

Perceptions of men experiencing gender-based violence in Oshana Region, Namibia

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Abstract

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a major public health and human rights problem globally. Therefore, this study aimed at exploring the perceptions of men who experienced GBV in the Oshana Region in Namibia. The study adopted a qualitative research approach involving descriptive and exploratory design to collect data from 15 participants who were selected through the convenience sampling method. The sample size was determined by data saturation. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare and the University of Namibia Research Ethics Committee. Written consent was obtained from the participants. Data were collected with the aid of an interview guide. The findings revealed that men who experienced gender-based violence were aged 30 to 70 years. Furthermore, most participants were either married and unemployed or with a low-income level. The study's findings showed that participants perceive that GBV among men is influenced by stigma, embarrassment, patriarchal domination and cultural beliefs. Furthermore, this study found that the causes for GBV directed at men include alcohol abuse, unemployment and income disparity and is exacerbated by lack of awareness of men's rights. The study concluded that GBV is a social problem in Oshana Region. Consequently, there is a need for advocacy and sensitization campaigns to reduce GBV directed at men.

Keywords: *perception, men, gender based violence, partners*

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Gender-based violence (GBV) is the most prevalent human rights violation in the world which is targeted at individuals or groups based on their gender (Bott, Morrison & Ellsberg, 2008). This type of violence can take many forms including physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence and needs to be seen as a part of a continuum of violence (Sherifat & Olanrewe, 2014). Furthermore, GBV has a significant impact at the individual level, with victims suffering from physical and mental effects, loss of earnings and increased healthcare costs (Bott et al., 2008). Domestic violence against men is a term describing violence that is committed against a man by the man's intimate partner (Sangari, 2008). Violence against men by women is not a new phenomenon and has increased with changing power dynamics, women's economic independence and control over the economy and resources whereby women are breadwinners and have power or influence over their husbands (Sigal & Denmark, 2013).

The change in power dynamics also affects relationships between men and women, whereby men are afraid of losing power and women are excited by their empowered position (Sangari, 2008). According to Sadiqi and Ennaji (2011), the problem in conducting studies that seek to describe GBV against men is hampered by silence, fear and shame within families and relationships. This is the reason most cases of GBV against men remain unreported and a number of men continue living through repeated abuses (Sigal & Denmark, 2013). Husband punching, slapping, kicking, nail scratching, sex deprivation and killings are forms of GBV affecting men (Oladepo, Yusuf, & Arulogun, 2011). Consequently, these men suffer from guilt, anger, depression, anxiety, shyness, nightmares, disruptiveness, irritability, and poor interpersonal relationships that may lead to homelessness and poverty (Carpenter, 2008).

In Namibia, 3,350 cases of GBV among men were reported in 2005 (Muwanigwa, 2017). Moreover, a study conducted in 2007-2008 in eight of 14 Namibian regions discovered that 28% of the male respondents had experienced physical or sexual violence from intimate partners and 4% of the participants reported that they had suffered injuries as a result of physical or sexual violence from intimate partners (Ministry of Gender and Child Warfare, 2012). Based on these figures, it is clear that GBV in Namibia is a challenge although few studies have been done to explore this phenomenon. Therefore, this study sets out to explore the perception of GBV among men to gain insight into this problem.

Literature Review

There are a number of views on GBV directed at men. Some scholars (Arbache Kolev, & Filipiak 2010; Wamukonya, 2002) argue that men have different views or perceptions of gender-based violence with some viewing abuse as normal while others view it as a means of strengthening their relationships. Stigma makes men not to be open with their experiences and they continue suffering silently (Arbache et al., 2010). Charles and Erin (2011) argue that men experience stigma based on GBV but are reluctant to

report these cases to the responsible authorities. Mosavel (2012) highlight that some men feel useless in their own homes and regret why they got married.

Patriarchal domination is a social system in which males hold primary and predominant roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property (Campbell, 2010). The study by Bakker and Arnold (2014) established that patriarchal beliefs cause men to suffer silently in their relationships and this keeps them from reporting the abuse they undergo. Patriarchal beliefs in a society or community cause men to feel that they cannot speak about the bad treatment they are receiving from the women in their houses and most of these men end up committing suicide or even leaving their homes and looking for other women to stay with (Mosavel, 2012).

Some of the reasons that men do not speak up about their experiences of gender-based violence in most communities is the fear of being embarrassed and feelings of powerlessness within the family setting (Campbell, 2010; Schulz, 2015). These result in the onset of mental and emotional harm and causes men to lose their self-esteem (Singh, 2009). Embarrassment has a long-term psychological effect on men if the GBV issues are not resolved (Schulz, 2015). Campbell (2010) states that most men are enduring their marriages while experiencing abuse by their wives.

Scholars (Asher, Schears, & Miller, 2011; Bott et al., 2008) indicate that alcohol plays a role both ways in an abusive relationship. It seems to give courage to abusive women to beat their men while, on the other hand, the abused men are often beaten when they are heavily drunk. This is also validated by Hamunyela and Mwanyanene (2010) who indicate that partners normally engage in GBV when they are drunk and, in most cases, men are the victims of such abuse. In addition, GBV may be caused by low levels of education (LeBeau, Pendleton, & Tapscott, 2010), unemployment and income disparity, alcohol abuse and changing lifestyles or modernisation (Oladebo, Yusuf, & Arulogun 2011). In any relationship, there is a need to have equal power-sharing between or among all the involved parties (Coomarswamy & Rajasingham, 2010). If there is equal power-sharing, individuals will understand each other's value and they will also learn to appreciate the value in each other as well as live in harmony (O'Grady, 2011).

Unemployment has often been blamed for GBV that takes place in various homes (Shirwadkar, 2009). This corroborates Charles and Erin's (2011) study that established that women expect non-working men to submit to them in all aspects since they believe that they are the ones providing for the family. There is a general understanding that men should be the providers for their families and that the men's salaries should be generally higher than that of their wives (Campbell, 2010). Women whose salaries are higher than those of their husbands tend to abuse their men based on this salary disparity (LeBeau et al., 2010; Singh, 2009). Lack of income is one of the main causes of gender-based violence against men (Hamunyela

& Mwanyanene, 2010). McGoldrick and Gerson (2010) claim that many men who are failing to support their families find themselves being abused by their wives and children.

With regards to dealing with GBV, people need to be educated to respect each other, to love each other and to understand that our gender differences make the world unique (Chang & Romeo, 2008). In this way, the human rights of all individuals irrespective of gender will be respected. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (2012) emphasises that educational strategies need to be implemented to identify the groups and individuals to be involved in plans to eradicate domestic policies that have been the main measures used in the mitigation of gender-based violence among men and women in many countries more so as past focus has been on women.

However, there is a need now to formulate and implement policies that focus on men rather than women as has been the case previously (Singh, 2009) and thereby ensure a paradigm shift in the way GBV is perceived (Ajowi, 2012). LeBeau et al. (2010) and WHO (2013) submit that men's gender policy formulation and implementation need to be used as a weapon to mitigate GBV directed at men. The current policies on GBV seem to focus more on women while neglecting men who are also victims of GBV. According to scholars (LeBeau et al., 2010; McGoldrick & Gerson, 2002), there is a need for campaigns addressing GBV directed against men in various communities to mitigate this challenge affecting some men in their homes.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative, exploratory descriptive, phenomenological research design to enable the researchers to understand the perspectives of the participants by asking detailed and probing questions. The study population was 85,913 men residing in the Oshana Region (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2016). The convenience sampling method was used to identify the participants. The sample size was determined by data saturation which consisted of 15 participants who reported cases of GBV by their intimate partners at the Women and Child Protection Unit, Oshakati Hospital during the study period. An interview guide developed by the researchers in English and translated into Oshiwambo was used to collect data because all participants are Oshiwambo speakers. The data collection tool had three sections: Section A addressed the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants; Section B, the perceptions of participants on GBV among men and; Section C explored the participants' views on remedial measures in combating gender-based violence among men. Data were collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews which were conducted by the researchers in the office for privacy and confidentiality. The aim and ethical aspects of the study were explained to the participants and consent form was signed by each participants before data collection commenced. All interviews were captured using a voice recorder and field notes. Data were

analysed guided by Tesch's method of data in qualitative research (Tesch, 2013). Data was deduced through the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the information that had emerged in the writing of the field notes and the memos. The main findings revealed three themes and ten sub-themes (See Table 1).

Ethics

Ethical clearance was sought from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare as well as from the University of Namibia's Research Ethics Committee. The participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any point or chose not to answer some questions with no penalty imposed by the researchers. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by informing the participants not to write their names while codes were allocated to each participant. To ensure the principle of non-maleficence, participants were monitored for any signs of distress. In addition, participants who exhibited emotions through tears were allowed to do so and those with psychological discomfort were referred to the social worker. All information collected from participants was stored in a locked cabinet that was only accessible to the researchers.

Results and discussion

Socio-demographic data

The participants were aged between 30 to 70 years. Among the participants, eight attended primary school, four have no formal education, two have attained secondary school education and one has tertiary education. The results reflected that 13 out of 15 abused men are unemployed and indicated that they do not have any other source of income. Four respondents indicated that they receive old age pension and two receive war veteran grants. The results of the study show that 12 were married and 3 were divorced. All of the respondents had stayed in abusive marriages for 2 to 32 years. The majority of participants (14) indicated that they had 2-7 children with their partners while one participant had no children. All participants stated that they are Christians.

The study's findings contradict the findings of Stemple (2009) who noted that young men from 15 to 30 years are frequent victims of GBV. These results are supported by Ghazizadeh's (2008) study that found that gender-based violence rises with low levels of education or unemployment. It is mostly known that uneducated or persons with little formal education find it hard to get employment or are mostly employed in non-formal sectors with low salaries. However, LeBeau et al. (2010) reported that educational qualification did not influence GBV. In addition, Asher et al. (2011) concurred by indicating that the

tradition of female dominance in marriage is still prevalent in Africa, where unemployed men marry women that are older than they are. These findings support those of Campbell (2010) who indicates that men who do not have a source of income are likely to suffer GBV at the hands of their partners who may be gainfully employed. In the same vein, Chang and Romeo (2008) mention that GBV is driven by the church because the way the Bible is written seems to show that women must submit to men but now if women feel empowered when they are the providers of income to sustain the family, they tend to ‘revenge’ on their husbands by treating them badly, leading to GBV.

Themes and subthemes of GBV experienced by men

The analysis revealed three themes and nine sub-themes (See Table 1).

Table 1

Themes and sub-themes

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Perceptions of Gender-Based Violence among men	❖ Stigma
	❖ Patriarchal dominations belief
	❖ Embarrassment
	❖ Cultural belief
Possible causes of Gender-Based Violence among men	❖ Alcohol abuse
	❖ Unemployment and Income disparity
	❖ Lack of power sharing between the couples
Remedial measures to be used in combating Gender-Based Violence among men	❖ Education on human rights
	❖ Empowerment in policy implementation on GBV
	❖ Campaigns on GBV prevention

Theme 1: Perceptions of Gender-Based Violence among men. Four sub-themes emerged from this theme such as stigma, patriarchal dominations belief, embarrassment and cultural belief. Participants

indicated that it is shameful for them to report gender-based violence taking place in their homes due to fear of being stigmatised. According to Interviewee 1, “Not every man can come forth to report abuse which is happening in their house because it is so embarrassing.” This was also supported by Interviewee 4 who finds it difficult to talk about the beatings from his wife as he will be stigmatised. However, some participants perceived being abused by their partners as normal. Interviewee 3 mentioned it to be normal for people to beat each other when they are in love while Interviewee 4 indicated that as long as he is getting money and is sexually satisfied, he does not care about the abuse that takes place in the relationship.

The results above support the findings of Arbache et al. (2010) and Wamukonya (2002) who indicate that men have different views or perceptions of gender-based violence. Some men view the abuse as normal and some view it as a means of strengthening their relationships. Stigma makes men not to be open with their experiences, hence they continue suffering silently and in shame (Arbache et al., 2010). With regards to stigma, what emerged as a key finding is that the abuse of men by women is overlooked and, in most cases, men who experience abuse are stigmatised.

This is supported by the views of interviewee 5 who stated that when he reports the abuse to Law Enforcement, police officers laugh at him and do not take him seriously. Interviewee 6 also shared the same sentiments and argued that because women know this, they start the fights or arguments but the moment the man goes to lay charges at the police station, police officers do not treat the issue with the seriousness it deserves. Hence men are reluctant to press charges. This finding suggests that GBV laws and law enforcement in Namibia miss the systematic and societal aspects of GBV that are manifest both nationally and at a wider scale due to stigmatisation. By focusing on individuals with regards to the attitudes on GBV, leading voices from both sides of the debate have ignored the larger social context in which GBV occurs.

Findings also show that the enforcement of GBV laws are more inclined to favour women than men and hence men find it difficult to report cases of abuse. In this regard, Interviewee 6 said that he regrets marrying his wife because in most cases women are protected in any case they report while men only get laughed at as the authorities think we are perhaps mad. He noted that things are looked at in a one-sided manner. He also stated that men are thought of as the only perpetrators of abuse, while on the other hand there are women who are abusing their men. This frustrates men and they end up being violent as time goes on because of the frustration they experience with the system.

The current study results show that stigma is one of those factors that lead men not to report abuse. Mosavel et al. (2012) highlight that some men feel useless in their own homes and regret why they got married. Charles and Erin (2011) argue that men are experiencing stigma in their lives but are shy to come

forth to report these cases to the authorities. This was supported by Interviewee 8 who noted that “the society will regard you a coward if you report any abuse by your wife.”

What also emerged as a key finding in this research is that interviewees indicated that patriarchal beliefs are prevalent. As such, men experiencing GBV suffer in silence because men are expected to be courageous, decision-makers and in control of their homes and relationships. In support of this, Interviewee 7 stated that men are afraid to come forward and report the abuse because they are expected to be strong and not to cry but instead be a pillar of support to their families. Interviewee 9 further supported the existence of patriarchal beliefs which overlook that men can also be abused by women by saying that he would rather die than speak about the abuse that he is going through. Interviewee 10 also corroborated the existence of patriarchal beliefs which overlook the fact that men can be also be abused by women by arguing that men are not expected to reveal everything in public. They have to endure unfavourable conditions in their homes. The results endorse the earlier findings by Bakker and Arnold (2014) who state that patriarchal beliefs cause men to suffer silently in their relationships and this keeps them from reporting such abuse.

The fear of embarrassment was one of the identified factors that makes them endure GBV in their relationships. To substantiate this, Interview 11 said that he feels ashamed outside of the home because his relatives and everybody knows that his wife does not cook for him anymore and he is sometimes chased out of the house because she is the one buying food. This is also supported by Interviewee 12 who said that he does not feel like a man anymore. It is interesting to note that the fear of embarrassment to report GBV abuse by women evades the realities of the gender dimensions in society. This is better expressed by Interviewee 12 who said that embarrassment makes them suffer silently.

The fear of embarrassment is supported by the literature (Campbell, 2010; Schulz, 2015) as one of the reasons that men do not speak up about their experiences with gender-based violence. Campbell (2010) indicates that most men are enduring their marriages while they are experiencing abuse by their wives. In addition, that embarrassment hurts men mentally and emotionally and causes them to lose their self-esteem (Singh, 2009). Embarrassment has a long-term psychological effect on men if the GBV issues are not resolved (Schulz, 2015).

Cultural beliefs are also perceived by participants as a factor that can influence GBV. In some Namibian cultures, the man is expected to earn more than the woman and to take care of the family. This belief causes women to consider men with low income as cowards or as not “man enough”. This view was mentioned by Interviewee 15 who said that his wife mostly insults him especially when she gets paid because he does not have money and it is supposed to be his responsibility to feed the family. Interviewee 14 concurs by saying that his wife sometimes refuses to sleep in the same room with him which is a taboo

in their culture especially when couples are legally married. Cultural beliefs suggest that women are weak while men are given autonomy that contributes to gender-based violence (Sangari, 2008). However, the results of this study indicates that violence was influenced by the failure of the husband to fully support his family. This has caused the wives to see their husband as poor and hence insult them for failure to provide for the family. Men have been socialized to be the providers but if women are the ones providing for their families, men tend to feel useless since all they can offer is sex rather than material possessions.

Theme 2: Contributing factors to Gender-Based Violence among men. Participants in the study cited several factors that may contribute to GBV such as alcohol abuse, income disparity and unemployment. This finding is key in understanding GBV in Namibia. While the masculinity discourse suggests that employment and financial stability is a pathway to a happier marital life, the findings of this study suggest that unemployment is a precursor to GBV. Interviewee 8 said that the woman makes decisions in a home where the man is not working and because the man does not have money he must therefore abide by the woman's decision. Interviewee 9 supported this by arguing that men being unemployed may result in women abusing them. The findings suggest that having a job or a business that one runs is associated with masculinity while homemaking, bearing children and raising them is seen as feminine. In this regard, being unable to find a job is seen as not masculine. Interviewee 1 said that he is suffering because his salary is far lower than that of his wife. This is further validated by interviewee 8 who said that gender-based violence is caused when women become too empowered and too much protected by the prevailing laws of the country.

Scholars (Asher et al., 2011; Bott et al., 2008) posit that alcohol plays a role in two ways in an abusive relationship. It seems to encourage abusive women to beat their men while on the other hand, the abused men are often beaten when they are drunk. Interview 14 said that gender-based violence is caused by unemployment, alcohol abuse and lack of awareness of men's rights. Supporting this sentiment, Interviewee 11 argued that women brutalise men especially when they know that they are drunk hence they tend to take advantage of their state. Interviewee 6 mentioned an example of some cases where the woman comes home drunk and starts quarrelling with the husband and starts fighting but could not remember the cause of the fight when they become sober. Research findings also underscore verbal abuse that emanates as a result of alcohol abuse. These findings are similar to that of Hamunyela and Mwanyanene (2010) who indicated that partners normally engage in GBV when they are drunk and, in most cases, men are the victims of such abuse.

GBV may be caused by low levels of education (LeBeau et al., 2010), unemployment and income disparity, alcohol abuse and changing lifestyles or modernisation (Oladepo et al., 2011). In support of the

study's findings, McGoldrick and Gerson (2010) revealed that many men who fail to support their families find themselves being abused by their wives and children. Interviewee 9 confirmed that most men are being abused because they are unemployed. This is supported by Shirwadkar (2009) who indicates that unemployment has often been blamed for GBV that takes place in various homes. These findings support the findings of Charles and Erin (2011) who claim that women expect non-working men to submit to them in all aspects since they believe that they are the ones providing for the family. There is a general understanding that men should be the providers for their families and that the men's salaries should be generally higher than that of their wives (Campbell, 2010). Women whose salaries are higher than those of their men tend to abuse their men based on this salary disparity (LeBeau et al., 2010; Singh, 2009).

In any relationship, there is a need to have equal power-sharing between or among all the involved parties (Coomarswamy & Rajasingham, 2010). If there is equal power-sharing, individuals will understand each other's value and they will also learn to appreciate the value in each other as they live in harmony (O'Grady, 2011). To support this, interviewees 2 and 12 state that the challenge they have as men in relationships is the fact that they do not understand the issue of power-sharing in the relationship and that there is no understanding of the issue of power-sharing in most relationships and for this reason, men become victims of GBV especially if the other partner has no understanding of power-sharing in the relationship.

Theme 3: Remedial measures to be used in combating Gender-Based Violence among men. This theme reflects the measures that could be implemented to prevent gender-based violence among men in which subthemes such as education on human rights, empowerment in policy implementation on GBV and campaigns on GBV prevention were identified. Findings show that there is a need for an awareness campaign that can empower the victims of GBV to fight for their rights. Moreover, there is a need to eliminate the stigmatisation of GBV through awareness. To substantiate this, Interviewee 2 identified the need to educate men to understand that they are equal to women in all aspects. Interviewee 6 suggested the need to educate women and communities/societies about gender-based violence. In addition, Interviewee 9 also suggested the need to develop protection centres for men as well just as there are women protection centres.

People need to be educated to respect each other, love each other and understand that our gender differences make the world unique (Chang & Romeo, 2008). In this manner, the human rights of all individuals irrespective of gender will be respected. These findings uphold the earlier findings of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (2012) which emphasised that educational strategies need to be implemented to identify the groups and individuals to be involved in planning to eradicate domestic

violence. Participants in the study stated that policies need to shift from addressing GBV on women to a more holistic perspective so that the plight of men can also be resolved. Interviewee 10 suggested that policies need to focus on men also rather than making GBV too women-focussed. This is validated by Interviewee 7 who said that policy formulation and implementation need to also focus on GBV on men rather than women alone since this problem is affecting both women and men.

Policies have been the main measures used in the mitigation of gender-based violence among men and women in many countries but such policies have unduly focused on women. However, there is a need now to formulate and implement policies that focus on men rather than women as has been the case previously (Singh, 2009) and thereby ensure a paradigm shift in the way GBV is perceived (Chang & Romeo, 2008). The findings above uphold the earlier findings of LeBeau et al., (2010) and WHO (2013) indicating that gender policy formulation and implementation need to be used as a weapon to mitigate GBV against men. The current policies on GBV seem to focus more on women while neglecting men who are also victims of GBV. The findings above concur with the findings of the National Gender Policy by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (2012) which was designed to create a society in which women and men enjoy equal rights and access to basic services. Sadiqi and Ennaji (2011) add that the justice system, law enforcement, the health care system, parliament, provincial legislative bodies and the education sector have been useful in attending to issues of domestic violence. But the reality is that most men feel disempowered by the current laws which seem to be protecting women at the expense of men (African Development Bank, 2015).

Participants emphasised the fact that there were several campaigns on GBV against women in Namibia but none of the campaigns has ever focused on men. The findings above concur with the earlier findings of McGoldrick and Gerson (2002) and LeBeau et al. (2010) who indicated the need for campaigns on GBV focussed on men in various communities to mitigate this challenge affecting some men in their homes. The study participants proposed awareness campaigns regarding the equality of men and women. Interviewee 5 stated that the government should recognise that men are suffering in the same way they do for women. This can also be fostered by ensuring that the law enforcement is not biased. Interviewee 1 validated this by suggesting that the government should punish the police officers that laugh at men when abuse cases are reported. This finding is supported by Wingood and DiClemente (2010) who indicated that society needs to strengthen the gender role empowerment of men. In addition, some responses suggested that society must ensure that marriage counselling is availed and that men should be treated the same way as women when they report their cases to relevant authorities. In addition, Arbache et al. (2010) emphasise the need to change social norms and values that allow this gross violation of human rights to go on unquestioned. Therefore, there is an urgent need to hold campaigns on GBV prevention among men so that

any man who is a victim or becomes a victim of GBV can speak out and get help (Coomarswamy & Rajasingham, 2010).

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, unemployed married men are mostly victims of GBV and this goes unreported as a result of several factors such as stigma, patriarchal beliefs, embarrassment and cultural beliefs. All these factors cause men to remain silent and suffer emotionally. Moreover, the study also found that GBV is mainly caused by alcohol abuse, unemployment or income disparities between men and women as well as a lack of power-sharing between couples. The study also unveiled that there is a general over-emphasis of the abuse of women by men leading to a neglect of the plight of men in GBV. This study recommends educating communities on GBV, enforcement of policies on GBV and conducting campaigns on how to prevent GBV. The study further recommends the implementation of gender-balanced empowerment strategies that do not only focus on GBV on women but also on men as they equally suffer in similar ways as women.

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