of the respondents surveyed on strategies for preventing and addressing gender-based violence in an equitable society, 70% agreed on the need for national legislation and international standards, while 30% disagreed. The study aims to promote a safer and a more equitable environment.

The study found that 65% of respondents support encouraging positive masculinity, confronting gender stereotypes, and including both men and boys in the fight against gender-based violence; 30% disagreed. The results showed that 12 participants (60%) agreed that men should be encouraged to take an active role in preventive initiatives and advocate for gender equality as part of broader strategies to prevent and address gender-based violence while promoting a safer and more equitable society. Meanwhile, 2 participants (10%) were uncertain, and 6 participants (30%) disagreed.

During the interview one interviewee said that:

“It is essential to promote gender equality through comprehensive sexuality education in schools, workplaces, and communities”.

The other one pointed out that; ...

“it is very important to raise awareness about gender-based violence, its consequences, and the importance of consent”. Furthermore, the discussion revealed that, *“...challenge gender stereotypes and promote respectful relationships through media campaigns and community programs is also practised.”*

During focus group discussion some of the participants pointed out that it is essential to

“enact and enforce laws that criminalize gender-based violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and harassment.”

Some said *“ensure access to justice for survivors through fair and effective legal systems.*

Implement policies that support gender equality and protect the rights of women and marginalized groups.”

The researchers observed that it was necessary to establish and strengthen support services for survivors of gender-based violence, including shelters, hotlines, counselling, and medical services. In other words, these services should be accessible, culturally sensitive, and adequately funded.

One participant expressed the view that it was essential to *“provide training for service providers to respond effectively and empathetically to survivors' needs.”*

Some of the participants contended that *“there is need to promote economic empowerment of women through access to education, skill development, and employment opportunities.”*

Some pointed out that *“it is very important to encourage women's leadership and participation in decision-making processes at all levels.”*

Some of the participants argued that, *“it was very essential to involve communities, civil society organizations, and grassroots movements in prevention efforts for the reduction of gender- based violence within the community under study.”*

Conclusion

GBV affects individuals across all backgrounds, causing physical, emotional, and economic harm while perpetuating inequality. Combating GBV requires legal reforms, community education, support services, and a cultural shift towards gender equality (Heise, 2019). These crimes are, often rooted in gender discrimination, often lead to physical and psychological issues necessitating legal frameworks, awareness campaigns, and empowerment programmes. Gender-based violence (GBV) is a complex issue influenced by gender inequality, social, cultural, and economic standards. It is more prevalent in societies with power imbalances and is normalised by patriarchal norms and gender roles. Socioeconomic conditions like poverty, unemployment, and income inequality increase the risk of violence. Gender-based violence (GBV) is a global human rights violation and public health concern. Effective public governance requires strategic planning to address it. A well-thought-out strategy framework can improve decision-making processes and focus on the most significant problems. The strategic vision should consider national legislation

and international standards, including penal codes, constitutions, and laws addressing gender-based violence.

Recommendations

The researchers recommended that:

Authorities should enhance community projects, media campaigns, and educational programmes that promote equality, respect, and empathy.

Positive role models should be actively encouraged to foster non-violent attitudes and behaviours within society.

The government must prioritise the economic empowerment of women and other marginalised genders through skill development, education, and greater access to resources and opportunities.

A serious commitment to these efforts is essential for effective change.

The government must establish clear and measurable expectations regarding gender-based violence. This should include a well-defined strategic framework that outlines the long-term vision and actionable steps for addressing GBV across all sectors of society.

There should be a strong emphasis on advancing technological innovations to tackle emerging challenges in GBV prevention. For example, artificial intelligence can enhance predictive analytics to identify and prevent potential incidents of GBV

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Sub-Theme: Strategies to tackle drug peddling, abuse and addictions among students and staff in HTEIs in Masvingo Province

Chapter 7: 'It Wasn't Easy': Unpacking the Everyday Experiences and Recovery Journeys of Substance Users in Tertiary Education Institutions in Masvingo

Sylvester Dombo, Pauline Chiripanhura and Vongai Z. Nyawo

Introduction

The problem of substance use in Zimbabwe is rising at an alarming rate. The primary aim of this paper is to unpack how the everyday life stories of students at higher institutions of learning in Masvingo have coped with drug use and how they have overcome the problem. The paper also seeks to capture the lived experiences of drug users through giving them a voice on their daily struggles. Using the lived experiences of five former addicts, the paper traces their encounters with drugs for the first time, how they became addicts and the challenges it presented to their daily lives, the attempts to overcome the problem and their lives after becoming sober. The paper shows that while starting drugs can be fairly easy and fun-filled, the journey to extricate oneself from the problem is not an easy task. While the effort to gaining sobriety is appreciated, the students often encounter problems with the society which ostracises them for having dabbled in drugs.

The study employed the everyday life experiences of students to give us a window through which we may understand the everyday struggles of people using drugs and substance. The everyday life approach was critical in that it focused on the so-called unimportant aspect of people's lives like resting, doing homework, and attending classes among others to show that these can be turned upside down when one engages in drugs. The everyday life approach allowed us to capture the life story of one constituency that has been neglected in telling the story of how drugs have affected lives in Zimbabwe as well as the everyday attempts by people to overcome the problem. This study therefore contributes to the capturing of the so-called unimportant people and their efforts may be important in informing the country on how to rid our society of harmful drugs and substances.

Drug and substance abuse: A global perspective

Drug and substance abuse is an all too common occurrence and is cause of concern at most schools and universities, including tertiary institutions worldwide. These drugs are either readily available in their communities or often used by their peers whom they relate to and interact with, hence they become exposed to them. Drug abuse occurs at all economic levels of society, from the wealthy to the impoverished, and among young people as well as adults. Okoye and Nwaka-Nwandu (2019) further add that the problem of substance abuse is no longer isolated within cultural groups and geographical regions, but has permeated various national and continental boundaries. This realisation that drug and substance abuse is a universal problem has seen efforts to curb its spread and possibly eradicate taking a diplomatic dimension, resulting in multilateral and bilateral treaties (Okoye and Nwaka-Nwandu, 2019).

Substance abuse refers to the frequent use of harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs (Raphael, Raveendran and Sajna: 2017). The Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly in April 2016 noted with concern the issue of increased substance misuse and its health implications amongst young people (10-24 years). Five years later, the World Health Organisation (2021) also raised concern over the use of psychoactive substances which often lead to dependence syndrome, a cluster of behavioural, cognitive and physiological phenomena that develop after repeated substance use. The increase of this phenomenon among young people of the stipulated age group is a cause of concern because these are the years of personality growth and development. As such, these years should be spent wisely instead of being wasted on abusing drugs. Studies have also shown that drug abuse wrecks individuals, shatter families and weakens entire society with its burden of economic losses, health cost and increased lawlessness and crime. In 2018, the World Health Organisation reported that drug and substance abuse accounted for 5.9% of annual global deaths among young people including university students. Yusuf (2007) presented general effects of substance abuse among university students as being reduced graduating chances of undergraduate from school or of landing and holding a steady job, and causing student unrest in the campus which will disturb academic calendar. Okoshiya and Ali (2006) reports that among the Nigerian youths, drug abuse has resulted in an increase in the number of cases of cultism, violent disorders as well as mental disorders. Gasa *et al* (2022) identified time management challenges, risky sexual behaviour and engaging in criminal activities such as sexual harassment, fighting and sexual victimisation as the major effects of drug and substance abuse among university students in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa.

An exploratory study by Gasa *et al* (2022) on risk factors of substance abuse among KwaZulu Natal University students revealed that the issue was of global concern. One of the major revelations from this study was that in all five continents of the world both male and female students are abusing a lot of substances. Peer pressure, socialisation, the desire to escape stress and depression and enjoyment were the major issues that were raised by students to account for abusing drugs. Some scholars are of the view that the change in lifestyle behaviour that accompanies tertiary education, and the perceived freedom from parental control further heightens the prevalence of risky behaviour (Dumbili and Williams, 2016). The same authorities also feel that there is a strong relationship between substance abuse among students and dysfunctional family settings. Media adverts have also been factored in as drivers of substance abuse (Salaudeen, Musa, Akande, and Bolarinwa, 2011).

Drug and Substance abuse in Zimbabwe

The current trend of substance abuse among youth is a major national concern. It is troubling, and it has derogatory effects on youth such as health and behavioural problems, or even death. In its 2019 report, the World Health Organisation reported that Zimbabwe has the highest rate of 15 to 19-year-olds engaging in heavy “episodic drinking” in Africa, with 70.7 percent of males and 55.5 percent of females participating. The same age group is also heavily involved in drug dealing and

use. Mushangwe (2019) is of the view that the music called dancehall accelerated the use of drugs. Recently while launching the Zimbabwe Multi-Sectoral Drug and Substance Abuse Plan 2024-2030, The President expressed concern over the increased use and abuse of drugs and associated impacts. He stressed that drug and substance abuse has become a significant public health, socio-economic and national security challenge as well as a potential threat to the country's development trajectory (The Chronicle, 2024). This means that the impact of drug abuse extends beyond the individual to families, communities and society as a whole straining relationships, undermining trust and placing burdens on healthcare and law enforcement services.

Currently, the commonly abused drugs include Codeine; Methamphetamine (crystal meth, commonly known as meth, speed, mutoriro, Chalk, Ice, Crank, Guka; Glue; Broncleer (Bronco); Solvents- Fembo and Genkem; Chlorpromazine- Maragado; Mangemba; Cane spirit; Cocaine, Cannabis/Marijuana/Mbanje (which is mostly abused or traded under a variety of street names such as — Mbanje, Ganja, Dope, Weed, Blunt, Grass, Pot, Boom, Spliff, Mary-Jane, Skunk, Kiff) (Ministry of Health and Child Care, 2024). In 2022, a local anti-drug advocacy group, the Zimbabwe Civil Liberties and Drug Network (ZCLDN) expressed with concern the over rampant drug and substance abuse in higher and tertiary institutions and called for a holistic approach to curb the practice. ZCLDN (2022)'s research revealed that Zimbabwean adolescents and youth take drugs for various reasons including as a remedy of stress from joblessness, peer pressure, emotional/physical abuse at home, boredom, depression, anxiety, unstable home environment and poor relations with parents.

Chidarikire et al (2021)'s desktop research on drug and substance abuse in Zimbabwe rural schools revealed that rural areas that are in most cases considered remote and free from urban influences have not been spared with regards to drug abuse. The researchers note an increase in drug and substance abuse among teenagers in secondary education. They realised that peer culture is the main cause for the spread of drugs. UNICEF (2023) in collaboration with a number of stakeholders carried out a research to understand drug and substance abuse by Zimbabwean adolescence and young people. The report revealed that a lot of substances including cannabis, cough syrup, crystal meth, illegal alcohol, pharmaceutical, crack, cocaine powder and heroin were being abused. It also came out that young people from wealth families consumed the most expensive substances (cocaine, crack and heroine) while those from low and middle class consumed the cheaper ones. The report revealed that children are turning to drugs as early as at 14 years and that both males and females are indulging indiscriminately. It was further realised that most consumers were in urban areas as compared to rural areas mainly because of stronger community childcare systems and closer parental care that prevails in rural communities. The report also pinpointed gang violence, intimate partner violence, suicide attempts and increases in school drop outs as the effects of drug use and substance abuse.

Students in the tertiary institutions are increasingly indulging in use and abuse of these non-medical substances with detrimental effects. Rwafa, Mangezi and Madhombiro (2019) report that 45% of the people admitted in Zimbabwe's mental health institutions in 2019 were youth drug abusers. Recent admissions to Zimbabwe's mental health hospitals statistics released by the Ministry of Health and Child Care showed an increase in drug use related admissions. For example, in 2023, at Ngomahuru, Zimbabwe's second largest mental health hospital, 80% of admissions were juvenile and adult patients presented with drug-induced psychosis. With regards to university students, it is disheartening to realise that some university students do not regard drug use, abuse and dependence as a bad thing, as they view some drugs as effective psychoactive and performance-enhancing substances, stress and trauma depressants (Maunganidze, 2024). With this mind set, it means that university students will continue to indulge in drugs. Mashingaidze (2024) accuses Zimbabwe universities for indirectly contributing to increased drug and substance use and abuse. His argument is that acute shortages of on-campus accommodation has driven many students into cheap but 'bad' neighbourhoods, with high levels of alcohol consumption and a culture of drug and substance abuse where the students end up succumbing to peer pressure.

Nkoma and Bhumure (2014) once carried a research to determine the prevalence of drug use among first year students in the Faculty of Social Sciences (now Julius Nyerere School of Social Sciences). The research revealed that alcohol, marijuana and cigarettes were the most prevalent drugs amongst the students. It also came out of the research that alcohol was the first choice for both male and female students; marijuana was mostly smoked by male students as compared to female students, while no female students smoked cigarettes. Through interacting with students, Nkoma and Bhumure (2014) gathered that some learners started using these drugs as a coping mechanism as they experienced role transition; as a way of fitting in within a group of people and as a way of enjoying their freedom. As a coping strategy, they take alcohol and illegal substances but in the long run, this "escapist" form of substance use may lead to substance dependence and finally addiction. Drug abuse amongst these students resulted in them absconding lectures and failing to meet deadlines for given tasks such as assignments submission and sleep deprivation as they spent most of their nights drinking with friends. It is very clear that drug use at Great Zimbabwe has a long history.

Tertiary institutions students fall within the age ranges that are regarded as the most drug users and abusers. As such, it is imperative to understand the development of the drug addiction problem among students in tertiary institutions; how drug addiction impacted their academic life and their road to recovery. Although there is a lot of information with regards to factors influencing use of illegal drugs and substances, there is need to understand the situation at a localised scale. This helps in picking out push factors that might be specific to Masvingo. Furthermore, this research might also help in assessing the essential support needed by recovery addicts against those currently offered, and inform tertiary institution policies.

The government of Zimbabwe has taken a number of proactive steps to address drug and substance abuse. In June 2024, the government launched the Zimbabwe Multi-Sectoral Drug and Substance Abuse Plan 2024-2030. The plan outlines a comprehensive strategic approach to address the escalating threat of drug and substance abuse to public health, economic growth, national security and social stability in Zimbabwe (The Chronicle, 2024). The government also reviewed and updated the fine structure as a way of trying to reduce cases of drug abuse. With the new fine structure, all drug users and peddlers arrested no-longer have the option of paying a fine before court appearance. Periodically, the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) name and shame these drug users and peddlers through publishing their names on social media platforms. A number of non-governmental organisations in collaboration with the government have intensified educational campaigns to raise awareness about the risk of drug abuse. These organisations have also come up with support programmes for those seeking to overcome addiction. All these intervention measures bring hope for the reduction of drug abuse cases and the rehabilitation of the addicted.

Theoretical Framework

This study made use of the everyday life approach to understand the daily lived experiences of students in tertiary institutions in Masvingo as they attempt to clean themselves from the vagaries of drugs and substance use. In its simplest and broadest understanding, everyday life is what we know to be familiar, immediate and ordinary. Like many categories, it is equivocal, ambivalent, and knotted within a bundle of (too often) unquestioned commonplace notions and figures. Its customary registers, “natural”, “boring”, “ordinary”, “repetitive”, “mundane”, “unreflexive”, “passive”, “banal”, etc., all stem from diverse and historically situated understandings, conventions, and debates.

The everyday life is a concept with a long history. Beyond the often cited work of Michel de Certeau, there is an extensive tradition of writing on the everyday. This includes not just the work of Henri Lefebvre, but also of philosophers and sociologists such as Lukács, Heidegger, Heller, Schutz, Goffman, and Habermas among others. Back (2015) has recently written a moving account of “why everyday life matters”, arguing that “identifying public issues” in “mundane public life”, “demonstrates the opportunity to link the smallest story to the largest social transformation”. This study shows that studying about students and drug use is an important public issue that can be linked to the psycho-social issues affecting the country. A neglect of the everyday lives of students will lead us to abandon them as an important component of the country’s attempt to harness its human resources for development as the country moves towards fulfilling its vision 2030 agenda. In studying the everyday life, the seemingly unimportant participation of actors in its mundane practices and places, both constitutes and is constitutive of, larger social processes. These so-called unimportant issues of students’ use of drugs and how it has affected their lives is what preoccupies this study. This is so because studies these days are no longer concerning themselves with the so-called grand narratives, but with histories from below, where focus is now on the hitherto neglected

subjects of history (Rita 2000). This approach helps us to unearth the often hidden transcripts from the lives of the social groups that had hitherto been deemed unimportant.

The everyday is a key concept in cultural studies and feminism and an important reference point in other scholarly fields, part of a growing interest in micro-analysis and history from below. This study is anchored on the premise that everyday life is undeniably 'the essential, taken-for-granted continuum of mundane activities that frames our forays into more esoteric or exotic worlds the unavoidable basis for all other forms of human endeavour'. The everyday, as articulated by Guy Debord, "is the measure of all things." Therefore, a proper study of the everyday is more inclusionary as it brings back to life the stories of the forgotten social groups.

Everyday life is synonymous with the habitual, the ordinary, the mundane. In other words, through a study of the everyday, we appreciate that every little tiny detail or event is important in shaping the social lives of the people and the environment they operate in. Everyday life is also a secular and democratic concept. It is regarded as secular since it conveys the sense of a world leached of transcendence; the everyday is considered such because it is no longer connected to the miraculous, the magical, or the sacred. It is democratic because it recognizes the paramount shared reality of a mundane, material embeddedness in the world. Everyone, from the most famous to the humblest, eats, sleeps, yawns, defecates; no one escapes the reach of the quotidian. Everyday life, in other words, does not only describe the lives of ordinary people, but recognizes that every life contains an element of the ordinary. We are all ultimately anchored in the mundane.

Methodology

Research Design

In this study, we employed a descriptive qualitative design. The qualitative study aims to uncover and understand the everyday experience of participants who took drugs, got addicted, decided to fight the addiction and overcome.

Target Population and Sampling

Purposive sampling was adopted, whereby the researchers selected and identified information-rich participants who fell into the category of those who used drugs and are either fighting to stop the addiction or those that have overcome and are clean. We focused specifically on those participants who were willing to share their everyday experiences with drugs and were either students or former students of any higher institution of learning in Masvingo Province.

Data Collection and Analysis

For this study, one-one-one in-depth interviews were conducted during the month of August 2024. While we had targeted about ten participants, we successfully interviewed five students. Those who refused to participate felt that they were not ready to talk about their experiences. One

participant pulled out of the interview midway through the exercise. A number of questions were drafted and posed to the students. These were generally grouped under the four themes that centred on the following: 1) Student involvement in drugs 2) Their experiences using drugs 3) The decision to stop taking drugs and 4) the aftermath of drug addiction. These interviews were done at one tertiary institution of learning in Masvingo Province. The duration of interviews lasted from 30 to 45 minutes. These interviews were held in a secluded place in order to ensure the right of privacy and limit disturbance. The informants were informed on the purpose of the interview and those who were not willing to proceed with the interview were excused. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, the informants refused to be audio-recorded and such hand-written notes were taken during the interviews. The interviewer orientated the participants about their rights and introduced the aim of the study at the beginning. Anonymity was observed and participants were assigned pseudonyms. In this study they will be simply identified as participant 1 up to 5.

Researching on human subjects involved in a sensitive issue as drug use is not an easy endeavour. Initially, we had envisaged that we would be able to do a focus group discussion. However, when we entered into the field, we discovered that participants' anonymity and confidentiality would be seriously compromised leading to stigma and social exclusion. This was so because many engaged in drugs and substance use secretly and as such were not prepared to come out in the open. For others, the subject of drugs brought out emotional and traumatic experiences which seriously compromised the quality of the data gathered. Due to these problems, we ended up settling for in-depth one-on-one interviews with the informants.

Through one-on-one interviews, we were able to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity. This made our informants more relaxed and willing to provide even sensitive information. Since the informants gained our trust, it was easy for them to provide detailed responses without the fear of being ostracised and judged. More importantly, since we are dealing with the everyday experiences of those who used drugs, doing in-depth interviews allowed for the capturing of the varied individual experiences as this gave the participants a platform to share in greater detail their stories and experiences. We were able to probe deeply the issues and seek clarity where necessary. This allowed the research to capture accurately and to understand the informants' experiences as they fought to extricate themselves from the drug problem.

We used snowballing as a recruitment strategy whereby initial participants were identified and interviewed. These were then asked to point us to their friends and acquaintances who also used drugs. Snowballing was particularly significant in this study as we discovered that participants opened up easily to researchers who had been trusted by their friends. This allowed us to reach those participants who were hitherto inaccessible and unknown had it not been for their friends. We learned a valuable lesson that trust is an important element needed when one is carrying out research.

The data that was obtained from interviews was transcribed word for word. This data was then grouped according to the themes that emerged from the interviews, as well as the research questions. The themes were then refined until we were left with four overarching themes which became the basis for the understanding of how students dealt with the problem of drugs and substances. The four themes allowed for a better understanding of the data generated from the informants and the discussion of the findings was therefore based on the four themes stated. At the beginning of the interview, we asked participants to share the “story” of their addiction and the discussion evolved until we reached the final theme of their lives after fighting the addiction.

Discussion of Findings

First encounter with drugs

Our entry point in the discussion was anchored on our need to understand the informants' encounter with drugs. Of the five informants, Participant 1 pointed out that he had started taking drugs before enrolling for University. This actually happened during the Covid-19 induced lockdowns when people were at home. The participant pointed out that ‘being a ghetto youth tempted me to indulge in drugs with other youths as we had nothing to do at home the whole day.’ The same participant argued that he partook of drugs ‘out of curiosity’ and to have first-hand experience of ‘what it meant to be high’. It was at this juncture that he tried alcohol and broncleer which is popularly known as ‘broco’. The participant noted that his first encounter did not affect him significantly, but it rather pushed him to keep testing:

I felt like I had taken too few during my first attempt. It was probably because I was afraid of being caught by my parents. So I took them incrementally making sure that I didn't get caught at home. By the time I enrolled at the University, I already knew how to manage my uptake of drugs.

The remaining participants encountered drugs at the University. The story of Participant 2 is that he partook of illicit beers in their various forms such *tumbwa* just for recreational purposes and to have them for fun. He said:

We used to hear stories about these drugs. I was driven by curiosity to find out whether I will have fun from taking drugs. So I joined this other guy I met at university and I began to try them out. It was curiosity more than anything that pushed me to take drugs.

Participant 3, 4 and 5 started taking drugs when they got hooked up in the company of drug users while at college. They stated that it was peer pressure that led them to take drugs. Coupled with a degree of freedom, far away from the prying eyes of their parents, they began to indulge in drugs, firstly during the weekends before it became a permanent feature of their lives. One participant said:

For me I just ended up playing with this group. If you ask me I can't say how we really clicked but it just happened. Before long we started trying out things to get high. I couldn't wait for weekends because that's when we did everything. We tried mbanje, mutoriro beer and these straight alcohols that will make you ‘stick’. It was a roller-coaster experience.

Life under drugs

The life of drug users is one characterised by two extremes: on the one hand it is dominated by feelings of pleasure and euphoria while on the other it is characterised by mood swings, relationship difficulties, aggression and isolation. Unpacking the life of drug users has brought to the fore the controversial issue of whether one is under addiction or dependence. This is the central aspect of our discussion, because we want to understand how drugs transform the lives of the users on a daily basis. Firstly, we discuss or problematize the issue of addiction or dependence before we move on to how drugs have changed the everyday lives of students.

The term addiction or dependence has to be broadened if we are to accurately describe the life of users. There is a general belief that addiction should not be limited to just patterns of alcohol and other drug use but can describe any activity that is experienced as compulsive such as gambling or even overeating. The idea of addiction that a person is sick or otherwise has a problem that needs to be addressed. They say that even though their alcohol or other drug use is regular and holds a key place in their lives, they still did not see it in terms of dependence or addiction. Instead, they present it as an important part of their lives with benefits as well as disadvantages.

A sign of addiction is when consumption disrupts other parts of everyday life such as work, and relationships with family and friends. Addiction is when it impacts on other areas of life in a negative way. Addiction is destructive. Addiction is also seen in terms of devoting too much time to finding and taking the drug. This disrupts everyday activities.

From our research with the five participants, we discovered that addiction interferes heavily with normal life. The typical everyday life of students centre on academic, social, personal activities and rest time. All the five participants agreed that academic activities such as attending classes and lectures, preparing for tutorials and group work were the most important tasks that occupy their schedules from Monday to Friday. Socially, students also budget their time on such activities as joining clubs, attending campus events, relaxing with friends physically and sometimes online. Personally, students can also engage in exercises and other daily hobbies. Finally, students also need time to sleep and relax through watching television or watching games. These are some of the activities that make up a student's daily life on campus.

This study confirms that drugs are disruptive to everyday life of students in their academic, social, personal and rest time.

Of all the activities that are turned head on due to drugs, the academic life is seriously compromised. Participant number 5 had this to say:

My academic life slowly became a nightmare you know. I began missing lectures for no apparent reasons. I ended up not attending even tutorials as my friends would just write my name on the group list. I would only submit my assignments well after the due date. I tell you, I almost failed my modules.

Participant number 3 had a slightly different story to tell. Although he continued to attend his lectures like the normal days, he highlighted that he started developing a pattern whereby he would show up late for classes and in most instances he would be dozing off. He also had serious challenges meeting due dates for assignments that were mostly poorly written. This also affected his performance.

In the social arena, drugs are known to induce social isolation among users. Participant number 4 pointed out that he became more withdrawn and could not sustain friendships at campus. He also faced challenges with his temper as he quickly got angry at his class mates. Participant number 1 had a different story to tell since he had started taking drugs before he enrolled for university and the fact that he was aware of their dangerous impact on his academic life. He informed us that as far as academic performance was concerned he would not take drugs when assignments were due. He claims he never allowed drugs to dominate him.

Participant 2 told us a story of how his life now centred on drugs. He says:

I became a lone ranger, without friends staying in my room for the better part of each day high on methamphetamine. I foolishly believed that meth would give me the strength to do my school work. I no longer slept. I no longer had a life worth talking about. I felt like was going crazy.

It can therefore be noted that consumption of drugs and alcohol disrupts other parts of everyday life such as work, study and family commitments. Life loses its balance as one ends up focusing on drugs at the expense of other social activities. One participant remembers that he would miss out on activities such as doing sporting activities, going to gigs and others because of drugs. Missing out on these would ultimately lead to emotional pain and difficulties which were 'overcome by taking more drugs'. It is true therefore to say that benefits and drawbacks of drugs and substances are often closely linked. While drugs can help one to cope with loneliness, they end up leading to addiction as what happened in the case of participant 2. As a result of the drugs and the hangover from the alcohol school work was disrupted heavily. It can therefore be noted that drugs are unsettling in the lives of students.

Battling the addiction

This study discovered that for people not taking drugs, it is often easier to wonder why others are on them. They often think that one has to just wake up and walk away from drugs. Addiction has to be fought and its cycle broken. From our research, our informants clearly show that it is not an easy task to fight addiction. Participant number 4 clearly stated that the journey to sobriety is not easy. As someone who experienced anger and loss of temper, without friends, it became difficult for him to demarcate between what was acceptable and not. Sometimes he would end up in fights. He remembers one incident in which he fought with someone and were almost arrested for public violence. Participant 4 said:

The more I got angry the more I got isolated, no one wanted to associate with me. I became scruffy as I no longer cared what people thought about me and everybody was shying away from me. As a result, I felt the urge to continue, school no longer mattered to me. I was just programmed to fight, didn't care if it was my lecturer or fellow student. I almost got arrested for engaging in a public fight.

The participant noted that it was this flirting with the jail that caused him to reconsider his life and the route it was taking.

Participant number 1's journey to recovery owes much to him being open and accepting that he needed help. Although he claims that he did not take too much drugs, he realised that he was now in a cycle where he needed them on a daily basis, even in small quantities. When his family discovered that he was on drugs, and although his parents are known for their strictness, their threats were not sufficient to make him stop. He says it took the efforts of his girlfriend to then acknowledge that he needed help. His parents had to book him for a rehabilitation program in Masvingo town. He explained what he went through at the rehabilitation:

At the rehabilitation I had to detox by drinking water and some pills. I was also instructed to do some gym exercises, running and climbing the mountain. I was supposed to sweat so that my system could be cleaned. It was not an easy task but I had to do it if I wanted to be sober again. So I soldiered on.

Participant 1 therefore states that it was through a proper support system that he was able to gain his sobriety. He maintains that the relationship he kept with girlfriend was very instrumental in him not getting haywire.

Participant 3 also pointed out that he had 'a really hard time getting my recovery back' and that long term sobriety is not for the faint hearted'. One has to constantly fight the temptation to take drugs again. Going back to school represented a big challenge to participant 3 as he was afraid of the stigma associated drug use. He felt that even though he had successfully beat his dependence on drugs, fellow students and even lecturers seemed to have not forgotten his previous escapades.

Aftermath of Drugs

The whole essence of this study was to show that one can triumph over drug related dependence. It aims at establishing the means used by other users and the challenges they faced until they overcame. This will help in designing better strategies to fight substance use at tertiary institutions in Masvingo and can provide a model that can be used in Zimbabwe as a whole.

From our discussion with our participants, it was established beyond doubt that no one wants to be an addict. When we see someone who has overcome drugs, we have to know that the journey to sobriety is a meandered road, full of detours but will ultimately lead to the promised-land. However, there is always a fine line between a once addict and an addict. All participants highlighted that they continued to suffer from societal stigma because people say 'once a junkie, always a junkie'. Although Participant 1 understands these judgmental sentiments coming from people, he wishes that they see him differently and he points to the efforts he is putting in keeping away fellow youths from drugs.

All the five participants are back in class but a dark shadow almost always looms beyond the horizon. They all fear that they may relapse and start all over again. Participant 5 said:

I am so scared of withdrawal...I know that the solution to my drug problem is the same thing that hurt me. The drug is both the cure and the cause.

From our interaction with the five participants, we learned a few things. Firstly, that most people know about drugs through learning rather than through experience and as such their treatment of people battling addiction is from a biased perspective. The sentiment by one participant that no one wants to be an addict is very true. Even though they battle addiction, they are still people and as such they deserve the dignity that is due to all human beings. Issues of stigma remain rife and contrary to what many think; they actually harden the resolve to drug takers rather than moderate their behaviour.

Conclusion

This article has deployed the everyday life to understand the story of students in higher institutions and how they deal with the problem of drug and substance use. Using the story of five former drug addicts, the article pursued four themes to unpack their story. The first theme was a discussion of how these students encountered drugs in their lives. One participant had prior experience with drugs before enrolling at a tertiary institution while the other four encountered drugs at campus. The overall conclusion was that the students attempted drugs out of curiosity coupled with peer pressure. Theme number two zeroed on the everyday lives of these students under drugs, how they became addicts. The article shows that drugs altered the everyday lives of students. While others became isolated and lost all friends, the majority suffered in their school work. Attendance to class became erratic, deadlines were not being met. Drugs almost ruined the lives of these students. Theme number 3 focused on how these students beat their addiction. It showed that it was not an easy task for the students, but with the support of friends and family, they managed to move towards sobriety. The presence of support facilities and rehabilitation was also critical for the students to becoming clean again to such an extent that they returned to class to further their studies. The final theme discussed on students' lives after beating the drugs. Although fear of relapsing lingered on, the students showed that they were progressing steadily in their quest for sobriety. One challenge which was picked was that the students continued to face the challenge of stigma and labelling. Fellow students, and to a lesser extent lecturers continued to assign them derogatory labels such as junkies.

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CHAPTER 8: Unveiling the Undercurrents: Drug and Substance Abuse Among Students in Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions

Chipfupi Lydia and Connick Lorraine

Introduction

Drug and substance abuse among students in Masvingo Higher Tertiary Education Institutions (HTEIs) is a growing concern, with potential consequences on their academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being. These institutions where students are supposed to be nurtured, are now grappling with the devastating consequences of drug and substance abuse. Students in higher education institutions face numerous challenges that make them resort to substance and drug abuse. These challenges include academic pressure, social isolation and newfound independence. This dangerous trend endangers individual students' health, wellbeing, academic potential as well as compromising the safety of the campus environment, productivity and reputation of institutions.

This paper presents a study on the prevalence, causes, consequences, and sustainable interventions related to drug and substance abuse among students in Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions (HTEIs) in Masvingo province. The research probes into the complex nature of drug and substance abuse and its effect on the academic, social, and psychological well-being of students within the HTE setting. Through a rigorous methodology, the research seeks to distinguish the underlying factors contributing to drug and substance abuse, such as peer pressure, stress, accessibility, and individual vulnerabilities. Furthermore, it aims to identify the specific drugs and substances most commonly abused within the HTE community, shedding light on emerging trends and patterns. The consequences of drug and substance abuse are also examined, encompassing academic performance, mental health, interpersonal relationships, and future career prospects. By examining these causes and consequences, the research endeavors to underscore the urgent need for proactive interventions and support systems within HTEIs, as well as the broader community. In exploring potential interventions, the study assesses existing prevention and treatment programs, evaluating their effectiveness and relevance in the context of HTEIs so as to foster a safe, supportive, and conducive environment for the holistic development of students within the HTE landscape. Additionally, it investigates the role of institutional policies, peer support networks, counseling services, and educational initiatives in addressing and alleviating drug and substance abuse.

Background

Drug and substance use has become a public health concern in many countries across the globe (Government of Zimbabwe, 2019). Students in higher and tertiary institutions in different countries in the SADC region were reported in a number of researches to be users of drugs and substances of which are harmful and put them at risks (WHO, 2019). The problem is nestled within the existence of drug and substance abuse in HTEIs despite the efforts made to tackle it, the problem seems difficult to eradicate due to underlying causes that need to be unveiled and addressed.

A research carried out in Cameroon by Metuge et al (2022) on the prevalence and factors associated with substance use among students in tertiary institutions revealed that the use of substances by youths in tertiary institutions is increasing rapidly worldwide. The prevalence of substance abuse in Cameroon was at 89% in 2022. The rise of substance abuse was associated with negative impact on students' health as well as their professional and social life (Metuge et al., 2022). In Cameroon institutions, the main reasons for substance use were to relieve stress (91.7%),

quarrel or arguments (18%) and loss of money (16.7%). Peers were also contributing to substance use at 66.9%. Westernization of African countries, rapid change in socio-economic and cultural aspects, and transition to independence and freedom from direct supervision of their families were also considered to be causes of substance abuse. Most users of substances were male students at 95%. This shows that HTEIs students in Cameroon were practicing drug and substance use. Mbanga et al. (2017) indicate that substances and drugs such as cannabis, tramadol, cocaine, heroin, ecstasy and crystal were commonly used by the students, with tobacco and alcohol as the gateway to these hard drugs.

In Zambia, students from HTEIs were also into drug and substance abuse. According to the Ministry of Health (2021), Zambian students used cannabis and codeine among others and were fully aware of the consequences such as low academic performance, violence, theft, risks of sexually transmitted infections and other social problems. Kabbash et al. (2022) point out that abuse of drugs and substances among young people is a global challenge that has effects that are detrimental to the security of nations and individual health and livelihood. Drug and substance abuse can affect the way individuals taste, smell, feel behave and see things (Ministry of Health, 2021). Thus, drug and substance abuse compromise students' health and wellbeing.

Mwanza and Mwale (2023) recommend effective strategies such as an increase in student-led awareness campaigns, security surveillance on campus and collaboration with government drug enforcement agencies. This also involves including students in planning the programs to deal with drug abuse. Thus, peer educators may be of help in preventing or minimizing drug and substance abuse. However, in some cases the so-called peer educators may be substance users which therefore will make the situation worse. Masiye and Ndhlovu (2016) argued that more Zambian policies were more punitive than educative in nature. According to Glistic (2010) the punitive policies are not seen to support behavior change and most students avoided coming out because of fear of the sanctions (Mwanza and Mwale, 2023). HTEIs students should therefore be empowered to report drug and substance abuse. Orientation programs can also be used as platforms to campaign against drug and substances abuse. Mwanza and Mwale (2023) posit that continuous abuse of drugs among students may be a result of their level of awareness, thus calls for the need of awareness programs.

In South African Universities, it was noted that the majority of students start substance and drug use after entering the universities and the rate of substance and drug use in these universities was at 62.7% (Blows and Isaacs, 2022). These students were mainly using cannabis, alcohol and ecstasy. In Egypt the case was the same, with high rates of substance and drug abuse among HTEIs students (Kabbash et al., 2022). This shows that drug and substance abuse is now a global case which needs collaborative efforts to eradicate or prevent. Blows and Isaacs (2022) recommend for the South African universities to embark on the training of peer counsellors to reach more students with awareness campaigns on anti-substance abuse messages, enforcement of clear institutional policies, increased security in campuses and service delivery that reaches the student on adjustment to university life including academic stress management.

In Zimbabwe, institutions in Masvingo highlighted, a growing concern on drug and substance abuse among, with potential consequences for academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being. Drug and substance abuse in Zimbabwe is a growing threat to the nation's health,

security, economy and social stability (Zimbabwe Multisectoral Drug and Substance Abuse Plan, 2024-2030). There is need for HTEIs to work hard towards a safer, healthier and more productive academic environment. This could be done through; drug supply reduction, community engagement, policy and legal enforcement and media and communication (Zimbabwe Multi-Sectoral Drug and Substance Abuse Plan, 2024-2030). In terms of policy Zimbabwe has done much in trying to prevent and control drug and substance abuse. Zimbabwe has a National Drug Policy (2019-2024) which aims to prevent and control drug abuse, promoting healthy lifestyles. Its key components included prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, law enforcement, harm reduction, research and monitoring, funding and resource mobilization and implementation and coordination (Government of Zimbabwe 2019). MHTESTD (2020) calls for regular surveys and research on drug abuse hence the need for this research. The research focused on two institutions in Masvingo, Institution A and Institution B. The study focused on the prevalence of drug and substance abuse, common causes, common drugs used and sustainable intervention strategies.

Research Methodology

The paper uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect data on drug and substance abuse among students from HTEIs. Thus, the study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining survey questionnaires and interviews to gather data from a diverse sample of students from two institutions in Masvingo Province, Institution A and Institution B. The two institutions were conveniently selected; they were the ones close to where the researchers reside. A survey question paper was administered to 300 young adults aged 18-35 years. 150 students were selected from each institution. Interviews were employed to 20 individuals (16 students and 4 staff members from the institutions). Participants were purposively selected on the criteria that they were enrolled at any of the two institutions in question by the time of the study. Since there were so many students from the two institutions, the researchers used convenience sampling to come up with interviewees and questionnaire respondents. Convenience sampling is quick, inexpensive and convenient to use (Pandey and Pandey, 2015) thus the researchers used participants that were available at that moment. The participants were selected based on their willingness to participate in the study and they were assured confidentiality. So, names of participants were not disclosed. Those selected for the interviews were given questionnaires to distribute to their fellow students. All the 300 questionnaires were returned and thematically analysed. Data collected was presented using tables, percentages and narratives.

Literature review

Drug and substance abuse is a pervasive issue affecting individuals, families and communities worldwide. Drug and substance abuse (DSA) is a threat to public health, security economic growth and social stability internationally and regionally including in Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe Multisectoral Drug and Substance Abuse Plan, 2024-2030). In Africa, drug and substance abuse is a concerning upward trajectory, with a predicted 40% increase, marking the highest rise worldwide (Zimbabwe Multisectoral Drug and Substance Abuse Plan, 2024-2030). Zimbabwe is also experiencing DSA which has implications on health, social and economic development, peace and security (Government of Zimbabwe, 2019). This reflects a serious problem in all sectors especially the youths. According to WHO (2019) more than 20% of students in HTE institutions use substances and drugs. 20-30% of students in Zimbabwe's HTE institutions engage in substance abuse (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019). According to Mbanga et al (2017) some university

students are into drug and substance use. He added that drug and substance abusers included male gender and others living off campus.

The literature reveals a complex interplay of biological psychological, social and ecological factors contributing to substance abuse in HTEIs. Research has indicated that biological factors such as genetic dispositions, psychological factors including poor mechanism and stress management and social factors such as peer influences and social networks major factors contributing to drug and substance abuse (Kendler et al, 2012; Merikangas et al, 2010). Nyoni and Mugweni (2020) state that stress, peer pressure and curiosity lead to drug abuse. Similarly, Moyo and Mwanga (2019) point out to peer pressure, social settings as factors contributing to drug and substance abuse in tertiary institutions. Lack of awareness and education, mental health issues, academic underperformance and social relationships may also lead to drug and substance abuse (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2019). According to WHO (2019) living away from family, peer pressure and academic stress are risk factors contributing to drug and substance abuse in Higher and Tertiary institutions. Wagenaar et al (2010) states that availability and accessibility of substances, policy and legislation also contribute to substance abuse. This suggests that policies and measures to control and prevent substance and drug abuse should be taken seriously and enforced to have sustainable interventions.

Drug and substance abuse has numerous effects that if ignored may destroy lives of many students from HTEIs. Mbanga et al (2017) indicated that drug and substance abuse may result in mental health problems, addiction, social relational problems and legal and economic issues. Drug and substance abuse among students may lead to difficulty concentrating, poor time management, missed classes, decreased motivation, poor grades (Nyoni and Mugweni, 2020). According to WHO (2019) academic underperformance, physical and mental health problems, social relationships issues, increased risk of sexual harassment and assault and legal problems in HTEIs are mainly a result of drug and substance abuse. This calls for comprehensive approaches to prevent and tackle these issues.

The measures to prevent and tackle drug and substance abuse include policy changes and community-based initiatives (Wagenaar, 2010). In an effort to address drug and substance abuse among students in HTE institutions, the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education Science and Technology Development (MHTESD) (2020) calls for the prevention of drug abuse through drug education, peer support groups counselling services. The Zimbabwe National Drug Policy also outlines the need for community engagement in an effort to prevent and address drug and substance abuse (Government of Zimbabwe, 2019). This means that HTE institutions should work with communities in drug awareness campaigns. Statistics show that 60% of HTE institutions had a substance policy, 40% provided counselling and 20 % offered peer support as institutional responses to the problem of drug and substance abuse (WHO, 2019). WHO further recommended for the integration of substance abuse prevention into the curricula, increased access to counselling and support services, strengthening of policies and enforcement and encourage students' involvement and leadership in substance and drug prevention programmes. This calls for the remaining HTE institutions, which do not have drug abuse policies to adhere to the national drug plan strategies for addressing drug and substance abuse in the country. By doing so most communities and families as well as individual students will receive support as Zimbabwe works towards Vision 2030 (Zimbabwe Multi-Sectoral Drug and Substance Abuse Plan, 2024-2030)

There is also need to occupy students with safe activities that enable them to cope with campus stress and pressure (Wagner et al, 2015). This therefore calls for the need to address underlying causes of drug and substance abuse such as stress.

Discussion of findings

Prevalence of drug and substance abuse on campuses.

The study established that some students do abuse drugs and substances. 90% of the participants from interviews and questionnaires indicated that drugs and substances are being abused by some students in and around the campus. Table 1 below shows responses on drug and substance abuse among the two Higher and Tertiary Education institutions in question. 270 students indicated that some students abuse drugs and substances at their institutions and 30 students were not sure if students abuse drugs and substances or not.

Table 1: Drugs and substance abuse.

Category	Percentage
Students abuse drugs and substances	90
Not sure if students abuse drugs and substances or not	10

N= 300

Below are some of the responses from the interview participants:

- *“Drugs are becoming a problem since some of the students are abusing them”.*
- *“Most students who are into sports abuse drugs and substances, believing that they get energy from them”.*
- *“Occurrence of drug and substance abuse among students in HTEIs is increasing as each day passes by”.*
- *“Yes students use drugs, some use these drugs at regular or on daily basis but others may take drugs after heartbreaks or when they fail their studies.*
- *“Students at this institution use drugs and substances in the morning, afternoon and evening. These drugs and substances were used or taken through smoking, drinking or eating.*

Findings from the questionnaires indicated that drug and substance abuse was common in HTEIs, with male students being the most drug abusers. These findings showed that drug and substance abuse were becoming a problem on campus though a small population was said to be involved – from the respondents, about 20-30 percent of the students were into drug use. According to the respondents, female drug abusers were those involved in sports or prostitution. These findings are similar to those established by Government of Zimbabwe (2019) that substance abuse was a growing concern in HTEIs. The findings also match literature from Mwanza and Mwale (2023) that university students abuse drugs, especially the youths

Types of drugs and substances in use by students from HTEIs

From the findings, the commonly used drugs on campuses were alcohol, cannabis (mbanje/marijuana), crystal methane (*mutoriro/tumbwa/dombo*), tobacco and other spirits such as chateau (see the responses given below).

- “Students use drugs such as, *mutoriro, mbanje, alcohol (mukozoda), tobacco and other beers*”.
- “Students use marijuana or mbanje, *mutoriro and alcohol for example mukozoda, mutoriro, dombo, guka and tumbwa*”.
- “Drugs and substances such as *mukozoda, mbanje, mutoriro and kambucha* are used by both male and female students on campus. Some even take tablets to boost their moral and confidence especially when one is asked to present in a lecture”

Responses from questionnaires revealed that mbanje (cannabis), mutoriro, alcohol, spirits and tobacco are commonly abused drugs and substances by students from HTEIs. Table 2 below shows responses on drugs and substances abuse on campuses.

Table 2: Percentage of people using the different types of drugs

Substance	Percentages
Mutoriro	33%
Mbanje/cannabis/marijuana	30%
Alcohol (mukozoda, dombo, tumbwa, guka)	15%
Spirits	12%
Tobacco	10%

These results are in line with findings of a similar research done by Nyoni and Mugweni (2020) in Zimbabwe that commonly abused drug was cannabis with 34, 6%. Moyo and Mangwa (2019) also indicate that cannabis, alcohol, tobacco and cough mixtures were abused by students. According to World Health Organization (2019) alcohol, cannabis and tobacco are commonly used substances in Higher and Tertiary Education Institution.

Factors leading to drug and substance use among students from Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions

Findings from questionnaires indicated that factors leading to drug and substance abuse were peer pressure, assignments stress, weekend leisure, and sporting and social gatherings. These findings indicated that students should not be given unwarranted freedom during sports though they are adults and strict rules and supervisions should be adhered to so that social and sporting gatherings will be safe for them. Beliefs that drugs or substances work as energizers for those in sporting activities, independence, campus environment as well as poor background were also noted as factors of drug and substance abuse. Students from poor backgrounds were said to easily be trapped by peer pressure in exchange for goodies or other academic requirements. Some students and staff indicated that students are not inspected as they get into the campus or even in their hostels so they can bring drugs without being noticed. In addition to responses from the interviews, students who have social problems do not open up due to shyness and cultural beliefs of not to expose ones secrets (*kusafumura hapwa*), resulting in them using drugs and substances to temporarily forget their problems. Thus, there is need to empower students to open up if they have problems or

challenges which need assistance. Below are responses from some of interview participants:

- *“Our campus environment contributes to the use of drug and substances. Students can access alcohol, tobacco and hot stuff from a tuck-shop in the campus and they can drink till 10pm. These students come to the halls of residence completely drunk and irritating. Some students drink alcohol during lunch time. Some even bring tobacco into the hostels and they are not caught.*
- *“We drink alcohol after school work to easy pressure and have fun”.*
- *“When I am away from home, I should feel free to decide what I want to eat and drink as long it brings happiness into my life. Life should be enjoyed before marriage so it’s good always hang up with friends, taking one or two”. Some students use drugs due to pressure and stress, heartbreak or love affairs.*
- *Peer pressure and poverty is one of the causes of drug and substance abuse”,*

Findings indicated that some female students, who were used to be under parent control, were overwhelmed by being free from home and ended up abusing drugs and substances. This resulted in some of them having sexual transmitted illnesses. Some students were said to use sexual boosting tablets to produce more sexual desire and energy. Poverty, which can lower student esteem and confidence, was cited as being another driver for drug and substance abuse. These findings are in line with those found by Moyo and Mangwa (2019) that weekend use, social settings and peer influence are the drivers of substance and drug abuse. This means that students were not busy during the weekends and ended up using drugs as a way to entertain themselves. Metuge et al (2022) reported that transition to independence and freedom from direct supervision of families, self-decision making, staying with strangers, forming new social groups and friends and intense academic pressure were some of the causes of drug and substance abuse by students in institutions. According to WHO (2019) living away from family, peer pressure and academic stress are risk factors contributing to drug and substance abuse in Higher and Tertiary institutions. Wagenaar et al (2010) state that availability and accessibility of substances also lead to drug abuse. Thus, behavioral acts and consequences among students from HTEIs such as drug and substance abuse are mostly a result of their hidden undercurrents which need to be unveiled to find interventions to tackle them. Academic pressure, peer influence and first-time independence are some of the most causes of drug and substance abuse in HTEIs and there is need for measures to curb these factors besides drug and substance abuse educations. These may include having money generating projects for students which they do after academic work or lectures to occupy and generate funds for them.

Consequences of drug and substance abuse.

Drug and substance abuse has been said to have long lasting effects on student lives and the community at large. Findings from this research showed that students who abuse drugs and substances ended up failing academic examinations including teaching practice and internship. Some student drop outs were also said to have been caused by drug and substance abuse. Some drug and substance abusers end up having mental health problems, leading to depression and suicide. A student from one of the interview respondents said:

“Drug and substance abuse is causing school students to drop out for example, some students during teaching practice, dropout due to drug abuse and some may fail to attend to school work since they will be drunk most of the time”.

Another respondent also said:

“Drug abuse causes mental illnesses, depression and college dropouts. They may lead to violence with other students on campus, disturbing their peace”. Some of the students engage in unprotected sexual activities due to drunkenness since some of the drugs used are too strong.

These results are an indication that drug and substance abuse leads to numerous problems such as violence, crimes, poor social relationships, suicide attempts, risk of STIs and unplanned pregnancies. Addressing the issue of drug and substance abuse may help in solving global problems mentioned above since it is said to be the root cause. The findings are similar to those from a research by Metuge et al (2022) which established that the rise in substance use is associated with a negative impact on students' health as well as their professional and social life. In addition, they said that substance use leads to poor grades, violent acts, poor sleep quality, and robbery, engagement in unprotected sex and dependence to drugs. Mbanga et al (2018) found out that drug and substance use causes financial problems, criminal behaviour, depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. Ndangana (2022) found out that 60% of those with mental illness are drug users. WHO (2019) also indicated that the consequences of substance use are: academic underperformance, physical and mental health problems social relationship issues and risk of sexual harassment and assault. Concurring with the above, Nyoni and Mugweni (2020) state that poor grades (51%) resulted from drug abuse and Blows and Isaacs (2022) found out from a study in South Africa that substance abuse among university students resulted in increased risks of HIV and AIDS and tuberculosis, mental illness, crime, violence, dropouts and high level of poverty. This also means that drug and substance abuse draws back the efforts to full fill the vision of Zimbabwe being a middle economy country by 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 3 and 4. This means that drug and substance abuse is a serious threat to the nation's economy and it needs sustainable interventions.

Prevention and control of drug and substance abuse in HTEIs

Responses from Institution B indicated that there were strategies put in place to address drug and substance abuse. Responses from both institutions indicated the availability of drug and substance abuse policies at their institutions. Students also stated that there were counselling services provided for those struggling with drug and substance abuse and those who have social problems. However, at Institution B there were employed personnel specifically for counselling services while at Institution A there were no independent counsellors but there were lecturers who teach Health Life Skills to students as well as providing counselling services. Responses indicated that only a few students visit these counsellors. Most students from Institution B were not introduced to the counsellors due to the setup of the institution. Students from Institution A indicated that they were not comfortable to share their issues with lectures they come in contact with during lectures and as a result they do not seek these counselling services. Responses from staff members indicated that very few students came for counselling services and a number of students who fail was a result of drug and substance abuse. Staff members argued that students were not comfortable sharing their problems with counsellors who were also lectures in academic areas. This means that poor counselling services result in students resorting to drug and substance use. HTEIs, therefore, should employ independent counsellors.

There is also need to introduce the counsellors to all students not only to those who come with their issues especially in the institutions where there are independent counsellors. Moyu and

Mangwa (2019) found out, from their research, that only 12.3% of the students struggling from substance abuse were asking for counselling services most of them were seeking help from friends. Counselling is one of the strategies for the prevention and control of drug and substance abuse (Zimbabwe Multi-Sectoral Drug and Substance Abuse Plan, 2024-2030). Mwanza (2021) in Mwanza and Mwale (2023) concurs that counselling services help students on how to handle stress and other social problems. This was also supported by Nyoni and Mugweni (2020) who state that students suggested for counselling services as interventions for drug abuse. Drug and substance abuse awareness was also done through Health and Life Skills, partnership with organisations and sectors such as SAYWHAT and Zimbabwe Republic Police as well as during Scripture Union programmes done on campus. These issues, on drug and substance abuse, were also addressed during orientation programmes. One of the respondents said:

“The institution is implementing strategies such as camp aware of drug abuse- users through introduction of disciplines such as Health and Life Skills and inviting organisations such as SAYWHAT for educating learners. Also, through scripture union (focus) programme on campus, however some students still use the drugs even if they know the consequences”.

Another responded said: *drug and substance abuse education is being provided at school but notorious students still use them.*

Findings from Institution A indicated that drug and substance abuse education was being given to students but not regularly. Students from the two institutions indicated that the institutions were doing much on educating them on the issue of drugs but there was lack of follow-ups and monitoring since they were regarded as adults. In addition to awareness campaigns, there was need to distribute fliers and pamphlets on drug and substance abuse issues as well as having posters and wall hangings in public places around the campuses. In one of the institutions there were having sporting activities and wellness programmes as indicated by some of the participants. However, in most cases, students were not fully supervised at night when going out for different activities such as sports, music and dances or even after lectures so they will have chances to use the drugs and substances. This means that social activities which were meant for students to release academic pressure were becoming dangerous environments where they access drugs and substances. Some of the respondents indicated the need for strict disciplinary measures to be included in drug and substance abuse policies. Nyoni and Mugweni (2020) established, from their research on effects of drug abuse, that there was need for strict disciplinary measures as one of the interventions to tackle drug abuse. All the same these measures should not only be punitive. Glistic (2010) in Mwanza and Mwale (2023) argued that punitive policies are not seen to support behaviour change and most students avoid coming out because of the fear of the sanctions.

However, not all students were involved in these social activities such as sports or debates to ease academic pressure or stress. This calls for inclusive activities in which most if not all students participate. HTEIs may introduce projects to occupy students during weekend have well organised and monitored sporting activities, since sporting gatherings were said to be promoting drug and substance abuse, during weekends were different organisations are invited, even offering prizes and reduce time they will be idle as well as releasing stress. Thus, creating a safe environment for students. For students with financial difficulties, scholarships should be introduced. Although one of the institutions had a work for fees programme, it was catering for a limited number of students. Staff members responded:

- *Drug and substance abuse education is being offered but there is also need to address the causes of drug abuse and address them. There is also need to introduce support groups to support individuals or groups struggling with drug abuse*
- *Use of drug testing at campus to avoid increase of drug and substance use among students is necessary as well as providing mental services to address underlying issues. It's no use to keep on giving education without trying to help the students to solve the problems leading to them abusing drugs.*
- *A female student said: "drug abuse will not end due to education only but there is need for all members at campus and students to work together to create a safer and healthier environment, if it means searching everyone who enters the gates it's okay or even to regularly search the hostels because these students disturb us a lot and those who smoke should not be allowed to do so in hostels or on campus. Students should not be allowed where beer, tobacco or alcohol beverages are sold".*

The results are similar to what was established by Mbanga et al (2018) that comprehensive drug education programmes, confidential counselling and support groups, addressing underlying issues such as stress, anxiety, depression, family and community involvement, sports, recreational, wellness programmes, screening and policy enforcement, enforcement of disciplinary actions for drug-related offences as well as regular surveys and research studies were some of the interventions to address drug and substance use among students in Zimbabwe. From the results there was also an indication from staff members that identifying factors contributing to use and misuse of substances and drugs is of paramount importance in the prevention and controlling of drug and substance abuse by students from HTEIs. Thus, the need to unveil underlying currencies.

Conclusion

Drug and substance abuse has been seed to be cause of concern in Higher and Tertiary institutions in Masvingo. The findings indicated that cannabis or marijuana also known as mbanje were the commonly abused drugs and substances. Factors that contributed to drug and substance abuse in HTEIs included stress, peer and academic pressure, idleness during weekends, heartbreaks, social problems and poverty. Some students argued that drugs and substances are affecting their academic performance, mental health, social life, contributed to poverty, students drop outs, depression, suicide and risks of sexual diseases and unplanned pregnancies. Drug awareness education through campaigns and distribution of fliers, pamphlets and posters, offering scholarships to those living in poverty, regular campus and halls of residence inspections, drug and substance testing among students and avoiding selling alcohol to students on campuses were strategies suggested to address the drug and substance abuse issues. Peer or support groups were also seen as an effective method to prevent and control drug and substance abuse. Enforcement of available policies was also seen as key to a safe and healthier, drug and substance free, environment for students which in turn enable the achievement of sustainable development goals thereby fulfilling Vision 2030 of Zimbabwe becoming a middle economy country.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

- Improving drug and substance abuse education by increasing on campus awareness campaigns and workshops
- Distributing fliers, pamphlets and posters on drug and substance issues

- Infusing drug and substance abuse issues in other areas and not only in Health and Life Skills
- Improving counselling services by employing professional counsellors not counsellor-lecturers
- Introducing inclusive activities to occupy students during weekends or leisure time
- Having student led projects to generate funds and occupy them
- Formulating and training support groups and peer educators to assist the vulnerable and those struggling with drug and substance abuse effects
- Empowering students to report drug and substance abuse acts
- Enforcing institutional, ministry and national drug policies
- Monitoring sporting and social gatherings to avoid drug and substance abuse by students during and after the activities thus tightening security
- Engaging local communities in drug and substance abuse control initiatives
- Students from HTEIs to engage in media drug and substance abuse awareness campaigns. For example, on local radio stations or television or other social media platforms

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CHAPTER 9: Development of an AI-powered Chatbot to Address Substance Abuse Among University Students Akim Munthali and Kumbirai Makaruke

Introduction

University students often face significant mental health challenges, including substance abuse issues, which can negatively impact their academic performance and disrupt their cognitive and emotional development (Paul et al., 2024; Pedrelli et al., 2015). The prevalence of these issues among the student population has become a growing concern for higher education institutions worldwide. To address this challenge, universities are increasingly recognizing their crucial role in providing accessible and tailored support services to students (Mekni et al., 2020).

One promising approach to enhance student support is the implementation of artificial intelligence (AI) powered chatbots. Chatbots are computer programs designed to simulate human speech through text or voice interactions (Brush & Scardina, 2021). Similarly, Labadze et al., (2023) define AI-powered chatbots as virtual assistants designed to mimic human conversation using text or voice interaction, providing information in a conversational manner. These virtual assistants, accessible through popular messaging platforms or websites, offer a novel way to interface with university students and address substance abuse concerns (Studente et al., 2020). Compared to traditional support services, chatbots provide instant and discreet support available 24/7, thereby lowering the barriers to seeking help and improving student engagement (Ellis, 2019; Mekni et al., 2020). This paper explores the potential of AI-powered chatbots in addressing substance abuse issues among university students.

Theoretical Framework

The Technology Adoption Model (TAM) served as the theoretical framework for this study, guiding the investigation of factors influencing the adoption of a chatbot for substance abuse prevention among university students. The TAM was developed by Davis (1989) and posits the view that two primary factors drive an individual's decision to use a technology: Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU).

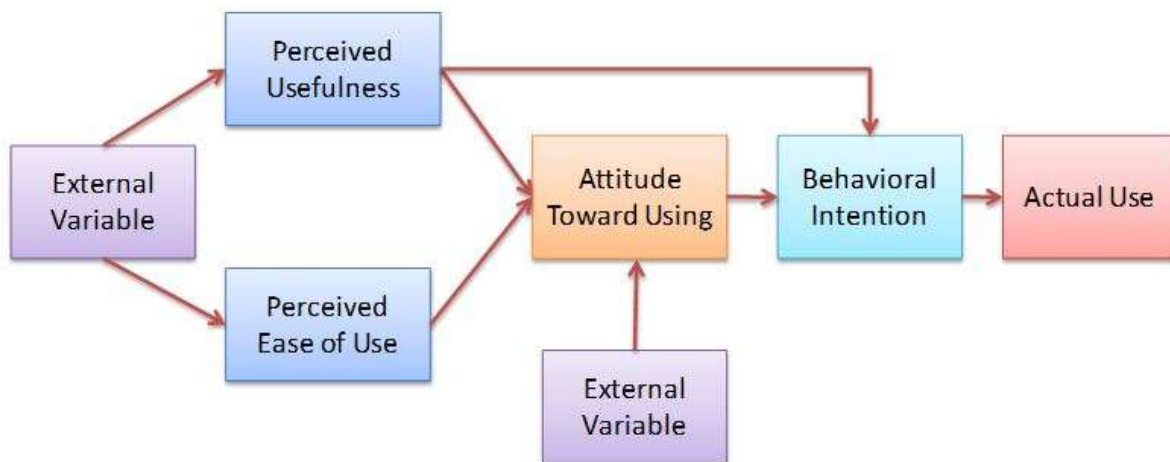


Figure 1: Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) for mobile services (Adapted from Phan & Daim, 2011)

Perceived Usefulness is the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance their job performance while Perceived Ease of Use measures the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort (Davis, 1989). As illustrated in Figure 1, these factors influence the user's Attitude Toward Using (ATU) the technology, which in turn affects their Behavioural Intention to Use (BIU), ultimately leading to actual system use (Phan & Daim, 2011; Koul & Eydgahi, 2017).

In the present context, PU refers to students' belief that the chatbot would provide information that would enhance their ability to make informed decisions about substance abuse and seek appropriate help. It also looks at the effectiveness of the chatbot in providing accurate, reliable, relevant and timely information. PEOU reflects students' belief that using the chatbot would be effortless and straightforward via a welcoming and intuitive user interface. A user-friendly interface, accessible across multiple platforms such as the Web and mobile devices, and quick response times are also essential to ensure a positive user experience.

These factors collectively influence the user's Attitude Toward Using (ATU) the technology. A positive attitude, in turn, leads to a Behavioural Intention to Use (BIU) the chatbot regularly (Koul & Eydgahi, 2017). Positive experiences with the chatbot, such as receiving helpful information and ease of use, can then lead to a favourable attitude towards using it. If students find the chatbot useful and easy to use, they will be more likely to intend to use it regularly.

Literature Review

Substance abuse among university students remains a significant public health concern (Pedrelli et al., 2015). The transition to university life often exposes students to new environments and pressures that can contribute to the initiation or escalation of substance use. Factors such as academic stress, peer influence, and newfound independence can exacerbate the risk of developing substance abuse problems (Welsh et al., 2019). The consequences of substance abuse extend beyond individual health, affecting academic performance, social relationships, and future career prospects.

Universities have long recognized the need to provide support services for students struggling with substance abuse. These typically include student affairs sections, peer support groups, and educational programs. However, traditional services often face limitations such as limited availability, stigma associated with seeking help, and lack of immediate access during critical moments (Earnshaw, 2020). These barriers can deter students from seeking the help they need, highlighting the need for more accessible and innovative support solutions.

AI and chatbot technologies have gained significant traction across various sectors, including education. In higher education, chatbots have been employed for a range of purposes, from answering administrative queries to providing academic support (Winkler & Söllner, 2018). Chatbots offer several significant advantages in the context of student support, particularly for addressing substance abuse issues. Firstly, their accessibility is a key benefit, as they are available

24/7, providing instant support when students need it most (Labadze et al., 2023). This feature overcomes the limitations imposed by traditional office hours, ensuring help is always at hand (Ellis, 2019).

Lee et al. (2023) found out that the perceived anonymity of interacting with a chatbot can significantly reduce the stigma associated with seeking assistance for substance abuse problems. This anonymity encourages students to reach out for help without fear of judgment. Additionally, Følstad et al. (2021) state that chatbots are scalable and can manage multiple conversations simultaneously, which allows them to potentially reach a larger number of students compared to conventional one-on-one services.

According to Assayed et al., (2024), a crucial advantage of chatbots is that they offer personalization, as they enable responses and recommendations to be tailored according to the individual needs and preferences of each student. This customized approach enhances the relevance and effectiveness of the support provided. Finally, the data collected from interactions with chatbots can yield valuable insights into student needs and behaviours, which can inform the development of more effective support strategies (Ait Baha et al., 2024).

The potential of chatbots is further enhanced when integrated with existing university systems. This integration can streamline the delivery of information and resources, ensuring that students receive timely and relevant assistance (Studente et al., 2020). For example, chatbots can be connected to student information systems to provide personalized academic advice or to campus health services to facilitate appointments with counsellors.

By utilizing popular messaging applications such as WhatsApp, universities can meet students where they are most comfortable. The conversational nature of these platforms aligns well with the chatbot interface, creating a familiar and accessible environment for students to seek information and support regarding substance abuse (Chamorro-Atalaya et al., 2023). Research has demonstrated the potential of chatbots in higher education, with students reporting enhanced study engagement, increased connection to their lecturers, and improved access to support services (Studente et al., 2020).

Chatbots, have also emerged as a promising yet underexplored tool in the domain of mental health disorders and substance abuse. Research in this field has been fuelled by the need to explore innovative solutions to provide support and intervention to the increasing prevalence of mental health disorders and substance abuse. A scoping review by Casu et al. (2024) evaluated the effectiveness and feasibility of AI chatbots in treating mental health conditions. The review found that chatbots could improve mental and emotional well-being, address specific conditions such as depression and anxiety, and facilitate behaviour change. Similarly, a systematic review and meta-analysis by Li et al. (2023) demonstrated that AI-based conversational agents significantly reduce symptoms of depression and distress. Chatbots have also been explored as supportive agents for individuals with substance use disorders. Ogilvie et al. (2024) provided an overview of the applied use of chatbots for substance abuse, noting that chatbots hold promise for providing support and intervention.

While chatbots have shown promise in enhancing student engagement and support in higher education, their specific application to addressing substance abuse among university students

remains under-explored, (Ogilvie et al., 2024). The bulk of existing research primarily focuses on the potential of chatbots in general student support, with limited studies dedicated to their role in substance abuse prevention and intervention. Consequently, there is a lack of evidence on the effectiveness, design, and implementation of chatbots tailored to this specific student population. The specific application of chatbots to address substance abuse issues among university students in particular remains an area ready for further exploration and evaluation.

Problem Statement

Substance abuse among university students is a significant public health concern with detrimental impacts on academic performance, mental health, and their overall cognitive and emotional development. Traditional intervention methods often face challenges related to accessibility, stigma, and resource constraints. This study aims to address this issue by developing and exploring the potential of a chatbot as an innovative and accessible tool to support students struggling with substance abuse.

Objectives

1. To develop a chatbot specifically designed to address substance abuse issues among university students,
2. To explore the chatbot's potential to provide information, support, and resources to students struggling with substance abuse.

Research Questions

1. How can a chatbot be effectively designed and developed to address the unique needs of university students struggling with substance abuse?
2. What are the key features and functionalities of a chatbot that can effectively support students in managing substance abuse issues?

Methodology

The development of the chatbot involved several activities including data collection, model selection, fine tuning, and user interface development, and model training.

Data Collection

Data for fine tuning and training the model was collected from various reputable sources including peer-reviewed academic publications on substance abuse, guidelines from the Ministry of Health and Child Care and from various university, educational and college websites. These sources were meticulously verified to ensure the integrity and reliability of the information. The data collection process involved identifying and selecting high-quality sources, verifying the accuracy of the information and organizing the data into a structured format suitable for training the model. The dataset then went through a process of prompt engineering, consisting of carefully crafted prompts and corresponding responses that elicit empathy and conversational abilities in the chatbot. This approach not only facilitates a more human-like interaction but also fosters greater user engagement by making the chatbot feel more relatable and supportive throughout conversations about sensitive topics such as substance abuse, thereby addressing the limitations frequently encountered in traditional chatbot interfaces (Haque & Rubya, 2023; Yan & Alterovitz, 2024).

The dataset covered various aspects of substance abuse, including information about different substances, their street names, effects, risks and symptoms, legal aspects, coping mechanisms, stress management strategies, referral information for professional help, myths and general questions. The resulting dataset was a json? file consisting of 373 question- answer pairs related to substance abuse among university students. The dataset was randomly split into 80% for training, 10% for validation, and 10% for testing.

Model Selection

A Llama-2-7b generative pre-trained (GPT) model was chosen for this project. Developed by Meta, Llama-2-7b is an open-source language model that offers significant flexibility for customization and deployment. This allows researchers and developers to tailor the model to various specific applications (Meta, 2023). Despite its relatively smaller size compared to some larger models, Llama-2-7b's 7 billion parameters enable it to effectively handle complex language understanding and generation tasks (Shah, 2024). This balance of size and performance makes it a practical choice for many applications, including question answering.

Fine tuning and Model Training

Before the training commenced, the model was first fine-tuned using the Adam optimizer with a learning rate of $2e-4$ for 3 epochs and a dataset of substance abuse-related questions and answers. This allowed the chatbot to develop a strong foundational understanding of the substance abuse domain, enabling it to engage in natural conversations and provide relevant responses (Zohuri & Mossavar Rahmani, 2023). The model was trained on Google Colab platform, which provided the necessary free computational power for efficient training. The training process leveraged the parallel processing capabilities of the platform to handle the large-scale data and the complex computations involved (Rakhimov et al., 2023).

The software environment for training the model included Python 3.12, a modern and efficient programming language that offers enhanced performance, new language constructs, and better error handling capabilities, making it a suitable choice for machine learning projects (Trivedi, 2024). PyTorch 2.0, a deep learning framework, was employed to facilitate the fine-tuning and training of the Llama-2-7b model. PyTorch provides a flexible and intuitive interface for building and training neural networks, making it a powerful tool for natural language processing tasks (Ansel et al., 2024). The Transformers library by Hugging Face, a widely used collection of pre-trained models and tools for natural language processing, was also involved in the training process. It provided a streamlined way to load and fine-tune the Llama-2-7b model, as well as access necessary utilities for data pre-processing, tokenization, and evaluation (Singh, 2024). Collectively, these tools facilitated the fine-tuning and training of the Llama-2-7b model, allowing for seamless integration and optimization (Wolf et al., 2020).

Chat Interface Design

The front-end of the chatbot was implemented as a responsive web application using Django. Django is a high-level Python web framework that streamlines the creation of exceptional web applications that prioritizes efficiency and clarity, allowing developers to build high-quality projects faster with less coding (Das, 2024). This allows for seamless access across various devices and platforms. The chatbot interface was developed to ensure accessibility, engagement, and sensitivity to the delicate nature of substance abuse discussions. To create a soothing and

welcoming environment, the interface incorporated a minimalist design with a calming colour scheme informed by psychological research (Layman, 2023). For example, the user interface was intentionally designed to be dominated by a soft green colour, often associated with tranquillity and relaxation (Elliot, 2015). This approach aimed to create a comfortable and non-judgmental space for users to seek help and support.

Ethical considerations

To ensure the safety, privacy, and well-being of prospective users, it was crucial to prioritize ethical considerations when developing the chatbot. The chatbot was designed to maintain user anonymity to encourage open and honest communication without fear of stigma or repercussions. Additionally, the chatbot does not collect any personal information from users. The chatbot interface was designed to be sensitive to content, using non-judgmental language. Links to relevant support services and educational materials were also offered. To avoid bias, the chatbot was trained on diverse and unbiased datasets. This helped to ensure that the chatbot's responses were neutral and did not perpetuate stereotypes. Finally, the chatbot was designed to connect students to relevant helplines, and counselling services, on substance abuse.

System design and architecture

The design and architecture of a chatbot system are critical to its overall functionality and effectiveness in natural language interactions. Key components of the chatbot system developed include a natural language processing unit that facilitates understanding and generation of human language, a knowledge base that stores necessary information and responses, and a user interface that enables seamless interaction between the user and the chatbot, all of which must work together in a cohesive and efficient manner.

Results

To evaluate the developed chatbot, it was tested for accuracy and user interaction via the user interface. This section highlights the findings.

User Interface Evaluation

The chatbot's user interface was designed and implemented using Python's web framework, Django, to ensure a responsive experience. The interface features a minimalist design with a calming colour scheme, based on psychology research, to create a soothing user experience (Figure 2).

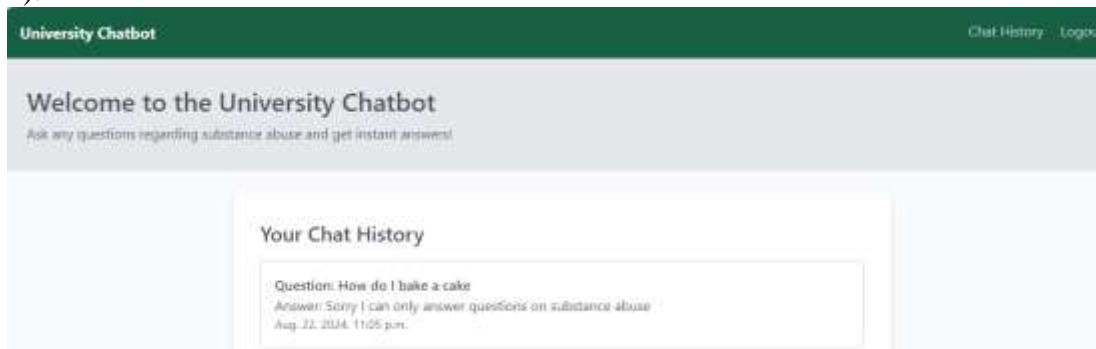


Figure 2: Chatbot user interface with minimalist design and calming colour scheme

User Interaction and Feedback

During the testing phase, users interacted with the chatbot by asking various substance abuse questions. For example, one user asked, “What are the potential effects of inhaling solvents like Genkem?” The chatbot responded as shown in Figure 3 with the response, “Inhaling solvents can lead to brain damage, liver and kidney issues, and sudden death.”

Chat with the Bot

Ask your question...

Send

Your Question:

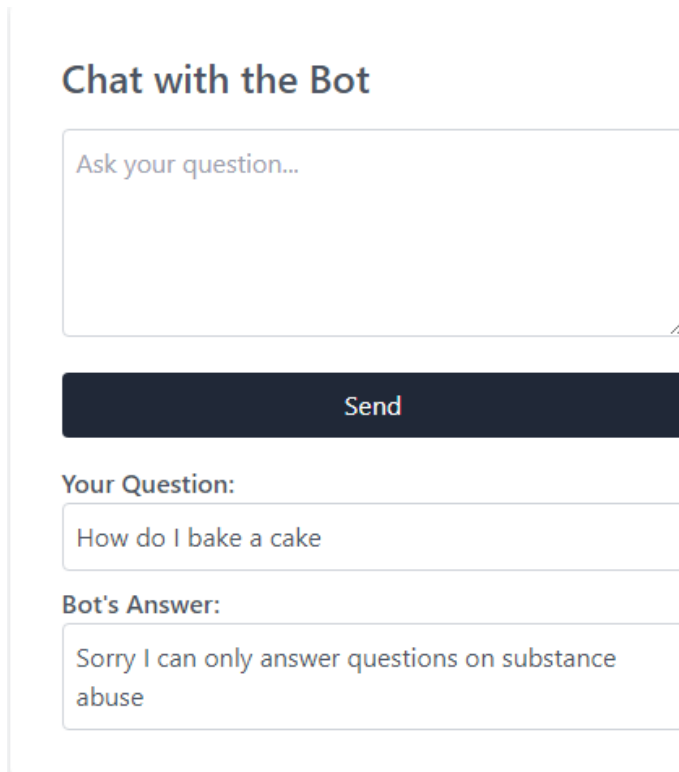
What are the potential effects of inhaling solvents like Genkem?

Bot's Answer:

Inhaling solvents can lead to brain damage, liver and kidney issues, and sudden death.

Figure 3: User interaction and feedback

This demonstrates that the training was successful as the chatbot has acquired the ability to provide specific and accurate information on substance abuse issues. The chatbot was also tested using prompts that are outside the realm of substance abuse. For example, when asked, “How do I bake a cake?” it responded, “Sorry I can only answer questions on substance abuse” as shown in Figure 4. This clearly shows the chatbot’s ability to stay within the guard rails set for it.



Chat with the Bot

Ask your question...

Send

Your Question:

How do I bake a cake

Bot's Answer:

Sorry I can only answer questions on substance abuse

Figure 4: User feedback for a question that is outside the realms of substance abuse

Performance Metrics

The chatbot's performance was also evaluated based on response accuracy. On that front, the chatbot consistently provided accurate information, verified against a knowledge base. The chatbot achieved an accuracy rate of 95% in providing correct responses.

Discussion

Substance abuse poses a significant mental health concern, with millions of university students affected worldwide. The high accuracy rate and positive test results recorded indicate that the chatbot effectively meets its goal of providing accurate and helpful information on substance abuse. The successful implementation of the chatbot also demonstrates the potential of AI-driven chatbots in providing support and information on sensitive health topics. This can be particularly valuable in areas where the end users are digital natives, who spend a lot of time online.

Additionally, the chatbot serves as a valuable tool for bridging the gap between evidence-based substance abuse prevention programs and at-risk populations, thereby enhancing accessibility to essential resources and information in a timely manner. This increased accessibility is particularly important given that traditional methods of seeking help can be daunting for individuals facing stigma and reluctance to seek assistance, which the chatbot successfully mitigates through its conversational approach and user-friendly interface (Chamorro-Atalaya et al., 2023).

Moreover, the chatbot developed can play a significant role in promoting informed decision-making about substance abuse issues, particularly among adolescents who may prefer digital communication over more conventional methods of inquiry (Crutzen et al., 2011). Furthermore,

the ability of the chatbot to engage users in a non-threatening manner encourages open dialogue about sensitive topics related to substance abuse, ultimately fostering a supportive environment that may lead to increased help-seeking behaviour among those who might otherwise remain silent due to fear (Aggarwal, 2023).

The development of a chatbot offers a promising avenue for addressing substance abuse among university students. By providing accessible, confidential, and non-judgmental support, the chatbot can help students to increase their knowledge about substance abuse, develop coping strategies and reduce stigma associated with seeking help. The findings from this project contribute to the growing body of literature on the use of AI in healthcare. The high accuracy rates suggest that AI chatbots can be a reliable source of information and support for individuals dealing with substance abuse.

The integration of chatbots in substance abuse prevention programs can significantly enhance the reach and scalability of these initiatives. Traditional face-to-face interventions often require substantial material and financial resources, including trained personnel and physical infrastructure, which can limit their availability and accessibility. In contrast, chatbots can be deployed widely with minimal additional costs, making it possible to provide support to a larger number of individuals simultaneously cheaply.

The anonymity provided by chatbots can encourage more individuals to seek help. Many people struggling with substance abuse may fear judgment or stigma, which can deter them from reaching out for support. A chatbot offers a private and non-judgmental space where users can freely discuss their concerns and receive guidance (Aggarwal, 2023). This anonymity can help reduce the barriers to seeking help, leading to earlier interventions and potentially better outcomes for individuals at risk.

The use of chatbots also allows for the collection of valuable data on substance abuse trends and user behaviour. By analyzing interactions with the chatbot, researchers and healthcare providers can gain insights into common issues, triggers, and patterns associated with substance abuse. This data can inform the development of more targeted and effective prevention strategies, as well as the allocation of resources to areas with the greatest need. Additionally, real-time data collection enables the continuous improvement of the chatbot's responses and the overall effectiveness of the intervention.

Chatbots can play a crucial role in providing continuous support to individuals in recovery. Substance abuse recovery is a long-term process that often requires ongoing encouragement and resources. A chatbot can offer 24/7 support, providing users with immediate assistance whenever they need it. This continuous availability can help individuals stay on track with their recovery goals, access coping strategies during moments of crisis, and feel supported throughout their journey.

Limitations of the Research

Despite the positive results, there are several limitations to this study. One significant limitation is the lack of user feedback on the chatbot's usability. Without direct input from users, it is challenging to assess how intuitive and user-friendly the chatbot interface is. User feedback is

crucial for identifying potential issues with navigation, response times, and overall user experience. This feedback could provide valuable insights into areas that need improvement to enhance the chatbot's effectiveness and user satisfaction. Additionally, the chatbot's responses were constrained to the information available in the verified knowledge base, which may not cover all possible user queries.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should focus on expanding the chatbot's knowledge base and improving its ability to handle a wider range of queries. Also worth adding is a sensitive topic handling mechanism that implements a content sensitivity classifier to detect potentially triggering or dangerous topics. Another future refinement that needs to be added is an escalation protocol to handle situations beyond the chatbot's capabilities. Additionally, there is need for conducting a comprehensive usability study to gather direct feedback from users. This can help better understand their experiences, challenges, and satisfaction with the chatbot. This feedback can be invaluable for refining the chatbot's interface and functionality.

Conclusion

This paper has presented the technical development of an AI-powered chatbot designed to address substance abuse issues among university students. The development of a chatbot represents a significant step towards addressing the complex issue of substance abuse among university students. By leveraging technology, this innovative approach has the potential to reach a large number of students and provide them with the support they need. This project demonstrates the technical feasibility and potential impact of AI-powered chatbots in addressing critical health issues in university settings. As AI technology continues to advance, such systems may play an increasingly important role in providing accessible, timely, and effective support for student well-being. Further research is necessary to evaluate the chatbot's impact and to optimize its features for maximum effectiveness.

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Sub-theme: Unwanted Pregnancies

CHAPTER 10: Analysis of Higher and Tertiary Education Institution policies and regulations: Initiatives to prevent unwanted pregnancies among students in Masvingo Province

Emerge Masiya

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

Globally, there are 121 million unintended pregnancies annually (Bearak, Popinchalk and Ganatra, 2020) and according to a 2024 study held in Masvingo, many girls drop out of school due to pregnancy (Nkomo, 2024). Unintended pregnancy is associated with several adverse maternal and child health outcomes, including maternal and child mortality (Khan and Isam, 2022) and thus initiatives should be taken to lower the rate of unwanted pregnancies. There are many factors that influence unintended pregnancies. They include, but not limited to, peer pressure (Vinh and Tuan, 2015), couple problems, family structure and financial problems (Barton, Redshaw and Quigley, 2017). Promoting the use of contraceptive has proven to be effective in reducing the number of unintended pregnancies (Henshaw, 1998). More so, ensuring proper access to effective contraceptives following birth is key to reducing unintended pregnancy and associated adverse consequences (Khan and Isam, 2022).

The state is obliged under international and national law to provide sexual health services (like sexual reproductive health awareness and access to contraceptive) under the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Sustainable development Goal Target 3,7 speaks on universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services including family planning, information and education. Public institutions should thus play its role as instruments of the state to achieve sexual health awareness. More so, Garwe and Thondhlana (2023) argue that higher education is critical for socio-economic development and production of relevant knowledge. State universities should thus further the obligations of the state through the provision of sexual health services and awareness initiatives. Added to that, such intentional efforts should not only be explicitly reflected in their rules, regulations and policies but be readily available to their students.

Though sexual reproductive health awareness has been identified as a key factor in reducing unintended pregnancies, it is not the only factor. There are various intersectional disadvantages that merge to create a unique disadvantage for students in Masvingo thus influencing unwanted pregnancies. Intersectionality acknowledges this reality and highlights the differences between people in the same groups who may otherwise have been considered the same and brings attention to the factors that lead to some people being marginalised. It demonstrates how these factors work together, reinforcing or weakening each other (Girls Not Brides, 2022). Simplified, scholars and theorists who endorse this theory must attend to a myriad overlapping and mutually reinforcing oppressions that many women face in addition to gender (Samuels and Sherriff, 2008). Unwanted pregnancies are influenced by various factors. State institutions must fulfil their role through the provision of sexual health services and awareness as well as taking into consideration, the various factors that influence sexual health services.

The paper will do a literature review on the role that higher and tertiary institutions can play to ensure social development through sexual health awareness and services. Secondly, identify the rules and regulations of Great Zimbabwe University and Masvingo Polytechnic College as well as pinpoint provisions that speak on sexual health and unwanted pregnancy or have an

indirect influence on unwanted pregnancies. Moreover, the paper will recommend policies that have the potential to mitigate against unintended pregnancies and recommend aggressive intentional efforts to mitigate against unintended pregnancies.

1.2 Literature Review

The World Health Organization (2020) indicated that globally, an estimated 16 million teenagers under the age of 19 years give birth annually, and 9 million of these pregnancies are unplanned. Sexual victimization is referred to an epidemic in global higher education systems (Bondestam and Lundqvist, 2020). Research has also revealed new types of sexual harassment exposure in higher institutions relating to online sexual harassment as compared to earlier studies (Megan et al. 2016; Poland 2016). Though sexual and reproductive health education and promotion is found to be high in public educational institutions (Habel, et al., 2018), Koumans (2005) notes that health education efforts on campuses were not robust enough to impact behaviour change.

Research has shown that sexual health knowledge has been identified as one of the major factors influencing the occurrence of unwanted pregnancies while other research also noted complimentary factors. More so, it has been established that sexual health awareness is a sexual reproductive health right. Existing international and regional norms on sexual reproductive health rights impose obligations on governments to ensure access to contraception services for adolescents (Mukundi and Ngwena, 2021). General recommendation 24 of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) states that nations should emphasize the 'prevention of unwanted pregnancy through family planning and sex education' and general comment 14 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) highlights the inclusion of safe pregnancy and childbirth in ensuring a right to health.

Government efforts to fully realise this inalienable right are not visible in state institution like Great Zimbabwe University and Masvingo Polytechnic College. Though avenues to ensure the sexual reproductive health awareness and implementation could have been created through policies and regulations, their absence in HTEI rules and regulation reflect greatly on the institutions' efforts to achieve social development. Research thus far in as far as higher and tertiary institutions are concerned with unwanted pregnancies has been centred on the determinants of unintended pregnancies (Wasswa, Kabagenyi and Atuhaire, 2020) the disparate access to contraceptive as an influence on access to contraceptives (Troutman, Rafique and Plowden, 2020) and the various effects of unintended pregnancies (Schonewille et al, 2022).

This paper investigates the extent to which the university policies have been playing a role directly or indirectly in curbing the increase in unwanted pregnancies. The importance of policy entrenchments will also be noted and the overall role of HTEIs in furthering development will be reinforced.

1.3 Purpose and Objectives

The research aims to identify efforts by higher educational institutions to fulfilling their obligation to promote sexual health in Masvingo. More so, identify provisions within HTEI rules and regulations that act as a catalyst for unwanted pregnancies. Literature review will reveal also the necessity of sexual health services in preventing unintended pregnancies and the obligation imposed on higher institutions and the state to provide sexual health services as well.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What role do higher, and tertiary institutions play in promoting sexual health awareness and providing sexual health services to reduce unintended pregnancies among students in Masvingo?
2. How do the rules, regulations, and policies of Great Zimbabwe University and Masvingo Polytechnic College address sexual health and unintended pregnancies, and what gaps exist in these provisions?
3. What specific policies and intentional efforts could higher, and tertiary institutions implement to effectively mitigate unintended pregnancies and address the intersectional disadvantages faced by students in Masvingo?

Literature Review

1.5 Overview

Case studies by Habel et al (2018) on the state of sexual health services in higher institutions in the United States of America showed that most institutions provided at least one sexual health service and though a few colleges received some support from their health department, a third of the institutions did not. Most of the institutions did not provide varying sexual health services. Another case study revealed institutional efforts to promote sexual health through the provision of sexual health courses. King et al. (2017), notes that 80% of US public universities and colleges offer a course in human sexuality, and nearly 85% offer at least one course in gender/women's studies. A study held in Kenya at a higher education institution showed that there was need to sensitize the youth about sexual health and a need to improve the accessibility of reproductive health services through strengthening of services provided at campus health clinics (Mbugua and Karonja, 2018). Campus clinics and hospitals were the most recognised source of reproductive health services (Mbugua and Karonja, 2018) and awareness of their existence is crucial.

Considering the varying identified factors by researchers that influence unwanted pregnancies, there is a need to consider intersectional preventative measures that consider all the possible factors that influence the emergency of unwanted pregnancies. In a Zimbabwe university study, one young female respondent said: *“Madhara acho anonetsera kuti haadi kushandisa protection vanotoda nyoro chaiyo”* (the problem with these old men is that they do not want to use protection) (Gurume, 2011 p184). This shows that knowledge of sexual reproductive health alone does not effectively guarantee prevention of unwanted pregnancies. It has been identified that livelihood limitations had drawn female students to transactional sex and leading to unwanted pregnancies (Gurume, 2011). There is thus a need to create policies that intentionally target such livelihood limitations.

Though the need to advance sexual reproductive health knowledge was reiterated, Bhatasara (2006) argued that young women during transactional sex in higher educational institutions in Zimbabwe were unable to negotiate condom use despite being highly educated and knowledgeable about sexual reproductive health. Thus, knowledge of sexual reproductive health alone does not warrant the lowering of unwanted pregnancies. There is, therefore, a need to create reinforcement measures that acknowledge the various factors that intersect with policy provisions to foster prevention of unwanted pregnancies.

Traditionally, HEI's main purpose was intended and crafted to equip graduates with skills and knowledge to enhance their creativity and innovation to meet the labour demands of various

industry sectors (Maireva and Mabika, 2022). Most research on HTEIs investigate the role of higher educational institution in human capital development (Maireva and Mabika, 2022), the role of higher learning institutions in ensuring job satisfaction of employees (Nyanga et al, 2012) while others research on the role of higher education institutions in the development of SMEs in Zimbabwe (Bomani, Fields and Derera 2019). The economic importance of higher institution is acknowledged and established. However, sustainable development goals demand the social, economic and environmental consideration in public institutions. In this regard, higher learning institutions should also extend its services to achieve social development as well, including the extension of sexual reproductive health services and awareness.

Ndlovu and Masuku (2004) argue that developing knowledge that would respond to the economic, social and political challenges of modern Zimbabwe certainly calls for the working of education policy makers in concert with the fully informed people of Zimbabwe who are the reservoirs of local knowledge systems. Higher educational institutions are supposedly reservoirs of local knowledge and according to Garwe and Thondhlana (2023) higher education is critical for socio-economic development and production of relevant knowledge. Identified global and national statistics show that unintended pregnancies and its effects warrant the serious attention of policy makers and higher institutions. It is incumbent on HTEIs in Masvingo to respond to the plight of the community.

The necessity of sexual health knowledge and access is recognised, and researchers have noted that women want to avoid pregnancy yet do not use any contraceptive method, because they do not have access to contraceptives or prefer not to use them for various reasons (Sedgh and Hussain, 2014). However, it is worth noting that use of contraceptive or sexual health knowledge has not always been proven to be a panacea for unwanted pregnancies. A study 2022 study in Bangladesh showed that the experience of unintended pregnancy did not change women's contraception using patterns, which indicates the risk of repeat unintended pregnancies and associated adverse consequences, including maternal and child morbidity and mortality (Khan and Islam, 2022). It is for this reason that the researcher is calling for policy reform that speaks of most of the identified factors that affect the creation of unwanted pregnancies.

Using higher institutions to social development is not a novel pursuit, higher education institutions have been noted to have a crucial role in providing knowledge, evidence-based solutions and innovation to facilitate SDGs attainment through extensive research activities and capabilities (Albareda-Tiana et al., 2020). A study conducted by Lechner et al., (2017) on whether the sexual health of college student was their persona responsibility or that of the college institutions showed that a majority of the participants believed that it is the college's responsibility to provide resources and the responsibility of students to access resources. While there was expectation of referrals to health services, others expected the services to be made available. It has been noted by Brennan, King and Lebeau (2004) stress on the social, cultural and political role of universities in national building and the challenges that might be faced in achieving such. Thus, such a role requires intentional efforts on the part of the institutions to achieve the ends of its role.

1.6 Framework

The intervention framework for prevention in public schools which addresses the 'challenges of providing educational services in multiple contexts of crisis and emergencies' (Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2022) will also be used as a blueprint for an ideals

public institution that create a safe and inclusive environment conscious of sexual health needs and services. The framework by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) establish the three pillars: Context, Action and Relationship as an essential mechanism to ensure a safe educational environment.

The human rights-based analysis is also used as it is the ‘most frequent linking of human rights and human development in policy’ (Marks, 2005, p5) and Yamin (2008) also stresses on the need for the human rights framework to health services. Unwanted Pregnancy is considered a public health issue that needs to be addressed (Payo et al, 2024) and sexual health services and awareness is integral in lowering unwanted pregnancies. The responsiveness of HTEIs rules and regulations to furthering the right is examined.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

A qualitative approach to achieve a doctrinal analysis of the rules and regulations is used. Fraenkel and Wallen (1996) state that the qualitative approach is a method which attempts to understand and interpret what exists at present in the form of conditions, practices, processes, trends, effects, attitudes and beliefs as they are perceived by the actors. To effectively understand and interpret the HTEIs of Masvingo Polytechnic College as well as Great Zimbabwe University as well as identify common trends on both policies, a qualitative approach is used.

2.2 Data Sources

The study will use the desktop method of data collection and determination of the status of current scholarship about the proposed study. This entails the use of secondary data (e.g. the internet and the library). In particular, the study will use case law, articles, journal and legislation to review the HTEIs policies and regulations of Masvingo Polytechnic College and Great Zimbabwe University. This also enabled the researchers to determine the ease of access that students have to such document.

2.3 Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to identify the institutions since Great Zimbabwe University is a state university with various campuses across the province as well as Masvingo Polytechnical College which boasts a large campus area within Masvingo town. Public institutions like GZU and Masvingo Polytechnic College were ideal for the research as they use the ‘community oriented multi-campus university model’ (Dhliwayo, 2014) and thus endowed with obligations to respond to the needs and challenges of its local community. More so, as state institutions within Masvingo, [where students drop out due to pregnancies is still rampant (Nkomo, 2024)], are expected to fulfil state international obligation to ensure sexual health services and awareness initiates. The relationship between Great Zimbabwe University and Masvingo polytechnic male students characterized by fierce competition and conflicts relating to women (Gukurume, 2011) also lured the researcher to select these institutions.

2.4 Data Analysis

The primary research paradigm will be interpretive. The focus will be on interpreting HTEIs rules and regulations. Observations and views on the subject from a literature review will also be critically interpreted. An intersectional analysis of the effectiveness of such rules and regulations will be done. The term intersectionality was first coined by Crewshaw (1991) to explain the numerous ways in which race and gender interact to shape multiple dimensions of black women (Gopaldas, 2013). The term has evolved into a broader term. The implication of

intersectionality is that every person in society is positioned at the intersection of multiple social identity structures and is thus subject to multiple social advantages and disadvantages. Multiple aspects of girls' social and political identities – including gender, age, disability, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, caste and citizenship – intersect and create unique experiences of discrimination and privilege (Girls Not Brides, 2022).

3.0 Results

3.1 Student Regulations Analysis

Great Zimbabwe University

Great Zimbabwe University student conduct is regulated by The rules of Great Zimbabwe University student conduct and Discipline Ordinance No 2 of 2004(Great Zimbabwe University, n.d.). The rules ensure that the 'high communal standards of community life must be established and maintained for the benefit of present and future members of the University' (paragraph 1). More so, it asserts the type of conduct that is demonised by the institution. This includes disruptive behaviour, misuse of university premises and violence.

The rules expressly refer to the presence of health facilities in the instance that a student falls sick. No reference is made to the existence of health facilities to cater to the health, much less, sexual health services available to the students.

Paragraph 6.11 states that:

A resident student who is confined in bed shall, so far as he/she is able, ensure that her/his illness is reported to the university's Student Health Services centre.

Students are thus only made to infer on the existence of health facilities at the express mention of a nurse. Any indication on whether there is the presence of sexual reproductive health services and access to the respective preventative products can only be assumed.

More so, the abhorrence of sexual conduct within the resident halls is also assumed in paragraph 6.7.2 wherein male students are only entertained in female halls at certain times and female students are only entertained in male halls up to certain times. More so, it is expressly stated that visitation by members of opposite sex outside the identified hour is prohibited. Added to that, students are also instructed to be present in the Hall of Residence every night save for when they seek prior permission from the warden on Saturday nights while absence from the residence for more than two consecutive nights requires permission from the Dean. These are the only provisions within the rules and regulations that refer to health services and sexual conduct.

The GZU General Information and Regulations (2014-2018) mentions its commitment to the availability of Student Health services which 'facilitate the provision of quality health services and care to students through Health Education, Counselling, Curative, Family Planning and Peer Education programmes. More so, it stresses on the open-door policies of the health facilities 'without booking'. It also directs student to available counselling and advisory services with personalised facilities to cater for 'personal, emotional, social, academic, career, financial and health problems.'

Masvingo Polytechnic College

Masvingo Polytechnic College Rules and Regulations of student conduct and Discipline read together with Statutory Instrument Number 81 of 1999 regulate the conduct of students on campus and resident facilities (Masvingo Polytechnic, n.d.).

The only mention made about sexual reproductive health related matters relates to disciplinary measure taken if a student is found to be pregnant while staying as a resident of the Polytechnic hostels. Paragraph 9.34 states that:

Resident female students who become pregnant shall be withdrawn from the Polytechnic hostels on discovery and a resident male student responsible for such pregnancy will also be withdrawn from the hostels.

This rule speaks volumes of the institutional stance on sexual reproductive health. The basis of this rule, however, is questionable.

Whether the disciplinary act is the actual pregnancy or the insinuation that sexual conduct occurred on their premise is not clearly mentioned. However, read in conjunction with paragraph 9.3.10 which states that guests are not allowed in the halls of residence, paragraph 9.3.12 which states that sharing of residence with any unauthorized person is an offence and paragraph 9.3.1 which states that hostel study-bed rooms are out of bounds to guests and students of the opposite sex. It can be implied that the dismissal from residence after getting pregnant assumes that institution disapproves on the potential possibility of sexual acts within its facilities.

The rules refer to the presence of health facilities in the instance that a student falls sick. No reference is made to the existence of health facilities to cater to the health, much less, sexual. Paragraph 9.3.21 states that:

A resident student who is confined in bed shall, so far as he/she is able, ensure that her/his illness is reported to the Warden and the Polytechnic Nurse.

Students are thus only made to infer on the existence of health facilities at the express mention of a nurse. Any indication on whether there is the presence of sexual reproductive health services and access to the respective preventative products can only be assumed.

33. Sexual Health Facilities available

Great Zimbabwe University has various facilities that provided sexual health services. The institution boasts the availability of student health services centres (Great Zimbabwe University, n.d.). The student health facilities advocate and facilitate the provision of quality health services and care to students through Health Education, Counselling, Treatment of all illnesses, Family Planning services and Provider Initiated HIV Testing and Counselling (Great Zimbabwe University, n.d.). It also has two campus clinics, as Mashava campus and the Law School. The information is readily available on their official website.

Great Zimbabwe University has a HIV & AIDS Life Skills programme focuses on Sexual Reproductive Health, HIV and AIDS and Life Skills education for pupils and staff and the surrounding Masvingo Community (Great Zimbabwe University, n.d.). The programme provides for awareness campaigns, behaviour change forums, seminars, talk shows, gender-based violence dialogues, video screenings and workshops on selected issues/topics (Great Zimbabwe University, n.d.). Lastly, HIV & AIDS Life Skills activities are guided by the University HIV & AIDS Life Skills policy.

In recognition of the intersectionality of peer pressure and sexual health, the HIV & AIDS Life Skills programme also provides for peer educators.

3.4 Sexual harassment policies

Masvingo Polytechnic Sexual Harassment Policy, readily available on its website, reflects an unwavering commitment to fostering a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment for all

members of its community. In terms of paragraph 2 (a), the institution declares its obligation to effectively address sexual harassment and in terms of paragraph 2(b) through the establishment of a proficient Anti-Sexual Harassment Committee dedicated to fostering a safe and harassment free environment. However, Great Zimbabwe University does not appear to have a sexual harassment policy. The UN System Model Policy (2018) reiterates on the importance of, not only the existence of a sexual harassment policy, but the importance of making the policy accessible.

3.5 Sexual health courses

Great Zimbabwe University only provides for a Bachelor of Science General Degree in Biomedical Sciences Programme and no specific program that deals with sexual health (Great Zimbabwe University, n.d.). Masvingo Polytechnic has no course on sexual health specifically, but it does provide a course in Environmental Health for which a promising career as a TB and HIV/AIDS focal persons is expected to arise (Masvingo Polytechnic, n.d.).

4.0 Discussion

The research aimed to show the role of Higher and Tertiary institutions in promoting sexual health and reducing unwanted pregnancies in Masvingo. Great Zimbabwe actively advocates sexual health awareness through programmes like the HIV and Aids Life Skills Programme which robustly caters for the awareness campaigns, seminars and workshops, among others. As a reflection of its understanding of the role that peer pressure plays in sexual health, the program also includes peer pressure programs. However, these efforts do not seem intentional nor explicitly directed at the deterrence of unwanted pregnancies. Moreover, the institution provides health services like Family Planning through its health service clinics. These efforts contribute significantly to the reduction of unwanted pregnancies among students through the provision of essential information and resources.

At Masvingo Polytechnic, the only reference to the available health service within its regulations and in instances where the student is ‘confined to a bed’ due to illness. Though Masvingo Polytechnic college does provide for a sexual harassment policy, the policy itself does not expressly direct the victims to the available health facilities. Student regulations of Masvingo Polytechnic fail to compliment the available sexual harassment policy as well. Complimentary regulations and policies are key to ensuring effective policy awareness.

Zimbabwe’s higher educational systems is supposedly ‘poised for local impact’ (Garwe and Thondhlana, 2023, p 108), its impactful residual effects are yet to be seen in the rules and regulations of HTEIs in Masvingo. The new education system (dubbed Education 5.0) aims to integrate advanced ICT technologies into the education system to enhance the learning experience and remove barriers to education and develop 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving. Ahmad et al., (2023) and Filho, et al, (2018) note that institutional policy commitment to achieve development are an indicator of how universities deem it important to developing. Therefore, failure to engrain developmental efforts into policies shows, to a certain extent, some lack of interest on the part of the institution.

The student regulations at Masvingo Polytechnic College were geared towards carefree students, however, the policies are not tailored to the needs of students. This is also noted in another study by Mareau (2016, p2) who notes that,

universities reinforce discourses normalising the figure of the ‘care-free’ student and ultimately contribute to the marginalisation of student parents within higher education. This was not the case for Great Zimbabwe University as it acknowledges their existence through the Family Planning programs in its HIV & AIDS Life Skills programme. However, the challenge of unintended pregnancies faced by the community requires more direct, intentional efforts that do not require students to gain information through insinuations.

Intersectionality enables us to stretch our thinking about gender and feminism to include the impact of context and to pay attention to interlocking oppressions and privileges across various contexts (Samuels and Sherriff, 2008). The policies of Great Zimbabwe University were, in some instances able to recognise the interconnectedness of varying factors and unwanted pregnancies through the creation of peer education programs, student counselling facilities, and in Masvingo Polytechnic College, through sexual harassment policies. Intersectionality calls on us to consider women as whole beings; to recognize that not all women experience their womanhood in the same ways; many women face multiple forms of oppression, and not all women are rendered powerless (Samuels and Sherriff, 2008). Thus, the fact that the institutions’ rules and regulations lightly hinted on the availability of services that potentially foster the decrease in unwanted pregnancies and provisions hinting on the acknowledgement of the differences in gender, the presence of sexual harassment also speak on the institutional acknowledgement of the disadvantaged footing that women have in HTEIs.

The research also purported to identify how rules, regulations, and policies of Great Zimbabwe University and Masvingo Polytechnic College address sexual health and unintended pregnancies, and the gaps exist. The lack of sexual harassment policies, sexual health courses, the failure to ensure awareness of available sexual health services and lack of consolidation of sexual health policies.

4.1 Recommendations

1. A detailed sexual health education programme: Educational Institutions should instigate mandatory inclusive sexual education programmes that cover various themes, including contraception, consent and health relationship. Unwanted pregnancies have been identified as a major health problem (Lanre, 2010). A robust program dealing with such a problem is essential for the effective managing of sexual health.
2. A consolidated Sexual Health Policy and Student Regulation Amendments: There is need for a consolidated sexual health policy that brings awareness to students and HTEIs community. Student Regulations should be amended in a way that directs the students to the availability of sexual health policies and services.
3. Make sexual harassment policies readily available on public institutional forums: The new Labour Amendment Act 11 of 2023 prohibits sexual harassment and it considers sexual harassment to be an unfair labour practice for which a civil remedy is recoverable. There is a legal obligation on Higher and Tertiary Educational Institutions to ensure the protection against sexual harassment through sexual harassment policies. They should also be made readily accessible to interested parties as reflected in the UN System Model Policy on Sexual Harassment.

5.0 Conclusion

Echoing the maxim ‘Justice should not only be done but be seen to be done’, though the principle relates mostly to the judiciary, the maxim articulates the notion that policies and laws should be visibly achieving its purpose. Higher learning and education institutions in Zimbabwe are under the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology jurisdiction. It is a product of the state which purports too direct its efforts towards sustainable development. However, such purported efforts have been small in higher and tertiary institutions. An ideal higher education system should strive to tackle existing challenges which according to Weidman (1995) include the development of local societies. If HTEIs are endowed with the role of social development but their policies are not reflecting the institution`s efforts to achieve social development or the effort are miniature to the say the least, this reflects on the willingness of the institutions to achieve its purpose. Filho, et al, (2018) notes that institutional policy commitment to achieve development are an indicator of how universities deem it important to developing.

This research shows that there is need for real intentionally directed efforts to foster sexual health awareness and services in HTEIs. More so, there in need to delve into further research on the potential expansive role that institutions can shoulder in the pursuit of development on behalf of the state.

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CHAPTER 11: Exploring Strategies for Preventing Unwanted Pregnancies among Unmarried Female students in Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions: A case of Masvingo Province

Joburg Mahuyu

Introduction

Unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students in HTEIs pose a significant challenge, impacting not only the individuals but also their families and the broader educational system. This issue has been a longstanding concern in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe, underscoring the urgent need for effective strategies to tackle it. This research investigated different methods for preventing unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students in HTEIs within Masvingo Province. It focused on identifying the main contributing factors, assessing current support systems and interventions, and developing comprehensive strategies to address the issue. Utilising a mixed-methods approach, the study integrated both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. This allowed for a thorough understanding of the problem and explored possible solutions. The research included surveys of female students, in-depth interviews with parents, dean of students and landlords who provided accommodation to unmarried female students, and an analysis of relevant policies and educational programs. The findings enhance the existing knowledge on this crucial issue and help inform the creation of evidence-based policies and interventions that educational institutions, policymakers, and stakeholders can implement. Ultimately, the study empowers unmarried female students in HTEIs through education on reproductive health, supporting their academic and personal achievements financially, while promoting a more equitable and inclusive educational environment.

Background

Unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students in HTEIs represent a significant public health and educational challenge, particularly in regions like Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe. These pregnancies severely disrupted educational attainment, limiting future career opportunities, and impose emotional and financial burdens on young women and their families. In Zimbabwe, the prevalence of unwanted pregnancies among young women is influenced by various socio-cultural and economic factors. Cultural norms often stigmatize premarital sexual activity, leading to a lack of open dialogue about sexual health and reproductive rights. Research indicates that many young women lack access to comprehensive reproductive health education, which is essential for informed decision-making regarding contraceptive use (UNFPA, 2019). Studies have shown that limited access to reproductive health services and educational resources significantly contributes to the incidence of unwanted pregnancies. In many educational institutions, existing health services do not adequately address the unique needs of unmarried female students. According to the Zimbabwe National Family Planning Strategy (2016-2020), barriers such as social stigma, misinformation, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure hinder effective reproductive health education.

Unwanted pregnancies can lead to significant socio-economic disadvantages. Young women who become pregnant while pursuing their education often face increased dropout rates, which can perpetuate cycles of poverty and limit their future economic opportunities (Chigaru, 2021). Furthermore, the emotional and psychological impacts of unwanted pregnancies can affect academic performance and mental health, leading to a need for comprehensive support systems within educational institutions.

Despite the critical nature of this issue, there remains a lack of targeted research focused on the specific contexts and needs of unmarried female students in Masvingo Province. Existing literature often overlooks the cultural sensitivities and unique challenges faced by this demographic, highlighting the need for studies that explore effective, culturally appropriate strategies for preventing unwanted pregnancies (Makuwe & Chikoko, 2020).

This research explored various strategies for preventing unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students in HTEIs within Masvingo Province. By identifying key contributing factors and assessing existing support systems, the study developed comprehensive, evidence-based interventions that could be implemented to support the reproductive health and educational success of these young women.

Objectives

1. To investigate the prevalence of unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students in higher and tertiary education institutions in Masvingo Province.
2. To analyse the socio-economic and psychological impacts of unwanted pregnancy on unmarried female students HTEIs in Masvingo Province.
3. To identify and analyse the socio-cultural, educational, and health-related factors that contribute to unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students in the region.
4. To develop intervention strategies and programs aimed at preventing unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students in Masvingo Province.

Statement of the Problem

Unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students in HTEIs represent a critical public health issue, particularly in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe. Despite progress in reproductive health education and the availability of contraceptive methods, the rate of unwanted pregnancies in this group remains alarmingly high at 23.7% (Mutinta, 2022). There are various factors that contribute to this problem, including cultural stigma associated with contraceptive use, insufficient sexual health education, and limited access to reproductive health services. Many female students encounter obstacles such as misinformation, peer pressure, and socio-economic barriers that impede their ability to make informed choices regarding reproduction. Consequently, unwanted pregnancies can interrupt their educational journeys, resulting in higher dropout rates, financial difficulties, and long-lasting psychological impacts. Furthermore, the existing research indicates a significant lack of targeted interventions aimed specifically at this demographic in Masvingo Province (UNICEF, 2023). Most studies tend to concentrate on broader national or regional issues, neglecting the distinct cultural and social factors that affect reproductive health decisions among unmarried female students in the area. This research gap leaves stakeholders without effective strategies that address the specific needs and challenges faced by these students. Therefore, there is an urgent need to investigate and develop comprehensive strategies for preventing unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students in HTEIs in Masvingo Province. This study seeks to bridge the knowledge gap by examining the specific factors leading to unwanted pregnancies and strategies to curb unwanted pregnancies.

Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in four theoretical frameworks that clarify the factors contributing to unwanted pregnancies and inform the creation of effective prevention strategies. The first one is the Health Belief Model (HBM) by Rosenstock (1974) that suggests that individuals are more inclined to adopt health-promoting behaviours if they recognize their vulnerability to a health issue, view it as serious, and believe that taking specific actions will reduce their risk.

In examining unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students, the HBM helps to understand how perceptions of risk, severity, and the advantages of contraceptive use shape students' actions. By educating students about the risks of unwanted pregnancies and the benefits of contraception, they can be empowered to make informed decisions. Secondly, the Social Learning Theory (SLT) by Bandura (1977) highlights the significance of observational learning, imitation, and modelling in behaviour development. It asserts that individuals learn behaviours by observing others, especially role models. This theory is useful for understanding how social norms and peer influences impact the sexual behaviours of unmarried female students. By promoting positive role models and implementing peer education initiatives, institutions can effectively influence attitudes and behaviours related to contraceptive use and sexual health. Third, Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) by Ajzen (1991), asserts that a person's intention to perform a behaviour is the foremost predictor of that behaviour. These intentions are shaped by attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived control over the behaviour. This theory helps evaluate how attitudes toward contraception, social pressures, and perceived access to reproductive health services affect unmarried female students' intentions to use contraceptives effectively. The fourth theory is the Ecological Systems Theory (EST) proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) which emphasizes the influence of various environmental systems on individual behaviour. These systems range from immediate environments (micro-systems) to broader societal contexts (macro-systems). The theory is valuable for analysing how different factors such as family dynamics, peer influences, institutional policies, and cultural norms interact to shape the reproductive health choices of unmarried female students.

Empirical Literature

This section details some investigations done in some countries to establish the causes of unwanted pregnancy among female adolescents in HTEIs. The issue of unwanted pregnancies among teenagers and adolescents has been investigated in numerous studies, revealing insights into the contributing factors and possible prevention strategies.

Contributing factors towards unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students in HTEIs

Chirimuuta & Nyoni (2020) examined how unplanned pregnancies disrupt academic paths and affect students' future opportunities. They found that female students' career prospects were seriously disadvantaged when they fell pregnant. Some dropped school during pregnancy and breastfeeding period while fees paid to universities and colleges were forfeited.

Makuwe & Chikoko (2020) investigated the cultural influences on sexual behaviour and reproductive health decisions among female university students. Mixed-methods approach combining surveys and focus group discussions were used to explore cultural influences on sexual health decisions. Findings: Cultural stigma and misinformation were significant barriers to effective reproductive health decision-making. There was insufficient exploration of how specific cultural beliefs vary between different communities within Zimbabwe.

This study by Moyo & Zindi (2018) identified obstacles to contraceptive access and use, highlighting the impact of misinformation and stigma. Qualitative interviews with female students to identify barriers to contraceptive access were used. They found that misinformation and stigma surrounding contraceptive use were prevalent, impacting students' choices. However, there was lack of longitudinal studies tracking changes in attitudes toward contraception over time.

A situation analysis by UNESCO (2018) in selected HTEIs in Zimbabwe and Tanzania revealed that for many students, the age of sexual debut coincides with entry into university or college. This sexual debut also coincides with low knowledge on condom use or contraceptives. The study revealed that 66% of female students and 47% of male students had not used a condom the first time they had sexual intercourse. Report by UNICEF (2023) estimated that globally, about 257 million women are currently not using any method of contraception despite their desire to prevent pregnancy. The overall prevalence of contraceptive use among adolescent girls and young women in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) was estimated to be 24.7%. The prevalence of contraceptive use was highest in Southern Africa (52.3%) and lowest in West Africa (5.4%). By country, the Chad Republic recorded the lowest prevalence of contraceptive use (5.1%) while Lesotho recorded the highest with 59.2% and Zimbabwe was the third highest with 50.7%. A cross-sectional survey by Mutinta (2022) of 1269 female students from universities in Eastern Cape in South Africa found that the prevalence of unplanned pregnancy was 12.31%. According to Ministry of Health and Child Care (MoHCC) report (2016), about 25% of unmarried female students in Masvingo's universities and colleges have experienced an unwanted pregnancy during their studies.

A comparative study of unwanted pregnancies among students in South Africa and Zimbabwe by Khan & Sharma (2018) compared the rates and factors of unwanted pregnancies among students in different contexts, offering valuable insights for Zimbabwe. Findings: Differences in cultural attitudes and healthcare access impact pregnancy rates among students in different contexts. There was limited comparative studies that include a broader range of countries for a more comprehensive understanding.

CeSHHAR (2023) carried out a national assessment of adolescent pregnancy in Zimbabwe. The study was conducted to determine the prevalence of adolescent pregnancy in Zimbabwe and to identify root causes leading to adolescent pregnancy particularly in the wake of Covid-19. The study revealed that there were high cases unwanted pregnancies of adolescents aged between 10-19 years in 6 out of the 10 provinces in Zimbabwe. Adolescent pregnancy prevalence was 23.7% (337/1418). Among the 337 pregnant adolescences, 4.0% (20) had disabilities.

UNESCO (2021) started implementing the “Our Rights, Our Lives, Our Future” (O3 PLUS) project across 12 HTEIs in Zimbabwe from January 2021 to December 2024. The O3 PLUS project seeks to ensure that young people in HTEIs realize positive health, education, and gender equality outcomes through sustained reductions in new HIV infections, unintended pregnancy and sexual and gender-based violence. Despite all this effort, unmarried female students continue to fall victims of unintended pregnancies.

The empirical literature above illustrates the complexity surrounding unwanted pregnancies among female students, emphasizing the importance of this research to explore strategies for preventing unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students in Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions in Masvingo Province.

Methodology

This research study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students in higher and tertiary education institutions in Masvingo Province.

Research Design

A convergent parallel design was employed, allowing for the simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data, which was then analysed separately. The results from both data sets was combined to provide a complete perspective on the issue.

Study Population

The focus was on unmarried female students enrolled in the following six (6) HTEIs within Masvingo Province. There are two universities in Masvingo Province, namely Great Zimbabwe University (state owned) and Reformed Church University (private owned). The province has also the following colleges; Masvingo Teachers College and Masvingo Polytechnic (state owned), Bondolfi Teachers College and Morgenster Teachers College are privately owned. In order to protect integrity of the institutions and avoiding stigmatisation, the universities and colleges were labelled D, E, F, J, H and I (not in any order). The population for the study was 6800 female students in HTEIs in Masvingo Province.

Sampling Method

A stratified random sampling technique was used for the quantitative part to select a study sample of 500 participants from the six (6) HTEIs in Masvingo province to ensure a representative sample across different demographics (age, socio-economic status). In the case of qualitative component, purposive sampling was used to identify a smaller group of 30 participants for in-depth interviews selected from the six (6) institutions. The participants were selected based on their experiences with unwanted pregnancies or reproductive health issues such as ward health workers who normally issues contraceptives.

Data Collection Methods

In order to gather quantitative data, a closed ended questionnaire was used to collect information on demographic details, knowledge of contraceptive methods, attitudes towards reproductive health, and experiences with unwanted pregnancies. The questionnaire underwent a pre-testing for validity and reliability prior to full distribution. Data was collected through paper-based questionnaires administered during campus events or at various institutions location.

Gathering qualitative data involved in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide to delve into participants' personal experiences, perceptions, and the socio-cultural factors affecting their reproductive choices. Interviews were recorded (with participants' consent) and transcribed for further analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analysed using statistical software (SPSS or R). Descriptive statistics summarizes demographic characteristics, while inferential statistics such as chi-square tests helped to identify relationships between variables related to unwanted pregnancies.

Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. The data was put into themes which were later analysed to get patterns and similarities that reflect participants' experiences and perceptions.

Results and discussion

This section presents results and discussion in line with the research questions. Since the study made use of mixed method approach, the results were presented and analysed separately and compared.

Prevalence of unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students in higher and tertiary education institutions in Masvingo Province in 2022-2023.

Table 1: Findings from quantitative data

Institution	No. of unwanted pregnancies		Aborted	Drop outs
	Reported	Not Reported		
D	9	21	3	6
E	3	7	1	3
F	4	5	0	2
J	15	19	5	10
H	7	11	3	6
I	12	18	7	12
Percentage	10.9	17.7	0.04	0.09

Source: Author survey

Out of the 500 questionnaires issued, only 458 were completed and collected. For the planned 30 interviews only 15 were successful as most respondents were not free to share their experiences. From table 1 above, a total of 131 unmarried female students fell pregnant, translating to 28, 6% between 2022 and 2023. These findings almost converge with Ministry of Health and Child Care (MoHCC) report (2016) which stated that about 25% of unmarried female students in Masvingo's universities and colleges have experienced an unwanted pregnancy during their studies. This shows a slight increase of 3, 6% from 25% to 28, 6%. However, this is worrisome to have such an increase within a period of 2 years. Despite various programs availed within the province, the percentage of unmarried female students is on the rise. This calls for more effort to curb such an increase so that the female students can complete their education and avoid unsafe abortions.

Again, from table 1 above, there are high numbers of unwanted pregnancies that go unreported posing a threat to the mental health and living conditions of the pregnant students. This study revealed that there are a number of abortions being done by some female students. These abortions are done under unclear circumstances as some of the pregnant students said that they went to sangomas or witch doctors, private doctors or other old women known to be facilitators of abortion in the vicinity. Some female students alluded to the fact that it was illegal and risky but they had no option since they feared their parents or guardians most, feared deferring studies or dropping out of college or university as some parents or guardians would refuse to pay for their school fees. Some female students pointed out that they faced challenges in accessing safe abortion in Zimbabwe as it is only legally permitted to save the woman's life or preserve her physical health, or in cases of rape, incest or foetal impairment. As a result, many women in Zimbabwe seek unsafe, clandestine abortions, which led to severe complications and even death (CeSHHAR, 2023). This coincides with MoHCC (2016) report which estimated that 40% of women who had an abortion in Zimbabwe experienced complications that required medical treatment, but only half of them received the necessary treatment. Although, Zimbabwe Ministry of Health and Child Care has made efforts to improve access to post-abortion care (PAC) services meant to reduce maternal mortality, there are critical gaps in the provision of PAC, including shortages of essential medicines and equipment, as well as delays in seeking and receiving treatment. Unmarried and adolescent women in Zimbabwe face high

unmet need for family planning services (ADD the references). There are barriers to accessing contraception, including lack of youth-friendly services and limited information about family planning.

The economic crisis in Zimbabwe has further strained the health system's capacity to provide quality reproductive health services, including for post-abortion care and family planning (UNICEF, 2023). Some female students said that they used some washing detergents to abort. Although women of all age-groups experience similar levels of unintended pregnancy, percentage of unmarried female students was on the rise and ending in abortion. From the six institutions visited, about 39 unmarried female students dropped out of college or university due to unwanted pregnancy with the majority of the male counter parts rejecting accountability, mentioning that they were not yet ready to father a child. There were some undocumented incidences where some female students attempted to commit suicide after falling pregnant.

Socio-economic and psychological impacts of unwanted pregnancy on unmarried female students HTEIs in Masvingo Province.

The study revealed that unwanted pregnancy caused the following:

Social impact: Unwanted pregnancy affected female students socially by increasing dropout rates, isolation, stress and stigma. This resulted in some female students committing suicide or shunning their homes or close relatives. This caused lack of quality prenatal and postnatal healthcare.

Economic impact: Unwanted pregnancy had a financial burden on female students as they failed to source funds for their education, general upkeep and also presented limited job opportunities and this kept most pregnant female students out of employment until they had delivered their babies.

Psychological impact: Female students suffered anxiety, depression and in some cases lack of counselling led to abortion or committing suicide due to unwanted pregnancies.

The study revealed that unintended pregnancies led to disruption or discontinuation of the student's education, as they are forced to drop out of school to care for the child. This have long-term consequences on their academic and career prospects. Unmarried pregnant students often face social stigma and discrimination from their peers, faculty, and the broader community. This leads to feelings of shame, isolation, and withdrawal from social activities. Raising a child as an unmarried female student can create a significant financial burden, due to the resources required to support and care for the child. This can exacerbate existing financial challenges and lead to increased poverty. Unintended pregnancy causes significant stress, anxiety, and depression among unmarried female students, which further impact their academic performance and overall well-being. It has been found from the study that unmarried pregnant students face barriers in accessing quality prenatal and postnatal healthcare due to financial constraints, lack of information, or social stigma. The disruption of education and the financial burden of raising a child is trapping unmarried female students in a cycle of poverty, making it difficult for them to break free and achieve their full potential.

Factors that contribute to unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students in Masvingo Province.

This study revealed that cultural factors significantly influence the occurrence of unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students in HTEIs. Many cultures view premarital sex negatively, which leads to secrecy and a lack of open dialogue about sexual health and contraceptive methods. Cultural beliefs spread myths about contraception, thereby building misconception, resulting in ineffective use or outright refusal to use it. These findings converge with the findings made by Makuwe & Chikoko (2020) in which traditional gender expectations pressured women into passive sexual roles, restricting their ability to negotiate safe sex practices. Cultural taboos surrounding discussions of sex often result in poor sexual education, leaving students uninformed about contraceptive options and safe practices.

Young women were compelled to engage in sexual activities to fit in with their peers, often without considering the potential consequences. The anxiety of being ostracized for not participating in certain social behaviors led to risky decisions.

Some students said that in some of their cultures, a stigma was associated with buying or carrying contraceptives, making them harder to obtain. Some students encountered resistance from family members regarding contraceptive use, resulting in either non-use or misuse. Cultural norms inhibited open discussions about sexual health within families or communities, leaving students without guidance or support.

Some female students said that in some of their cultures where religious beliefs were prevalent, teachings discourage contraception and promote abstinence, leading to higher rates of unintended pregnancies.

Economic challenges restricted access to healthcare and contraceptives, making it difficult for students to make informed reproductive choices. Female students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds had limited access to educational resources and healthcare services that provide information on family planning.

Worries about being judged by peers, family, or the community deterred female students from seeking assistance or information about contraception.

Educational factors, particularly media influence and social media platforms, played a significant role in shaping perceptions and behaviors regarding sexual health among students in higher and tertiary education institutions (HTEIs). These factors contributed to unwanted pregnancies in the following ways: Media provided valuable information about sexual health, contraception, and safe practices, but the effectiveness depended on the accuracy and accessibility of this information. Conversely, the prevalence of inaccurate or sensationalized information led to misconceptions about sexual health and contraception, increasing the risk of unwanted pregnancies. Media often portrays premarital sex in a casual or positive light, which influenced female students' attitudes and decisions regarding sexual activity. For example, portrayals of romance and relationships created unrealistic expectations about the consequences of sexual activity, potentially leading to risky behaviour. Platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat create a culture of peer validation, where students feel pressured to conform to perceived norms regarding sexual activities. Students often shared personal experiences related to relationships and sex on social media, which influence others' attitudes and behaviours, sometimes leading to risky choices.

Health factors, especially challenges within the healthcare system, play a crucial role in contributing to unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students in higher and tertiary education institutions (HTEIs). Insufficient healthcare facilities on or near campuses hinder students' access to vital reproductive health services, such as contraception and counseling. Female students encounter difficulties in reaching healthcare providers, particularly where public transport options are scarce or when they lack personal transportation. Some female students said that accessing campus clinics was not easy as information often leaks to other students especially when one is treated sexually transmitted diseases/infections (STDs/STIs). Some healthcare professionals might not receive adequate training in sexual and reproductive health, resulting in poor advice on contraceptive options and safe practices. Negative perceptions from healthcare providers discourage female students from seeking assistance or having open conversations about their sexual health, leading to misinformation.

High costs associated with contraceptives and reproductive health services render them unaffordable for students, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Many students lack sufficient health insurance coverage for reproductive health services, complicating their access to necessary care.

A lack of comprehensive sexual health education within the healthcare system leave female students uninformed about their options and the significance of contraception. Healthcare systems in the province failed to adequately implement outreach programs targeting student populations due to limited resources.

Some healthcare systems fail to respect or understand cultural beliefs surrounding sexuality and contraception thereby alienate students, preventing them from seeking essential services.

Worries about being judged or stigmatised by healthcare workers deter students from pursuing care. Insufficient mental health support impacted on decision-making related to sexual health, potentially lead to impulsive behaviors and unwanted pregnancies. Therefore, challenges within the healthcare system contribute to stress and anxiety, influencing students' sexual behaviors and choices.

Although the study has revealed several factors that contributed to unwanted pregnancies. Some factors had more impact on unintended pregnancies. As a percentage calculated from the respondents, economic factors had 43%, social media influence 36%, cultural factors 7%, traditional gender roles 5% and lack of reproductive health education 9%. This means that economic factors and social media influence have been identified as the major causes of unwanted female pregnancies in HTEIs in Masvingo Province. Some factors such as cultural beliefs often stigmatised unintended pregnancies, leading to a lack of open discussion about sexual health and contraception. Traditional gender roles limited women's autonomy in making informed choices about their reproductive health. Many young women lacked comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education, resulting in insufficient understanding of contraception and safe sex practices. Discussions around sexuality are often considered taboo, preventing young women from seeking necessary information. Some unmarried female students highlighted that at times pressure to conform to peer behaviours led to risky sexual practices, increasing the likelihood of unintended pregnancies. This has also been revealed by UNICEF (2023) report.

This study suits well with the Ecological Systems Theory (EST) proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) which emphasizes the influence of various environmental systems on individual behaviour.

Recommendations

This study recommends the following intervention strategies and programs aimed at preventing unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students in HTEIs in Masvingo Province.

Curriculum integration	Incorporating sexual and reproductive health education into the academic curriculum, covering topics like contraception, consent, and healthy relationships.
Workshops and Seminars	Organising regular workshops and seminars led by healthcare professionals to educate students about reproductive health and prevention methods.
On-Campus Clinics	Establishing youth-friendly health clinics on campuses that provide easy access to contraceptives and reproductive health services.
Mobile Clinics	Implementing mobile health services that reach students in remote areas, offering contraceptive options and counseling.
Peer Educator Training	Training selected students as peer educators to disseminate information on sexual health and contraception among their peers.
Support Groups	Creating support groups where students can discuss sexual health issues in a safe and supportive environment.
Awareness Campaigns	Conducting community-wide awareness campaigns to reduce stigma around unmarried pregnancies and promote safe sex practices.
Involvement of Parents and Guardians	Engaging families in discussions about sexual health to foster open communication and understanding.
Counselling Access	Providing accessible mental health and counselling services to help students cope with stress, anxiety, and relationship issues that may lead to risky behaviours.
Crisis Intervention	Establishing confidential support services for students facing unintended pregnancies, including options counselling and emotional support.
Supportive Policies (Policy advocacy)	Advocating for policies that support the reproductive rights of students, including access to safe and legal abortion services where applicable.
Institutional Support	Encouraging educational institutions to develop clear policies and support systems for pregnant students, allowing them to continue their education.
Research and monitoring	Conducting continuous research to understand the specific needs and challenges faced by unmarried female students regarding reproductive health.
Program Evaluation	Regularly evaluating the effectiveness of implemented programs and adjust strategies based on feedback and outcomes.

Policy recommendations

The following policy recommendations help HTEIs to create a supportive environment that significantly reduces the incidence of unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students. HTEIs should:

1. Implement mandatory, age-appropriate sexual education programs in higher and tertiary education institutions. These programs should cover topics such as reproductive health, contraceptive options, and decision-making skills.
2. Provide easy access to a range of contraceptive methods. This could include establishing partnerships with local healthcare providers to offer on-campus clinics where students can obtain contraceptives confidentially.
3. Develop targeted awareness campaigns that address the specific challenges faced by unmarried female students. Utilise various platforms, including social media, workshops, and seminars, to disseminate information about reproductive health and available resources.
4. Create and promote support services, such as counselling and health services, specifically tailored for unmarried female students. These services should offer a safe space for students to discuss their concerns without fear of stigma.
5. Foster partnerships with community organizations to develop outreach programs that educate students and women about reproductive health, abortion and provide access to necessary resources and services.
6. Implement programs that focus on empowering young women through leadership training, life skills development, and peer education initiatives. Empowered students are more likely to make informed decisions regarding their reproductive health.
7. Advocate for policies at the national and local levels that prioritize reproductive health services for students, ensuring that these policies are inclusive and address the unique challenges faced by unmarried female students.

Conclusion

Unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students have resulted in increased dropouts and abortions in HTEIs in Masvingo Province. Young women engaged in sexual relationships without adequate protection due to peer influence or desire for acceptance. Economic instability limited access to contraceptive methods and healthcare, make it harder for female students to prevent unwanted pregnancies. In addition, economic constraints led to reliance on partners, who exerted pressure on young women regarding sexual activities. Limited access to youth-friendly reproductive health services hinder female students' ability to obtain contraceptives or seek advice. Economic crisis in Zimbabwe has strained healthcare services, affecting the availability and quality of sexual health resources. Unsupportive family environments discourage open communication about sexual health, leading to uninformed decisions. Families that do not discuss sexual health openly, contributing to a lack of preparedness for safe sexual practices. Media representations of relationships and sexuality glamorised risky behaviours without highlighting the consequences, influencing young women's choices. Unemployment, depletion of family savings, persistent drought due to climate change and migration of parents leave female students without enough support – all these factors were attributed to high increase in unwanted pregnancy among female students in HTEIs in Masvingo Province.

The study recommends a multifaceted approach, which should include reproductive health education, access to contraceptives, and supportive healthcare services. The research underscores the significance of customised awareness campaigns that specifically address the challenges faced by unmarried female students, as these can greatly improve their understanding of reproductive health and available options. Furthermore, creating an environment that promotes open discussions about sexual and reproductive health in educational settings and family set ups is crucial for minimising stigma and fostering informed decision-making. The study advocates for partnership formaton among educational

institutions, healthcare providers, and community organisations to build a strong support network. These collaborations can lead to workshops, provide vital resources, and ensure students have access to necessary health services without fear of being judged. Preventing unwanted pregnancies among unmarried female students requires a holistic approach that equips young women with knowledge, resources, and comprehensive support. By adopting these strategies, educational institutions can significantly enhance their students' well-being and foster a more informed and healthier generation.

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CHAPTER 12: Unexpected pregnancies: Insights from 2nd year Masvingo Teachers' College students on Teaching Practice

Nhamburo Gladies and Masvosva Miriro

Introduction and Background

Unexpected pregnancies pose severe public health issues in South Africa (SA) and are also linked to bad health and social consequences that have a detrimental influence on academic advancement and future employment opportunities. The number of unplanned pregnancies among students at higher education institutions continues to rise, despite the government introduction of contraceptives and other preventative methods. A person's sexuality is formed as one grows up and continues to change and develop throughout life. There are international organisations that focus on sexual health issues of young children and women. One such organization is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), World Health Organisation (WHO), to mention a few. In sexual reproductive health UNESCO works to promote culturally relevant sexuality education, (Kim, Park, Kim, Park, Lee, Jo, Kim, and Shin, 2023). Globally, institutions of higher learning often struggle with the issues of unexpected pregnancies among students, (World Health Organisation, 2019). In America, the American Public Health Association tries to eliminate health disparities through public awareness for healthy global societies (Public Health 360, 2024). In eastern and southern African nations, the UNESCO'S 'Lets Talk' campaign is funded towards education, health and rights, (UNESCO, 2000: 2009).

Pregnant students face numerous challenges while on Teaching Practice. Teaching Practice (TP) is a crucial period for student teachers to achieve academic and personal growth. The human rights policy has given female students opportunities to fall pregnant and continue with their schooling without anyone chasing them away. This has seen some female students marrying off during the course while others simply falling pregnant during the course without even getting married. A lot of challenges surface during pregnancy. Even though there is that policy Strategic Development Goal number 4 (SDG4) which allows continuity and leaving no one behind, pregnant students seem to have challenges. This matter has some significant ethical and personal implications if the pregnancy falls under unexpected and wanted or unexpected unwanted. Mutinta (2022) describes an unexpected pregnancy as one which is unintended, unwanted or mistimed at the period of conception. The issue of unexpected pregnancies has become a critical and public health issue among student teachers in a number of nations. The Teaching Practice stint is a crucial period for student teachers to achieve academic and personal growth. However, for some an unexpected pregnancy can significantly impact their educational journey. The students with unexpected pregnancies needed to make informed choices. Tyler (2013) notes that choices being either positive or negative influence the way one prioritises issues of learning. Hence, negative choices can be detrimental to students' learning. Tyler (2013) further notes that students' choices should be considered if a meaningful learning has to take place. Despite the large enrolments some female students find themselves succumbing to unplanned pregnancies which may lead them to think of abortion. Generally, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and Human Immuno Virus (HIV) are mostly passed through the same way as pregnancy implies that one may find herself with all of these. The challenges that students who fall pregnant encounter differ depending upon marital status, background, and support systems (Mutinta, 2022).

According to Chireshe (2006) adolescents in Zimbabwe, especially females are quite vulnerable to sexual abusive situations due to early sexual debut, lack of assertiveness and

succumbing to peer pressure which may end up in unexpected pregnancies. Similarly, Mutinta, (2022) WHO, (2019) posit that most adolescents in South African tertiary institutions engage in premarital sex which renders them vulnerable to getting unexpected and unplanned pregnancies. These adolescents are found in this in Zimbabwe. In light of the challenges faced by the students, Life Skills Education (LSE) was conceptualised at the Ottawa Charter for Health Conference, where realisation of its importance in enabling learners to make better health choices was made (WHO, 1986). The United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS:2001) on HIV and AIDS recognised LSE as a methodology to address a variety of issues in youth development. Member states were tasked to educate their populace in strategies to curb the spread of HIV and AIDS. The governments pledged to ensure an HIV prevention curricular and safe environment, especially for young girls (Wikipedia the free encyclopaedia, 2017). Such an environment enables pregnant students to get HIV-pregnancy prophylaxis. It was against this background that the study explored the insights gained on unexpected pregnancies from students on TP. In 2023 the number of students on TP who registered for maternity leave was only nine. In 2024 the figure shot up to twenty (20). This chapter sought to explore the lived experiences of the second- year students who fell pregnant unintentionally during their Teaching Practice with a focus on the challenges they faced and the support systems they needed to succeed. By probing the complex interplay between unexpected pregnancy, the demands of teaching practice and the anticipated academic career pursuits, this research aims to provide. The Teaching Practice Issues Communication Register (TPICR) is a very valuable asset for identifying, managing and tracking issues that arise during teaching practice. Issues that are recorded in the TPICR are conflicts with supervisors, health and wellness, social issues, pregnancies, disability and any other issues that arise during Teaching Practice. Some notable trends on pregnancies were noticed leading to this research study.

Problem Statement

Unexpected pregnancies are a concern to the college, the student and students' parents or guardians. Students on teaching practice find themselves pregnant unexpectedly, leading to a myriad of challenges. This study aimed to inform the development of targeted support strategies and policies that promote academic success, well-being and to explore the experiences, challenges and support systems of second year student teachers who encountered unexpected pregnancies during Teaching Practice leading to the following research questions.

Research Questions

- i) What are the lived experiences of student teachers who encounter unexpected pregnancies during Teaching Practice?
- ii) Why do second year students on Teaching Practice face significant challenges in coping with unexpected pregnancies?
- iii) How do student teachers navigate their pregnancies and what support systems do they need to manage unexpected pregnancies during Teaching Practice?

Delimitation

The study focused exclusively on women of reproductive ages while leaving out other populations. The chapter exclusively focused on student teachers in their second year who also have a challenge of unexpected pregnancies. The study is limited Female students from Masvingo teachers' college were used for the study due to their close proximity.

Limitations

This was a small sample of a single institution. The findings would not be overly generalized since the study relied on self-reported data. The other limitation was that the study left out unexpected pregnancies for the males whom the females accused. The other limitation is that not all the pregnant students were given access to their insights. This was a clear indication that their voices remained unheard of.

Theoretical framework

As a research on unexpected pregnancy amongst students, the researchers chose to hinge this research on Beck's Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) which emphasises the role of cognition in human information processing and how it interfaces with the way people perceive situations (Pervin and John 2019). Austud (2009) asserts that CBT emphasises the importance of thinking in human behaviour and holds that thinking causes people to feel and act the way they do. This resonates well with the idea that female students who fall pregnant during TP can be influenced by the way they rationalise and perceive issues. Meyer, Moore and Viljoen (2003) highlight Beck's concept of automatic thoughts as, when a person is in a negative mood, and these thoughts which cause mood swings become habitual and pass so quickly that people may not be aware of their presence, even though these ingrained habits deeply affect emotions and behaviours. Therefore, one should be able to identify a corresponding negative thought that precedes the feeling state. This can be likened to a situation whereby a female student has a negative perception on having an unplanned pregnancy. Students who find themselves under this predicament may hold very different view point from the other due to circumstances once encountered, for example a female student from a non-supportive environment may hold very different perceptions from the one brought up in a supportive family. A well-groomed student from a rural setting may uphold high moral principles like 'ubuntu' more than a student from an urban setting. This difference in morality may pose different challenges when it comes to coping with the situation, in this case the unexpected pregnancy.

Meyer, Seligman and Rauschenberg (2011) highlight that CBT focuses on helping people identify, evaluate, and modify dysfunctional cognitions. The thoughts which are distorted by their wrong influences would actually determine one's behaviour, leading to unexpected pregnancies. Therefore, the way students with unexpected pregnancies are received by others can either enable or disable them to overcome.

Effective life skills (CBT Meyer, et al, 2011.) and moral principles enable unexpected pregnant students to cope with the challenges they encounter as they battle with work and pregnancy. Beck's CBT emphasises the importance of thinking in human behaviour and holds that thinking causes people to feel and act the way they do (Meyer et al 2011). It has been noted that Beck's therapy consists of highly specific learning experiences that teach clients to transform their distorted cognitions into more productive thinking and the theory goes on to assert that cognitive distortions, cognitive schemas and abnormal behaviour results from cognitive errors. Thus, students have to cope differently in the face of an unwanted pregnancy and turn the adverse experience. World Health Organisation (WHO) (1990) notes that teachers express judgmental attitudes towards female students' irresponsible behaviour besides strategies to minimise HIV and unwanted pregnancy risk.

Amnesty International (2000) observes that participatory methods in LSE prove to be the most relevant and appropriate methods which develop skills, attitudes and knowledge about sexuality. A research carried out by VVOB (2013) shows that there are activities that are undertaken in Zimbabwean tertiary institutions which include workshops, peer education,

distribution of condoms, advocacy, Health and Life Skills. These methods enable young people learn how to better manage themselves, their sexual choices, relationships and their health decisions. However, when students fail to positively manage themselves and wake up with unexpected unwanted pregnancies, they get affected emotionally and require problem solving skills. According to UNESCO (2009) problem solving skills enable individuals to deal constructively with problems in their lives. Significant problems that were left unresolved could cause mental stress and give rise to failure in accomplishing academic work. This can build them or kill the pregnant students if not well perceived and managed. Research studies in South Africa carried out by Mutinta in 2022 and the other one by Kgarose, Mashiane and Machaka in 2023, have investigated unplanned pregnancies and the underlying factors. Students from rural areas were five times more exposed to unexpected pregnancies. This current research was geared to help to inform the development of effective changes and interventions to reduce and cope with unexpected pregnancies.

Research methodology

This research was anchored in the qualitative research paradigm and carried at Masvingo Teachers' College (MTC). The qualitative case study research was chosen in the sense that unwanted pregnancy is a social phenomenon which calls for explaining things out (Cohen, Manion, and Morison, 2011; Robson, 2011). The study was a qualitative field research which placed emphasis upon exploring and understanding some meanings individuals ascribe to a social and human problem (Creswell, 2015). The researchers converged qualitative data from face-to-face unstructured interviews, on-line Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and the Teaching Practice Issues Communication Register (TPICR) in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the insights from female students pertaining unexpected pregnancies. This approach described meanings from the experiences and opinions of the participants, (Cohen, et al, 2011; Rovai, Baker & Ponton, 2014) and adopted the case study design. Creswell (2015: 2012: 2008) posits that in this design, the researchers collect data and thematically interpret the data.

The population

In this study, the population meant all the 300 female students on Teaching Practice who were from Masvingo Teachers' College. Langford, Higgs, & Fry, (2016) define a population as the target group with whom the research is going to be carried out. Gay (2010) also defines population as all the possible elements that should be included in the research. Deducing from the above definitions, a population was a group of female pregnant students from which the researchers were interested in studying and making conclusions. From all these female students, 240 were of child bearing ages (19- 39 years' age group sourced from the Selection Bio Data registers). The required population and sample were drawn from that age group.

Sample and sampling procedures

A sample, according to Best and Khan (2003) is a small proportion of the population selected for observation and analysis. Groves (2011) emphasizes that a sample which could be probabilistic or non-probabilistic is a subset of some units. This view is shared by Cohen, Manion, and Morison (2012) who also define sample as a subset of the whole population which is actually investigated by a researcher, and whose characteristics are generalised to the entire population. A sample was chosen to represent the behaviours that are part of the population. This study was targeting on pregnant female students on TP who were from Masvingo Teachers' College. The researchers employed both purposive and random sampling procedures. According to Creswell (2015) purposive sampling involves selecting subjects

because of some characteristics they possess and their ability to provide rich information for the study. Random sampling was used as well. Random sampling is a method of selecting a sample from a population in a way that every individual has a known probability of being selected, (Groves, 2011; Levy, 2008). The next table indicates the distribution of pregnancies district by district.

Table 1: MTC Pregnant statistics as from May 2024

District	Number of pregnant students
Bikita	5
Chiredzi	3
Chivi	1
Gutu	4
Masvingo	5
Mwenezi	2
Zaka	0
Total	20

Source: TP Issues Communication Register

A sample of ten pregnant students from the stated college were purposively considered for participation. Bikita and Masvingo Districts were randomly selected. In this study the researchers drew their sample of ten from the randomly selected districts (5 from Bikita and 5 from Masvingo). The two districts were ideal because they shared the equal number of pregnancies. Hence, the ten pregnant students from the total of 20 who were pregnant were considered. The research took almost three and a half months.

The Research Instruments

The data gathering instruments used were Teaching Practice Issues Communication Register (TPICR), unstructured interviews and FGD guide. The researchers used the TP Issues Communication Register to find possible participants. According to Creswell, (2015; 2012) and Grey (2010), an interview allows the researcher to seek clarification on unclear responses from participants. Unstructured interview was used to gain in-depth understanding of the participant's experience (Barbour, 2018; Kowitz, 2017; Yin, 2014.). An unstructured interview allows the participant to guide the conversation. On the other hand, FGDs had both closed and open-ended questions. These were used for comparative purposes.

Data Analysis Technique

Creswell, (2015) defines data analysis as the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. Creswell, (2015) goes on to say that, the purpose of analysing data is to obtain usable and useful information. Nominal and descriptive data were collected through four focused group discussions and ten (10) unstructured interviews. Collected data were presented in various forms such as diagrams and tables. Themes were drawn from the frequencies of the responses from participants. Nominal data from TP Issues Register were categorised and Non- numerical data were also presented in diagrams and in descriptive form.

Validity and reliability of instruments

The researchers did validity testing of the instruments before use in this research study to establish their suitability in collecting data. A small- scale pilot study with ten pregnant female students which closely duplicated the procedures of the main study was carried out. This was done to validate and triangulate the instruments and data collected. According to Parton (2012) a pre-test pilot study is used to flush some of the unforeseen weaknesses in the instruments so that the instruments are rectified before being used in the main study.

Ethical Issues

When we interviewed the students with unexpected pregnancies, it was very important to put support systems in place to ensure their emotional well-being and safety. Support systems which we put in place were private interview spaces at places chosen by the interviewees themselves. We also provided some emotional support through a trained counselor who happened to be one of the interviewers. Weaver, Flannelly, and Preston (2003), suggested that when carrying out sensitive interviews, have a trained therapist available to provide emotional support during the interview period. In addition, Stewart and Cash, (2017), emphasize the importance of being sensitive and respectful when conducting interviews on sensitive topics like unexpected pregnancies. The other support system was the informed consent.

Informed consent and justice

In every research discipline, it is unethical to collect information without the knowledge of participants, and their confirmed willingness. According to (Creswell, 2014, Mertens, 2010), consent implies that participants are made aware of the intention of the research and how participants should participate in the study. In this study, the researchers would make sure that no one will be forced to participate, strict considerations would be made to what Macleod (2011) says when they stressed that, informed consent is an important ethical norm in any research. The researchers also furnished the research participants with full information on the aims and objectives of the study, the duration of involvement, procedures that were to be followed. Therefore, all participants voluntarily participated in this study. It was also explained to them that they were free to withdraw if they felt they no longer wanted to proceed.

Maintaining confidentiality and anonymity

Each participant was made to understand that the information she supplied was kept confidential. Stewart and Cash, (2017) recommend that researchers use codes or pseudonyms to protect all participants' identities at the same time ensuring anonymity. Creswell, (2014) states that sharing information obtained for purposes of research with other participants or any other person other than the purpose of the research was unethical. The researchers made sure the information from participants was protected since it was unethical to identify an individual participant with the response. For reliable and valid information to be obtained, the researchers adhered to research ethical principles such as confidentiality, non-maleficence, informed consent and justice. By upholding the principle of maleficence, the researchers demonstrated their commitment to protect the well-being of participants and safety of data by storing the data in a safe place and not allowing anyone to temper with the information.

Research Findings

This chapter presents findings on unexpected pregnancies among 2nd year students on TP in both rural and urban settings. The study aimed to explore challenges and experiences encountered by students who got pregnant unexpectedly during their Teaching Practice and how to mitigate some of the challenges. A qualitative case study approach was employed. The results presented in this chapter are based on responses from ten (10) participants who were

interviewed individually and attended on-line focused group discussions twice using hidden identities. The findings provided valuable insights into experiences of students who encountered unexpected pregnancies while on TP, highlighting challenges they faced, the support systems used and the implications for their social, academic, well-being, and professional development. These results were organized into themes. The results have also been presented by means of tables, numbers, diagrams and narrative descriptions to enable easy understanding and interpretations. This research focused on insights of female pregnant students on TP. Views which were coming from pregnant student participants were that their unexpected pregnancies varied due to a variety of factors.

Diagram 3: Unexpected pregnancies’ stories.

Unexpected Pregnancy	(outcome) Wanted	(outcome) Unwanted
Rural pregnant students	2	3
Urban pregnant students	3	2

i) Unexpected pregnant students’ lived experience

Some key drivers were noted down by the pregnant students that led them to the indulgence in sexual activities. The major drivers were age, peer pressure and “promised marriages”. Unpacking the concepts, it was noted that age was in two categories. Young ladies could not realise that they were already being trapped while, spinsters fell prey to men who “promised marriages”. Everyone thought having sex was the ladder to marriage by those who were desperate for marriage. The ladies who needed money to improve Socio-economic factors by trying to improve resource bases from ‘blessers’ faced resistance of condom usage by the blessers and indulged in unsafe sex. The ladies who had never used birth control medication did not know that every medicine had an expiry date used expired birth control pills leading to unexpected pregnancies. Misconceptions from husbands with wives at college who thought their wives were engaging into sexual activities associating with what they have read on social media. In addition, most rural ladies were afraid of injectables and “Morning After Pills (MAP)”. The other devastating experiences were of contracting sexually transmitted infections like STIs, HIV and AIDS (Mutinta. 2022) as well as failing to perform academically. Pregnancies during Teaching Practice often posed significant challenges that impacted on students’ academic performances. More, often than not significant number of students deferred the course due to pregnancy related issues. Research has shown that pregnant students encountered various barriers such as stigma, lack of support and health issues (Mutinta, 2022). Besides, other pregnant related behaviours resurface such as being moody and cheeky, absenting oneself trying to solve health issues attached with being pregnant, withdrawn from other students in fear of them spreading news about the pregnancy. Late maternity booking (Enthoven, et al, 2022) or not booking at all were some of the experiences encountered by the pregnant students under study revealing that there is a gap between knowledge about good care of pregnancies and real practice. The other worrisome acts experienced were the Suicide attempts, drugs, alcohol uptake and poor nutrition which would affect the growing babies.

The aspect led to Mental health issues which aligned with Maphie 's (2023) study in Tanzania which revealed some psychological experiences by pregnant student.

ii) Reasons for facing the significant challenges

Contraceptives denial

The theme was common from both the interviews and focus group discussions. It was noted that some ladies did not want to use contraceptives. They relied on condoms and withdrawals when male counterparts ejaculated. The rural students cited poor accessibility of the health care facilities as the reason of not using contraceptives. They blamed the bus which would pass very early in the morning between 0200hrs and 0300hrs to be specific, on its way to town while very few taxis plied the road. The results were familiar to the study by Langford et al (2016). Their outcomes suggested the bus-riding yielded much lower accessibility levels than the car. The students then resorted to condom usage which they could access from the nearby shops and bottle stores for free. Three students in rural schools and two in urban confirmed that they didn't expect to get pregnant because they were using condoms and at times used the withdrawal system. After conceiving the men refused the pregnancies citing that they were not responsible since they used condoms or withdrew before ejaculation. This refusal to use contraceptives opting for condoms is what the National Research Council, (1989a) referred to as what ladies are afraid of since they think contraceptives affect their health especially emergency contraceptives like "Morning after pills. Lloyd and Turale (2011) allude that some female students do not consider themselves to be at risk of succumbing to social problems such as getting HIV and sexually transmitted infections. However, others positively embraced the learning of Life Skills Education during orientation as well as in lectures but fell prey to economic circumstances and peer pressure. All the 10 participants mentioned that the methods that were used in teaching LSE were quite effective. A research carried out by Luwes, Meda, & Swart (2016) shows that participatory methods yield good results in teaching LSE though the orientation seemed to have fallen on deaf ears of some ladies, especially the issue to do with unsafe sex which resulted in unexpected pregnancies. Further probing led to acceptance of contraceptive access and proper education as means of reducing unexpected pregnancies. Overall, Haeger, Lamme, and Cleland, (2018) highlighted the importance of contraceptives in reducing unexpected pregnancies and promoting reproductive health among women.

The mistiming

The other factor that contributed to unexpected pregnancies was mistiming as echoed in Mutinta, 2022). The pregnant students knew about contraceptives and even the 'Morning After' but had challenges in using them as well as accessing the pills even if they wanted to use it. This finding is in line with the findings from studies carried out in China, Kenya, Ghana, Malawi and South Africa, (Izugbara, 2015; WHO, 2018; Mutinta, 2022). One other particular interviewee described what she meant by mistiming. She said that the couple used to desist from sexual activities during her ovulation period and this had worked for years. Little did she know that they mistimed resulting in her falling pregnant. She had to accept the outcome though it disturbed her emotionally and had adverse effects on how she executed her TP duties. She also mentioned that abortion was out of the picture. The husband was very supportive and did all he could do to support by hiring a maid to escort her to her rural TP school.

Cheated by the blesser

Some participants indicated that they wanted to use a condom but the men ‘blessers’ did not consent to that as they were not prepared to have sex like someone eating a covered sweet (kudya sweet iri mupepa). These ladies pretty knew that they might get pregnant but simply gave in due to their need for financial resources support. One informant panicked when she realized that she had skipped her cycle but denied the fact. At one point she thought of abortion because the ‘blesser’ was a married man. She was ashamed of parents’ reactions, what friends would say, the mentors and worse still the church congregants. At this point the society was taking precedence. From both the focus group discussions and unstructured interviews emerged the moody, cheeky and withdrawn characteristics. The behaviours were meant to chase people away and scare them so that they would not witness the pregnancy symptoms.

iii) Provision of support systems

Although pregnancy was a rights-based opinion for the students, the college tried by all means to eradicate the issue of ‘Blessers’ through work for fees programmes. The college has to continue enforcing policies and introducing student led consortia which will generate more income so that even those on TP would be able to sustain economically. The other route the college took was for the Student Affairs (SA) office to continue engaging all students on TP. College counsellors have been made known and visible in addition to grandmothers and grandfathers who were tasked to engage the students. To re-enkindle unhu, culture day has been made a yearly event where students showcase cultural activities

Abstinence

Abstinence- was not in the picture before for single ladies but was considering abstinence after giving birth. Married women also indicated correct usage of contraceptives and condoms to prevent unexpected pregnancies. Counselling for couples was another option to reduce unplanned pregnancies. Empowerment of ladies in order to make wise and firm decisions as well as abstaining came also as a recommendation.

Discussions

In this study we found that all the pregnancies were unplanned - all student participants were associated with unexpected pregnancies. Unprotected sex was common leading to pregnancies. There was no pattern on age of those who embarked on unsafe sex which led to pregnancies. Those who fell pregnant ranged from 18 to 35 years making it very difficult to come up with an age pattern. This also resonated with Enthoven et al (2022) who also missed a pattern to follow during their investigations. The risk factors from this study were outlined. There were some significant differences between married and unmarried students in rural and urban schools when it came to the meaning of ‘unexpected pregnancy’. More pregnancies were realized from rural students. Some married students were forced to get pregnant (which they least expected) by husbands as collateral for their faithfulness without considering the pressures rendered on the bearer, while others got pregnant when they least expected when they were following their usual birth control system.

The husband’s support reduced the impact of the unexpected pregnancy. This clearly shows that any strong social support network would assist the pregnant wife/woman in overcoming the challenges to obtain care.

Unfortunately, the bulk of women who found themselves with unexpected pregnancies lack social and emotional and social resources support. Some husbands even divorce their wives as voiced by one student. He became violent and referred to her as a prostitute because he himself did not expect that pregnancy. He began to drink beer and used that as escape goat to abuse the pregnant wife. This was a sorrowful incident but the wife kept the pregnancy. During the Heroes holiday this respondent gave birth to a bouncing baby- boy the species which was very rare in the lineage. The husband has since asked for forgiveness and they are back together.

Conclusions

The study explored the experiences of student teachers who encountered unexpected pregnancies during their teaching practice. The findings revealed that the ten students faced significant challenges highlighting on the financial, emotional, physical, social and academic impacts of unexpected pregnancies on student teachers. The study also revealed gaps in societal, the institutional and personal support systems. Institutional support is crucial to create a culture of inclusivity. This study was of relevance to female students in that it enlightened them pertaining to the consequences they likely face if they find themselves with unwanted pregnancy. They would also have an awareness on desisting from having unplanned pregnancies. This would therefore, enable them to come up with informed choices. Overall, institutions should offer career guidance targeting students to help them find themselves, face challenges, balance work and leisure and family responsibilities.

Recommendations

- Longitudinal research to explore long term impacts of unexpected pregnancy on student teachers' careers and well-being is recommended.
- The college has to incorporate pregnancy and parenting simulations in TP.
- Physical and mental health issues need to be addressed more often in order for pregnant students to execute duties well. The other additional aspect is advocating for individualised management plans to avoid unwanted and unexpected pregnancies.
- Wellness and abstinence for unmarried women to prevent unexpected pregnancies together with the related illnesses.
- The college should continue communicating with students through roadshows, WhatsApp, TikTok, flyers, college magazine, dramas or inclusive sports for all as well as put in place a health welfare fund for those on TP. It has been noted that the majority of the students cannot budget their TP allowances on their own and so need some help from college.

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Chapter 13: Gender-Based Violence, Substance and Drug Abuse, STIS and Unintended Pregnancies in Higher and Tertiary Institutions in Masvingo Province: Charting the way forward

V. Z. Nyawo, T. Maravanyika and C. Mudzengi

Introduction

The book presents and discusses pertinent issues that shape learning environments for students in higher and tertiary institutions.

GBV is an umbrella term for any harmful act (occurring in public or private), perpetrated against a person's will - based on socially ascribed (gender) differences between males and females. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion, and other deprivations of liberty. These acts can occur in public or in private (Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crises., 2018).

Gender based violence takes many forms and affects many women (people) worldwide at different points in their life cycle, from infancy and childhood to adulthood and old age (WHO, 2005; Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crises., 2018). The past few decades have seen a lot of research to gather evidence on the dimensions of GBV, and many national and international organisations have been involved in the promotion of awareness on the seriousness of the issue (WHO, 2005). Many organisations have dedicated resources not only for research and advocacy but also for the development of strategies and policies aimed at preventing and addressing GBV at various levels including local, national and international. What is worrisome, however, is the limited progress as the different forms of GBV are increasingly being experienced in many situations including institutions of higher and tertiary education.

'Substance abuse' refers to the harmful or hazardous use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs (Sahu and Sahu, 2011, WHO, 2011). Most commonly abused substance include alcohol, marijuana (ganja), bhang, hashish (charas), various kinds of cough syrups, sedative tablets, brown sugar, heroin, cocaine, tobacco (cigarette, gutka, pan masala) etc. Any chemical that alters the physical or mental functioning of an individual is a drug. Using a drug to cure an illness, is termed 'drug use'. But when a drug is taken for reasons other than medical, in an amount, strength or frequency that causes damage to the physical or mental functioning of an individual, it becomes 'drug abuse'.

Unplanned pregnancies among young students in Higher Education Institution are a serious public health concern because they expose young women and their new-borns to potentially harmful health and social outcomes (Kgarose *et al*, 2023)

The chapter starts by presenting the major findings from the research (conducted in this book by different authors), key strategies that were used to curb gender based violence, drug and substance abuse, sexually transmitted Infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancies (in institutions of higher and tertiary institutions (HTI) in Masvingo and their successes and failures. The chapter then distils actionable insights on how gender based violence, drug abuse, STIs and unintended pregnancies can be tackled in higher and tertiary institutions in Masvingo Province and beyond going forward.

Authors in this book come from diverse backgrounds - universities, polytechnic colleges and teacher's colleges) and they have different experiences that provide rich leaning experiences. The authors used a variety of methods, including literature review, interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis.

The paper starts by discussing key findings from the authors of this book, discusses these findings and ends with a concluding section.

Key Findings

Sub-theme: GBV

From the authors of this book, GBV is rampant and is experienced in many forms in Masvingo. This includes sexual harassment, physical violence, stalking and online gender-based violence. According to Jemwa and Maruzani, – *'Sexual Harassment is the most prevalent form of GBV in, Masvingo...'* with many of these cases being unreported. Among the abusers were also the lectures who, according to Chinangure et. al. misled students saying *'No love no passing mark. No sex no passing mark.'*

Several factors were said to contribute to GBV in HTI in Masvingo and these include: power dynamics (usually between students and lecturers); drug abuse; detrimental cultural norms and values; economic hardships; shortage of on-campus accommodation; inadequate support systems that perpetuate GBV within these institutions; absence of safe and accessible reporting mechanisms within HTI, creating a culture of fear and silence and making students to be hesitant to report abuse fearing retaliation, and ostracization; lack of vibrant awareness programmes at institutions of higher and tertiary education and lack of robust policy frameworks to address gender based violence (Musebenzi).

GBV was said to have several negative impacts including poor performance in school, illnesses-after being infected with diseases and in the worst case scenario, suicide (Chinangure et. al.).

From the authors of this book, little is currently being done to reduce GBV in Masvingo institutions, and this raises serious concerns on the safety of students in these institutions.

Sub-theme: Drug and Substance Abuse

From the authors, *drug and substance abuse is common in HTI, with males being the most abusers* (Chipfupi and Connick). Students in these institutions were said to be using a wide range of drugs including: alcohol, marijuana, crustal myth (*dombo, tumbwa, mutoriro*), tobacco and spirits and sanitizers (Chipfupi and Connick).

Many factors were identified as leading to drug and substance abuse and these including:

- peer pressure and the feeling of freedom by students when away from their parents as clearly pointed out by Dombo et al, *'...peer pressure that led them to take drugs. Coupled with a degree of freedom, far away from the prying eyes of their parents, they began to indulge in drugs, firstly during the weekends before it became a permanent feature of their lives'*.

Identified effects of drug and substance abuse include:

- drug addiction that is destructive as it interferes heavily with normal and academic life. According to Dombo et. al., *'A sign of addiction is when consumption disrupts other*

parts of everyday life such as work, and relationships with family and friends. Addiction is when it impacts on other areas of life in a negative way. Addiction is destructive. Addiction is also seen in terms of devoting too much time to finding and taking the drug. This disrupts everyday activities.'

- Students becoming isolated. One student interviewed by Dombo et al mentioned that the drugs made him isolated and he felt like he was becoming crazy – *'I became a lone ranger, without friends staying in my room for the better part of each day high on methamphetamine. I foolishly believed that meth would give me the strength to do my school work. I no longer slept. I no longer had a life worth talking about. I felt like was going crazy'*.
- Mental illnesses and other social ills. According to Chipfupi and Connick - *"Drug abuse causes mental illnesses, depression and college dropouts. They may lead to violence with other students on campus, disturbing their peace". Some of the students engage in unprotected sexual activities due to drunkenness since some of the drugs used are too strong.*

Institutions were said to be using the following strategies to deal with drug and substance abuse: putting in place drug and substance abuse policies; putting in place counselling services - however, most institutions did not have these services and where the services were being offered, their effectiveness varied; and provision of drug and substance abuse education. However, authors noted that even though many institutions were providing these educational services, there was a general lack of follow up and monitoring (Chipfupi and Connick)

Sub-theme: unwanted pregnancies

From the contributors in this book, unwanted pregnancies were said to be high and go unreported posing a threat to the mental health and living conditions of the pregnant students. Some of these students opt to abort and since this illegal, many use dangerous methods (e.g. under witch doctors and angoras) that threaten their lives. being done by some female students.

Several factors were said to lead to these unwanted pregnancies including:

- Poor access to contraception due to lack of youth-friendly services and limited information about family planning.
- Cultural beliefs around the use of contraceptives – students opt not to use these.
- Peer pressure. Some students were compelled to engage in sexual activities because of peer pressure and the fear of being ostracized for not participating in certain social behaviors.
- Economic challenges that restricted student access to healthcare and contraceptives, making it difficult for students to make informed reproductive choices.
- Fear of being judged by peers, family, or the community deterred female students from seeking assistance or information about contraception.
- Negative influences from the media and social media platforms, according to Mahugu, *'portrayals of romance and relationships created unrealistic expectations about the consequences of sexual activity, potentially leading to risky behavior. Platforms like Face book, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat create a culture of peer validation, where students feel pressured to conform to perceived norms regarding sexual activities'*.
- Insufficient healthcare facilities around campuses hindering students' access to vital reproductive health services.

- High costs associated with contraceptives and reproductive health services rendering them unaffordable to students
- Lack of comprehensive sexual health education within the institutions

The impacts of unwanted pregnancies were said to be numerous including: increasing dropout rates, isolation, stress and stigma; female students committing suicide or shunning their homes or close relatives; Huge financial burden on female students as they failed to source funds for their education, general upkeep (Mahuyu); and students suffering from anxiety and depression – leading to increased suicide rates

In terms of current strategies to curb unwanted, pregnancies, it is clear that, very little is being done by the higher and tertiary institutions in Masvingo and more can be done.

Discussion

The sub-themes discussed in this book are interlinked and together, they combine to produce impacts that derail national capacity development efforts. Drug abuse, unwanted pregnancies and GBV are like the evil triplets – when combined, they make it difficult for students to thrive in their academic life. What is worrisome from the research conducted in this book, is the lack of effort by various institutions to take effective action to curb this social vices and ills. The institutions of higher and tertiary education in Masvingo are like death traps for students and this situation needs to be redressed urgently if the nation is to effectively build the human capital base. Findings on each sub-theme are discussed separately below

Theme: GBV

For gender based violence, findings from all authors were in unison – the forms of gender based violence identified were similar including economic abuse, sexual harassment, physical violence, stalking and online gender-based violence that encompass a wide range of abusive and discriminatory behaviours perpetrated through the use of digital technologies. Sexual harassment was identified as the most common form of GBV. These findings are not new but similar to findings of many other studies from literature (WHO, 2005, Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crises., 2018

Authors also identified complex inter-connected factors as leading to GBV, and there was no contradiction to their findings. Factors such as gender power dynamics, drug and substance abuse, retrogressive cultural norms and values, economic hardships, shortage of on campus accommodation, inadequate support systems for GBV survivors, absence of safe and accessible reporting mechanisms, absence of clear policies and procedures, were identified as key in perpetuating GBV within these institutions. These factors are quite similar to factors identified by many other scholars in literature (WHO 2005, Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crises., 2018

All authors were in agreement when it came to the impact of GBV on victims ranging from isolation and ill health, trauma, confusion and suicide, fear and loss of concentration, psychological trauma and exploitation and fear of failure.

Most authors raised worrisome concerns about the general lack of action by these institutions to curb the occurrence of GBV, as gender based violence is often ignored and left unattended. The lack of policies and procedures for reporting on GBV as well as mechanisms for supporting

victims makes institutions of higher and tertiary education very unsafe for students in their quest to achieve their academic goals.

Theme: Drug and Substance Abuse

The type of drugs and substances identified by others in this book are similar to those identified by Moyo (2020). The two papers under this theme raise complimentary issues and identify a myriad of factors leading to drug and substance abuse by students in higher and tertiary education. These factors include: peer pressure, assignments stress, weekend leisure, and sporting and social gatherings. These factors are similar to those identified by Moyo, (2020). Dombo et al also bring to the fore the realisation that some students start abusing drugs even before entering these institutions of higher and tertiary education. This raises important questions on the type of interventions that must be taken to stop this from happening.

The consequences of drug and substance abuse were said to be negative, leading to students failing their examinations, mental illnesses, depression, school dropouts, violence, crimes, poor social relationships, disruption of everyday lives, suicide attempts, risk of STIs and unplanned pregnancies. These findings are similar to those by Moyo (2020). As we can see, drug and substance abuse leads to complex outcomes leading to GBV and unplanned pregnancies that are topical areas for this book. The chapter by Dombo et al, however raises hope as it shows how some students have managed to escape and end use of drugs when effective support mechanisms were in place.

Theme: Unwanted Pregnancies

Papers under this theme looked at different aspects: existing health related policies and procedures within the institutions, the prevalence of unwanted pregnancies, their causes and impacts. From the policy perspective, Masiya points out that sexual health policies are currently unclear and that educational programs for reducing the occurrence of unwanted pregnancies on campuses were inadequate. Authors point out that the incidence of unwanted pregnancies was on the increase in these institutions and that many of these were unreported – posing health risks to students due to unsafe abortions. Several factors were identified as leading to the increase in these unwanted pregnancies including: cultural taboos surrounding discussions of sex often result in poor sexual education, leaving students uninformed about contraceptive options and safe practices, peer pressure; economic challenges that restrict access to healthcare and contraceptives; social media influences; insufficient healthcare facilities on or near campuses hinder students' access to vital reproductive health services; high costs associated with contraceptives and reproductive health services, and lack of comprehensive sexual health education within the institutions. The impacts cited by the different authors of unintended pregnancies were negative including; increasing dropout rates, feelings of shame, isolation and withdrawal from society, anxiety, depression, stress and stigma and discrimination from peers, students committing suicide or shunning their homes or close relatives, increased financial burden on female students as they failed to source funds for their education and increasing cycle of poverty for pregnant students.

As we can see from this discussion, drug and substance abuse leads to GBV and unwanted pregnancies and together, the three have compounding negative effects that hinder students from progressing well in their academic carriers. This book ends with a call to action for HTI to collaborate and join hands in the fight against drug and substance abuse, GBV and unwanted pregnancies. This can be done through various activities such as radio programs, shows and campaigns as well as putting in place effective policies and implementing these effectively.

Conclusions

Strategies for curbing these social vices cannot be done in peace meal – but must be holistic and encompassing. Ending GBV for instance, cannot be done by disconnecting and treating GBV as a separate and isolated problem – but should be situated in the context of gender inequalities (Sida, 2015). Strategies that are effective need to focus on economically empowering female students in HTI to enhance their bargaining power and ability to leave abusive relationships. This includes strengthening their entrepreneurship and employment opportunities on campuses, and promotion of gender transformative approaches that challenge underlying repressive gender normal and values throughout the entire education fraternity - beginning from lower levels (both primary and secondary education levels).

A total of 56 papers were presented in a conference themed ‘Interventions to Prevent and Tackle Gender-Based Violence, Drug Abuse, STIS and unintended Pregnancies in Tertiary Institutions in Masvingo Province. Among these papers 13 authored and co-authored by 29 contributors were selected to form this book. Some of these papers are presented in this book under subthemes starting with the Gender Based Violence subtheme and the last being on unwanted pregnancies. Experiences are shared from and between institutions, students, staff members and those in leadership with the hope to reduce the damage caused by the four dangers within institutions, organisations, communities and on the nation at large.

The book chapters presented in the book require further exploration which is hoped to come as future book projects pursued by same and more authors and survivors of abuses to give a closer look into these matters. The hope is to bring in creative ways of disseminating interventions and ensure that these strategies reach people and communities for them to be useful. Each subtheme in this book shall be developed in to a book, bringing together contributors who participated in the conference under the same subtheme.

Chapters in this book are written using diverse approaches. Some were written by staff members who observed the impact of abuses and excesses on students, others were written from the perspective of the leadership that experienced firsthand, how students suffered within institutions because of gender based abuse, substance abuse or unwanted pregnancies. Be that as it may, some perspectives have not been covered in this book. For instance, perspectives of the victims and the perpetrators as it were. Envisaged future book projects are hoped to cover more perspectives for better insights.

Future conferences on any of the four subthemes are sure to benefit from this book initiative. The hope is to put together interventions that are useful anywhere in the country and beyond. The interventions shall also be available to policy makers and government officials so that no one and no place is left behind.

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