Sexual Dilemma: Perceptions and Attitudes of Sexually Violated Women in Gweru Urban, Zimbabwe

By

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Research Article

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ABSTRACT

Every human being (women included) has a right to safe and satisfying sex and to consent to sex. However, there are some men in society who force themselves on women and this is called sexual violence. Such force is a violation of their rights. The purpose of this study was to find out the perceptions of violated women towards sexual violence. The study was carried out at Msasa Project Gweru. The objectives were to expose the types of sexual violence they encounter and how the women react to it. A descriptive survey design was used for the study and a purposive sampling method was used to obtain 30 women who were sexually violated. These women were interviewed to assess their perceptions on sexual violence. The study revealed that sexual violence occurs across all ages but the perceived causes are culture, lust, gender as well as the personality of individual males. The women themselves can also incite sexual violence through their dressing, looks and behavior. The findings show that the women felt that stiffer penalties, counseling and improved communication can decrease the rate of sexual violence. The women suggest that men be educated on the rights of women and to value women so that they may understand the feelings of women and change their behavior of sexual violence. As a result, the researcher suggests that the women be empowered through educating them on their rights and what to do in case of sexual violation. The organisations which help women need to involve men in an effort to change their behavior. The perpetrators of sexual violence should be given a stiffer penalty which is prohibitive.

Keywords: Health, Reproductive rights, Sexual health, Sexual rights, Sexual violence.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Sadik (2002) points out that sexual violence occurs throughout the world but because of its private nature, estimating the extent of the problem is difficult in most countries. Previous researches have suggested that sexual assault is one of the most under-reported crimes where there are numerous "hidden" victims who do not report their victimisation to the police or to health officials, making them invisible in official statistics (Schwartz, 1997). A review of available ‘indicators’ of violence against women in Australia found that police data and crime victimisation survey data continue to underestimate the extent of violence against women (Putt & Higgins). In the same vein, a child and adult sexual assault survey by Fergusson and Mullen (1999), found that in Australia, non contact sexual abuse like pornography, photography, watching, exposing/flash comments have a prevalence rate ranging from 8 percent to 62 per cent, where as with sexual abuse involving penetration or intercourse, including digital, oral, vaginal and anal, the prevalence rate ranges from 1.3% to 28.7%. Whilst these numbers may be low, what is disturbing is that victim of sexual assault rarely report the crime to police (Satin, 1992). The area of sexual violence therefore needs to be researched hence this study to investigate the perception of women.

Sexual assault by an intimate partner is neither rare nor unique to any particular region of the world (WHO; 2000). For instance, 23% of women in North London, England, reported having been the victims of either an attempted or completed rape by a partner in their lifetime. Similar figures have been reported for Guadalajara, Mexico (23.0%), Leo’n, Nicaragua (21.7%), Lima, Peru (22.5%), Canada (8.0%), England, Wales and Scotland (combined) (14.2%), Finland (5.9%), Switzerland (11.6%) and the United States (7.7%),(WHO; 2000). In addition, studies done in Mexico and the United States estimate that 40–52% of women experiencing physical violence by an intimate partner have also been sexually coerced by that partner though sometimes sexual violence occurs without physical violence (Granados, 1996). Women are violated in their homes and what do they think about it.
Statistics from the Royal Women’s Hospital journal reveal that 7.1% of Australian women over 18 years experienced an incidence of sexual violence in the previous 12 months whilst 23% of women who had been married or in a relationship experienced violence by a partner at some time during the relationship. In a national survey conducted in the United States of America, 14.8% of women over 17 years of age reported having been raped in their lifetime (with an additional 2.8% having experienced attempted rape) (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). In another survey of the general population of women over 15 years of age in the Czech Republic, 11.6% of women reported forced sexual contact in their lifetime, 3.4% reporting that this had occurred more than once. The most common form of contact was forced vaginal intercourse (Weiss & Zverina, 1999). Pregnant women are not exempted from sexual violence as shown by statistics from the Royal Women’s Hospital which indicated that 42% of the violated women who experienced violence by a previous partner were pregnant at the time of the violence and 20% experienced violence for the first time during pregnancy (World Sexual Violence Report; 2011).

Sexual violence is also a menace for adolescence as nearly half of the sexually active adolescent women in a multi-country study in the Caribbean reported that their first sexual intercourse was forced (Halco´n, Beuhring & Blum, 2000). In Lima, Peru, the percentage of young women reporting forced sexual initiation was 40% (Caceres, Vanoss & Sid Hudes, 2000).

Studies have shown that sexual violence is also rampant in the continent of Africa. Research in South Africa and Tanzania reflects that nearly one in four women may experience sexual violence by an intimate partner (Nikoijama, 2002). In addition, a survey of women aged 18–49 years carried out in three provinces of South Africa found that 1.3% of women had been forced, physically or by means of verbal threats, to have non-consensual sex (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2000). On the other hand, up to one-third of adolescent girls report their first sexual experience as being forced (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). A number of studies, from sub-Saharan Africa, indicate that the first sexual experience of girls is often unwanted and forced (World Sexual Violence Report, 2011). The report goes on to cite the findings of a case study of adolescent girls attending antenatal clinic in Cape Town, South Africa which showed that 31.9% of 191 pregnant adolescents and 18.1% of 353 non pregnant adolescents (matched for age and neighborhood or school) reported that force was used during their sexual initiation. Forced sexual initiation and coercion during adolescence have been reported in many countries and this suggests that sexual violence is rampant in many countries.

Zimbabwe is not spared from the crimes of sexual violence. In Harare, a survey of 1006 women was done in 1996 and revealed that 2.2% of the sample reported sexual violence (United Nations Report; 1998). In a survey conducted by WHO in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe on intimate violence, 25.0% of the 966 women interviewed, reported sexual violence by a husband, boyfriend or an acquaintance. Although the women who report the crime of sexual violence are low, the percentage is higher for women who seek help from organizations which help victimized women. In Gweru, sexual violence is a reality as shown by statistics from institutions dealing with domestic violence such as Musasa Project, Medicines San Frontiers (MSF) and Gweru District Hospital. These show a significant rise of 78% in the 2 years, 2009 and 2010. The above evidence show that sexual violence is a problem worldwide including Zimbabwe.

**Problem Statement**

World Health Organisation and the Ministry of Health, together with other stakeholders are fighting for the rights of women to be reproductively and sexually healthy. However, this goal remains a dream to women as their sexual rights are violated. It is a cause for concern to note that sexual violence is on the increase in Gweru as indicated by an average increase of 78% in the reported cases at three institutions over the 2 years, 2009 and 2010. The researcher therefore would like to find out the perceptions of the women towards sexual violence.

**Purpose of the Study**

The surge in the reported cases of sexual violence in Gweru prompted the researcher to investigate the perceptions of women towards the sexual violence. This study therefore sought to identify those effects on the women of Gweru urban. The study focused on the reproductive effects, psychological effects and physical effects of sexual violence.

**Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- In what way are women sexually abused?
- What makes men sexually violate women?
- How do women react to sexual violence?
What can be done to reduce sexual violence?

Objectives of the Research

In order to answer the research questions, the following objectives were used;
To expose how women are sexually violated
To find out what women think makes men sexually violent
To expose the reactions of women to sexual violence
To identify methods of reducing sexual violence

Assumptions

In this study the researchers assumed that;
Women are being violated sexually in or outside marriage.

RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The 1983 WHO Report noted that women were facing challenges in terms of their reproductive health. To address this, the United Nations then came up with the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of which the MDG number 5 addresses the reproductive health of women. The MDG number 5 states that all member countries should make great efforts to improve maternal health by the year 2015. The Zimbabwean Government, as a member of the United Nations, made a commitment to address the reproductive health challenges of women through the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare. One of the components of the reproductive health package is protection and prevention of women from sexual and gender violence. This can only be achieved if the sexual rights of women are observed. However, from the reports in the press, which are supported by the statistics in the statement of the problem, the Zimbabwean woman is not being protected from sexual violence.

The significance of this study is that it revealed factors which made women adopt a negative attitude towards their sexual rights allowing men to take advantage of them. The study reaches those women who are silent and through focus groups assist them to air their views. The results of the study exposed the magnitude of sexual violence and how the women react to it. To the community, Ministry of Health and Child Welfare and non-governmental organization seeking to help women achieve reproductive and sexual health, the findings and recommendations of the study may help them to come up with campaign strategies to improve sexual health. As a result, women will be empowered by knowledge provided by this study through its findings and recommendations.

Delimitation

The study focused on women between the ages of 15 to 35 years as these are the women in their reproductive period. The study also focused on those women who were sexually violated from Msasa project and Gweru District Hospital to investigate the effects of sexual violence. The area of study was limited to Gweru urban focusing on Gweru District Hospital and Msasa Project as these institutions are where some of the sexually violated women are found in the district.

Limitations of the study

Some of the women sexually violated may not be accessible as they do not report or seek help. The researcher therefore focused on those who reported and used counselors at Msasa Project and Gweru District Hospital to access them. It was not easy to engage some of the women in conversation since sex issues are taboo in most cultures in Zimbabwe. However, the researchers combined their previous experiences as nurses and counselors and teachers with good interview techniques to obtain this sensitive information.

THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Thornhill and Palmer (2000) view the behaviour of sexual violence as resembling that of other animals and such behaviors, referred to as ‘forced copulations’, involve an animal being approached and sexually penetrated whilst it struggles or attempts to escape. This is an observation also noted by Johnson (1992) who explains that if a woman resists sexual advances, she can be physically forced or coerced into submission. If men's behavior is like that of an
animal, as postulated by Thornhill and Palmer (2000), then it is not surprising that they abuse women. The behavior of sexual violence can also be influenced by the theory of reasoned action which claims that, the person’s attitude and the person’s environment influence willful behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2003). If the man’s attitude towards the woman is negative, and he believes that by raping the woman, he will enjoy sex (positive outcome) then the animal behavior can be applied. This is also supported by Becker’s (1998) Health Belief Model which claims that a behavior can be done if the person anticipates benefits from such behavior. These three theories can therefore explain the behavior of sexual violence.

The same principles also influence the reaction of women towards sexual violence. The woman can report sexual violence if she has a positive attitude towards self, views sexual violence as wrong and anticipates benefits from reporting. Whilst the behavior of both men and women can be explained by the Health Belief Model and the theory of reasoned action, it has a bearing on the socialisation and culture of the individual.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research methodology was used for this study since as it can be used to investigate a phenomenon as well as understanding human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior. As a result, this methodology was chosen to understand the perceptions of women towards sexual violence. The design of choice was the descriptive survey as it allows the researcher to gain more information about characteristics within the field of study in a short time (Waltz and Bausell, 1981). The descriptive design was best suited for this research because of its qualitative nature and its humanist thrust which suits well the investigation into the study of human subjects. It allows the involvement of the subjects rather than relegating them to scientific objects whose reaction can be predetermined and therefore uniform.

The study population was the sexually violated women who reported at Msasa Project and Gweru Hospital. The researchers used purposive sampling to obtain 30 women who were sexually violated for the interviews. This method of sampling was chosen because the researchers wanted to obtain the perceptions of those who had suffered sexual violence.

The data collection instruments were interviews. Face to face interviews were the best instrument available because they allowed collection of data in depth (Brunt, 1997). They allowed flexibility and clarification of questions as the interviewer could modify the line of inquiry to enable the interviewee to understand (Borg and Gall, 1997). The interview allowed probing of interesting responses and observation of the non verbal responses (Polit and Hungler; 2004). Since the information in this study is sensitive, observation of body language was very important and called for probing, to bring out sensitive information. In addition, the interviews allowed the researchers to explain the purpose of the interview so as to gain cooperation which was essential in order to access the perceptions of women towards sexual violence. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics.

Ethical considerations

Matters of sex are private and not easy to talk about to strangers, therefore respondents need to be strongly reassured of confidentiality and anonymity. They were reassured that no name would appear anywhere such that even the researcher would not even know who said what. The respondents’ were also assured that the information obtained would only be used for the purpose of the study. Informed consent was also sought from the subject who entered into the study willingly. They were asked to sign the consent forms whose contents were explained to them before signing. The subjects were reassured that they would retain the right to withdraw from the study whenever they felt the need. Permission to carry out the research was sought from the institutions involved and the Medical Research Board.

FINDINGS

Age

The age group of the women in this study was 16 years to 35 years and these are the women who are sexually active and are still in their reproductive age. Their ages were divided into 4 age groups of 5 year interval.
Table 1: Distribution of women according to age N=30

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 - 20</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 - 25</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 - 30</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 - 35</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 16 - 20 and the 31-35 years age groups both had 8 women (27%) of the sample whilst the 21 -25 and the 26-30 years age group had 7 (23%) women. These findings show an evenly distribution of sexual violence across all the age groups. This means that sexual violence can occur to adolescent, young adult women as well as those in the middle age. Sexual violence in the adolescence can be attributed to forced sexual initiation as supported by the World Sexual Violence Report (2011) which reports that most adolescents are initiated into sex by force. The findings also support Watts & Zimmerman (2002) who report that up to one-third of adolescent girls reported their first sexual experience as being forced. They also concur with the findings of a study by Caceres et al (2000) which showed that 40% of young women reported that their sexual initiation was forced. In addition to this, Halco’n et al (2000) also found that 50% of women in a European multi country study reported that their first sexual intercourse was forced. These findings are supported by a number of studies, from sub-Saharan Africa, indicating that the first sexual experience of girls is often unwanted and forced (World Sexual Violence Report, 2011). Considering the research findings and the supporting literature, the researchers therefore link this high percentage of sexual violence to adolescents as forced initiation supported by the culture which encourages men to use force since the girl is expected to be submissive.

Another 27% of the interviewed women fell into the 31-35 age group. These figures were significant to raise concern. There were a number of possible explanations to this high percentage. One possible explanation is that the violence could be attributed to intimate partner violence. This is in accordance with the WHO report which says that sexual assault by an intimate partner is neither rare nor unique to any particular region of the world (WHO; 2000). The report goes on to list percentages of women who were sexually violated by their intimate partners, for instance, 23% of women in North London, England, reported having been the victim of either an attempted or completed rape by a partner in their lifetime. Similar figures have been reported for Guadalajara, Mexico (23.0%), Leo’n, Nicaragua (21.7%), Lima, Peru (22.5%), Canada 8.0%, England, Wales and Scotland(combined) 14.2%, Finland 5.9%, Switzerland11.6% and the United States 7.7%,(WHO;2000). With this evidence the researcher feels that intimate partner violence is occurring but the women are bound by culture such that few women will report the men who paid lobola for her for sexual violence.

Marital status

The marital status of the women was assessed in relation to sexual violence to note if there is a relationship. Figure 4.1 shows the distribution of sexual violence in relation to marital status.
The women who were married constituted 76%, the divorced 12%, widowed 10% and the single 2%. The majority (76%) of the respondents were married. Since 76% of the sexually violated women are married, then the perpetrators of the sexual violence are their intimate partners. These findings are in consensus with Statistics from the Royal Women’s Hospital Journal which revealed that 23% of women who had been married or in a de facto relationship experienced violence by a partner at some time during the relationship. The high percentage of sexual violence in married women could be that the marriage was a cover up by sexual violence by a boyfriend as stated by Heise (1994), that in some societies, the cultural “solution” to rape is that the woman should marry the rapist, thereby preserving the integrity of the woman and her family by legitimizing the union. This practice is common in the Shona culture which views any sexual relationship with an unmarried girl as unlawful unless sanctioned by marriage (Holleman, 1997). Thus the researcher attributes the high prevalence of sexual violence in married women to intimate partner violence and to marriages occurring as a result of sexual violence. These findings support the findings of a survey conducted by WHO in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe on intimate violence. The survey revealed that 25% of the 966 women interviewed, reported sexual violence by a husband or a boyfriend.

Level of Education

The other biographic data assessed in relation to sexual violence is the level of education of the women. The researcher wanted to find out if there was any relationship between level of education and sexual violence. Table 4.2 shows the level of education of the women who were violated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The violated women with primary education were 2 which is 7%. Those with secondary education were 18 (60%) with the remaining 10 (33%) of the women having tertiary education. One would assume that the women who are sexually violated are illiterate and do not know about human rights. However all the women who were sexually violated are literate so they are expected to understand their sexual rights. This could be that they are not empowered or it could
be because of their culture. The culture aspect is supported by Chimhundu (1995) who depicts sexual relations to involve victory and conquest on the part of the male, and defeat and surrender on the part of the female. Even if the majority (60%) of the women attained secondary education and 33% attaining tertiary education, they are still violated sexually. The findings appear to suggest that sexual violence has nothing to do with the level of education or knowing one’s rights but maybe linked to the culture of the individual.

In addition, the theory of reasoned action explains the action taken by the women after being sexually violated. It should be noted that a person’s reaction is governed by a number of factors. Such factors include the beliefs about what the significant people think should be done and the individual’s motivation to comply with those other people’s wishes. So if the significant person in the woman’s life is the boyfriend or spouse and she believes in him, then she will be violated and to some extent live with the violation despite her level of education.

Types of sexual violence

The types of sexual violence that the women encountered were assessed in order to find out how women are sexually violated as well as to assess if women are aware of the types of sexual violence. Table 3 shows the types of sexual violence that these women encountered whilst Figure 2 shows the types of sexual violence known by the women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of sexual violence</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coercion</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced prostitution</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced marriage</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The types of sexual violence encountered by the women who were interviewed are coercion, rape and forced marriage. Coercion had a frequency of 60% which was followed by rape with a frequency of 33%. Forced marriages had a frequency of 7% whilst forced prostitution had none. These results echo the sentiments of Johnson (1992) who explains that if a woman resists sexual advances, she can be physically forced or coerced into submission. In many societies, women are treated as the property of men who keep them under subjectivity and to do as told without any question, thus subjecting them to sexual violence (Ncube, 1998). In addition, Kambarami (2007) concludes that culturally, women have no sexual rights, as such men can use them as sexual toys.

![Figure 2: Types of Sexual Violence Known to Women]
Seventy percent (70%) of the women knew about rape whilst 37% had knowledge on sexual coercion. Sexual harassment as a type of sexual violence was known by 7% of the women. The women had knowledge of the types of sexual violence although none of them were aware that sexual trafficking and forced marriage are forms of sexual violence. Since the women are not aware that forced marriage is a form of sexual violence, they may be easily be forced into marriage and may not do anything about it. On the same note, they may be involved in commercial sex as a form of employment without considering it as sexual violence.

Attitudes of Women towards Sexual Violence

The attitudes of women were assessed so as to find out their beliefs and feelings towards sexual violence. These beliefs and feelings, according to the theory of reasoned action, govern the women's behavior towards sexual violence.

What women think makes men sexually violent

The women were assessed on what they believe to be the causes of sexual abuse. The purpose of this was to bring out the perceptions of women on the social problem of sexual violence. The responses of the interviews are shown in Figure 4.3.

![Figure 3: What Women Think Makes Men Sexually Violent](image)

The responses from figure 4.3 show that the most common perceived causes of sexual violence were culture as indicated by 57% of the women and personality of the man as indicated by 50%. Fifteen percent (15%) of the women perceived woman factor as a cause for sexual violence. Women factor includes dressing, suggestive behaviour and denying the husband his conjugal rights. Thirteen percent (13%) of the women thought that sexual violence occurs as a result of men's lust and gender. Other factors which were highlighted by 20% of the sample were poverty, political power and raping for fun.

According to the women interviewed, culture seems to be the central reason why men sexually abuse women. Sentiments like 'society allows men to do whatever they want with women because of this lobola thing', were common from the interviews. It appears as if the women feel that the issue of lobola is at the bottom of sexual violence and yet some women are abused outside marriage. The perceived cause of culture supports what is explained in “The changing family in Zambia” Journal (1997), that women have no choice when it comes to sex. They cannot even say “no” as they are brought up for the comfort and enjoyment of men. The arguments brought up by this literature seem to suggest that women are meant to be enjoyed by men irrespective of paying lobola hence the raping, harassment and so forth. Furthermore, the African culture frowns upon a woman who is not submissive to her husband in matters of sex (Ncube, 1998). This seems to imply that the man can have sex whenever he wants and the woman will agree because sex in marriage is just a marriage “deal” which should be fulfilled whenever the husband demands it. Thus culturally women have no sexual rights; as a result men can use them as a sexual toy (Kambarami, 2007). The woman however just puts up with it as they were socialized to do the husband’s bidding and
should not complain about sexual assault (Nkosi, 2006). The woman was socialized to respect men and that culture implies that a husband has a right or even duty to force himself onto a woman (Jewles, 2006). This is supported by Madlala (2002), who states that sexual violence makes the African man more powerful and virile. This scenario makes it difficult to give sexual violence a definition which suits all cultures.

Even though Jones (1999) says that the societal ideology of male superiority emphasizes dominance, physical strength and male honour, which encourage sexual violence, some women argued that the women put themselves in a position to be raped. One girl interviewed pointed out that, 'girls go out to secluded areas with guys, wearing seductive dresses then they claim to have been raped'. The seductive behavior of the women may stimulate sexual feelings in the men who may become violent if turned down. Ariffin (1997) agrees with this view as he notes that in many cultural settings, it is held that men are unable to control their sexual urges and that women are responsible for provoking sexual desire in men. Besides the cultural connotations that culture allows men to be sexually violent; there is the notation that women may invite it as well in the way they dress and look at a guy. Whatever the case, there can be no justification for sexual violence.

The women thought that personality and the characteristics of an individual man can result in him violating women sexually. “There are some men who want to test what they see on pornographic movies,” said one girl. Some of the women claim that there are some men who are cruel and enjoy sex whilst the woman is screaming or is in pain. This is in support of the animal coercive theory by Thornhill and Palmer (2000), who noted that the behavior resembling rape in humans is widespread in other animals and such behaviors, referred to as ‘forced copulations’, involve an animal being approached and sexually penetrated whilst it struggles or attempts to escape.

Another personality problem which was a common response during interviews was lust. Comments like, ‘men cannot be satisfied with one woman’ and ‘they cannot leave beautiful girls alone’ or ‘they behave like animals’ were common during the interviews. This appears to supports Johnson (1992) who explains that if a woman resists sexual advances, she can be physically forced or coerced into submission. However, some girls interviewed argued that, ‘it may not be lust but the guy will be in love or wanting to marry but the girl will be reluctant so the guy will resort to rape in order to win the girl as she will be left with no choice but to marry him’. This argument is supported by Heise (1994), who claims that in some societies, the cultural “solution” to rape is that the woman should marry the rapist, thereby preserving the integrity of the woman and her family by legitimizing the union. On a similar note, Thornhill and Palmer (2000) believe that rape appears not as an aberration but as an alternative gene-promotion strategy that is most likely to be adopted by the ‘losers’ in the competitive, harembuilding struggle. It seems as if the women believe that sexual violence could be a personality problem inherent in the men, where a man is not able to convince a woman to marry him and resorts to rape or he is just lustful and enjoys inflicting pain.

Some women thought that psychological problems can be the cause of sexual violence. They attributed the use of violence on women to abuse during childhood. This point is postulated in the theories of rape where McKibbin et al, (2008) argue that there may be several different types of rapists or rape strategies of which one of them is psychopathic rapists. It appears as if the women are aware that psychological problems can alter the behavior of men and it can be altered towards sexual violence. From the findings, it appears as if women believe that men in authority, with power and money take advantage of the poor and vulnerable women. One college student laments, “some men use blackmail to force themselves on a woman and if you refuse, you will fail.” This seems to suggest that some college girls are awarded pass marks in return for sexual favours. This is sexual harassment which is a type of sexual violence. In support of this, Hagen (2002) describes some of the conditions where the gains from sexual violence may outweigh the cost of such behavior to be; high status males who do not fear reprisal and low status women who can do anything for money or a meal. In the case of the college girls who want to pass, they may do anything for a pass mark. This may mean that the lecturers, who are high status males, maybe taking advantage of the college girls who want to pass an examination.

The Reactions of Women to Sexual Violence

In trying to find out the attitudes of women towards sexual violence, the researcher interviewed women on how they should react to sexual violence. The interview results are shown in Figure 4.4.
Figure 4: How women should react to violence

From the interviews, 60% of the women suggested that the men be reported. Twenty three percent (23%) thought that the couple should negotiate but the woman should be firm during the negotiation. Counseling was another way of dealing with the violence which was suggested by 17% of the women. Seven percent (7%) said that they would rather tolerate or accept the man's demands without question. The other options brought up by the women were ending the relationship or fighting back which accounted for 3% of the women.

The women felt that the abused woman should report to the police, woman organisation or to a professional health worker. However some women argued that one cannot report her husband or the men she loves because that will be the end of the relationship. Sentiments like, 'report a man that paid lobola for you' and 'report the man you love' were brought up from the interviews. It seems that the women were reluctant to report sexual violence because they felt that it was not the right thing to do or they believed that the situation would get better. This way of behaviour is explained by the theory of the health belief model which says that action is only taken if one expects to benefit from the outcome. However, by reporting one’s partner, the woman could end up losing a lover who could also be the bread winner, so she may opt to keep quiet about it. The sentiments of the women seem to be in support of Kambarami (2007) who said that culturally, women have no sexual rights, as a result men can use them as a sexual toy with nobody worrying about the effects of forced sex on them as long as the man is satisfied. In addition, “The changing family in Zambia” Journal (1997), explains that women have no choice when it comes to sex. They cannot even say “no” as they are brought up for the comfort and enjoyment of men. Therefore those women who are against reporting but opting to get along with the abuse are only following their culture.

The reluctance to report can be attributed to cultural practices and beliefs. The beliefs that man has a right or even duty to force himself onto a woman appeared to influence how such women reacted to sexual violence (Jewles, 2006). This is supported by Madlala (2002) and Nkosi (2006), who state that sexual violence makes the African man more powerful and virile and that the woman should just put up with it as they were socialized to do the husband’s biding and should not complain about sexual assault.

The women believed that violated women should seek counseling. Counseling would be beneficial according to Foa (1999), who claims that in the absence of trauma counseling, negative psychological effects have been known to persist following rape. However, the women felt that counseling can be beneficial depending on who is doing the counseling. They argued that counseling by relatives focuses on the woman to be more submissive and do what the husband wants unlike counseling by a professional who focuses on what is best for the two. In the same vein, girls interviewed opted to talk to a nurse or counselor to get advice rather than to their parents as they believed that a
parent can become emotional or judgmental. A professional counselor should not be judgmental or emotional or else the victim would close down and will not get the help required.

These responses from the women showed that the woman had various methods of dealing with sexual violence. These included reporting, negotiating, counseling, accepting the situation and others such as ending the relationship or fighting back. However, according to the theory of reasoned action, specific behavior is controlled by two factors; the attitude (negative or positive) towards the behavior and the influence of the social environment (general subjective norm) on that behavior. This means that the option that is going to be chosen by an individual woman will be governed by her attitude towards sexual violence as well as her social environment hence the responses of the women to sexual violence may never be the same.

Controlling sexual violence

In response to the question; what can be done about sexual violence? The women had suggestions for ending or reducing sexual violence. Their suggestions are shown in Figure 5.

![Figure 5: Ways of Reducing Sexual Violence](image)

In order to reduce sexual violence, 57% of the women believe that if men are given stiffer penalties, they will not violate women. Thirty three percent (33%) believed that empowerment of women and educating men on the rights of women. Those who opted for counseling had a frequency of 23%

From the findings, it came out that women need to be empowered. The women thought that if they are all informed about their rights and what steps to take when violated, they will have been empowered. They also felt that they need life skills to defend themselves and be able to negotiate for safe sex. The women also lamented on the jail term given to rapist that it is not prohibitive hence stiffer penalties should be introduced. "Men need to be castrated or amputated then no one will rape again", said some of the interviewees. Some were more rational and suggested that there be organisations which will educate men on the rights of women so that the men will realize that women are people with feelings and their rights are human rights too. The women thought that involving men will decrease the cases of sexual violence since both parties will be involved.

The women believe that counseling can be done to the victims to help them deal with the trauma of sexual violence. They also noted that improved communication can help solve pending problems which may lead to sexual violence. However some women felt that if communication fails, it would be better to end the relationship through divorce or separation.
CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed that women believe that culture contributes significantly to sexual violence as it seems to be permissive to men forcing themselves on women. However, some men violate women because of their personality i.e. cruelty. The attitude of women towards sexual violence is influenced by their culture. Because of their culture, the women find it difficult to report sexual violence unless pushed to the limit.

The type of sexual violence which the women mostly encounter is sexual coercion and rape. The study also revealed that the women are not aware of forced marriage and sexual trafficking as types of sexual violence.

The findings show that women feel that men need to be educated on the rights and feelings of women. In addition to this, women felt that stiffer penalties which are deterrent should be given to perpetrators of sexual violence.

Sexual violence is a reality and the women are violated in and outside their homes. This act is a result of the socialisation process which has socialized women to be submissive whilst men are socialized to rule women. This means that even if women are aware of the violation of their sexual rights they are bound by the chains of culture which are difficult to break in spite of being educated. Their behavior is therefore explained by the theory of reasoned action which explained that a willful behavior is influenced by the environment and attitude of the individual. An attitude of submissiveness does not encourage the women to take action so they need to be empowered. The health belief model can also be used to explain this behavior through ‘perceived benefits’. There are no benefits from reporting abuse from a husband as one is bound to lose the breadwinner and be a laughing stock of the community so the woman will prefer to keep quiet about it. Not only that, another problem which was noted is the case of cultures at conflict.

What the western culture may define as abuse may be seen as normal in the Shona culture. For example, it is normal within the Shona culture for a woman to kneel down when giving a husband food, but an outsider may define this as abuse. In that respect, defining abuse can be problematic as there are cultural connotations involved. From this study, it is clear that a married woman is bound by cultural expectations to provide for his husband at his ‘demands’ including sex. This makes it difficult for the woman to define this as sexual violence and report her husband. In the same vein, it is also cultural for a boy to pursue a girl who plays hard to get so it becomes difficult to define sexual harassment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After carrying out this research and analyzing the results, the researchers came up with the following recommendations which may assist in handling issues of sexual violence.

- There is need to introduce organisations which target men, educating and counseling them on sexual rights and the effects of violence on the health of women as it will also affect the men. The assumption here is that if men are knowledgeable and understand the feelings of women, they may change the behavior of sexual violence.
- Whilst there are organisations which help women, they need to go out to the people to explain their mandate as the women are not aware of the services they offer. This is one way of empowering women.
- The literature from the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare and other nongovernmental organisation should depict sexual violence as a major concern and should also highlight its consequences.
- The victim friendly section of the police is a noble idea but women are not comfortable to discuss sexual issues with men so it is highly recommended that it be manned by women.
- The government should introduce stiffer penalties which are deterrent to sexual violence. The idea is to scare men from violating women sexually.

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