



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE PERCEPTIONS OF MEN ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN GWERU URBAN: ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

Sexual violence is violation of women's rights and a major public health problem, (WHO, 2013) which has aroused interest and publicity with women activist. The study aimed at unearthing what sexual violence is as perceived by men and to identify factors which the men believe to be leading them to sexual violence. The study was carried out in Gweru urban, Zimbabwe. A sample of 30 men was conveniently selected for interviews and individual focus groups. The data from the interviews were triangulated with that from the two focus groups which were conducted out at a college. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data from focus groups and individual interviews. The study revealed that men had a very restricted definition of sexual violence. They considered sexual violence to be accompanied by physical violence and that it does not exist in married couples as they have an obligation to satisfy each other's sexual needs. It also came out of the study that culture and socialisation of the boy child has a bearing on how the men perceive sexual violence. The men also believed that the behavior of women and the media can stimulate men to the extent of losing their self control. The conclusion that a universal definition of sexual violence is very difficult because of the different cultures and socialisations was made. The study recommends the need for men and women to come together and address cultural issues on sexual violence and how to bridge them.

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Introduction

Background

World Health Organisation (WHO) (2013) declared violence against women, particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women as major public health problem and violation of women's human rights. As a result the issue of gender based sexual violence (GBSV) has drawn a lot of interest and publicity with women activists. WHO (2005) defines sexual violence as any sexual act; attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other acts directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting. It includes rape, defined as the physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration of the vulva or anus with a penis, other body part or object. According to the WHO (2005) report, recent global prevalence figures indicate that 35% of women worldwide have experienced either intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. On average, 30% of women who have been in a relationship report that they have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence by their partner. Violence can result in physical, mental, sexual, reproductive health and other health problems, and may increase vulnerability to HIV (WHO, 2013).

Sexual violence occurs in different forms. McMahon, Warren, Douglas and Brener (2006) describe the types of violence as; coercion, rape, harassment, trafficking, forced marriage or cohabitation and violent acts against sexual integrity. However, men in some communities lack the knowledge of the sexual violence continuum. According to a study by McMahon et al. (2011), college students identified sexual violence with rape, where there is vaginal penetration. The other forms such as harassment or degrading language were believed to be harmless and unrelated to violence (McMahon, 2007; Stout & McPhail, 1998). In the recent study by O'Neil, & Morgan (2010) of the Frame Works Institute, they found that most respondents understood sexual violence as non-consensual, unwanted and forced but many believed that acts of sexual violence must result in some sort of physical harm. A lot of researches have been done on sexual violence. Unfortunately the focus of most researches is on the victims (women and children). This study looks at the perceptions of men as perpetrators of the sexual violence and why they commit such acts.

Why do men rape?

Socio-biological theory of rape by Thornhill and Palmer explains that the behavior resembling sexual violence in humans is widespread in other animals. Such behaviors, referred to as 'forced copulations', involve an animal being approached and sexually penetrated whilst it struggles or attempts to escape (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000). This animal instinct is believed to be behind men's behavior of sexual violence. However the theory does not explain why married men who have access to legitimate sex with their wives still rape other women. Hagen (2002) describes four conditions where the reproductive gains from sexual violence may outweigh the cost of such behavior. These are status males who do not fear reprisal, low status women who can do anything for money or a meal, war where soldiers can get away with anything when armed and men who are of low status with few opportunities of investing in kin. On the other hand, McKibbin, Shackelford, and Goetz (2008) argue that there may be several different types of rapists or rape strategies. One is raped by disadvantaged men who cannot get sex otherwise. Another is "specialized rapists" who are more sexually aroused from rape than from consensual sex. A third type is an opportunistic rapist who switches between forced and consensual sex depending on circumstances. A fourth type is the psychopathic rapists. Similarly, the Frame Works study found that respondents perceived perpetrators as sick, mentally disturbed predators (O'Neil & Morgan, 2010). The authors affirmed that at least one-third of males admit they would rape under specific conditions. In other words they propose that rape is a conditional strategy that may potentially be deployed by any man.

Jones, (1999) looks at sexual assault as a learned behaviour. The basis of this theory is that, "social conditions, such as cultural norms, rules, and prevailing attitudes about sex, mould and structure the behaviour of the rapists, foster rape-prone environment and, in fact, teach men to rape." Jones further claims that sexual violence was linked to larger patterns of violence within a society, an ideology that encourages male aggressiveness and this encourages them to be sexually aggressive. Such cultural norms devalue women but value male dominance and aggressiveness thus create a subculture that sanctions sexual violence. Malamuth and Heilmann (2005), has a psychological development models. They claim that men who rape often come from harsh developmental backgrounds involving impersonal and short-term social relationships, in which manipulation, coercion and violence are valid ways of conducting social relationships. A man with such a background has no whims about sexual violence. According to WHO (2013), poor upbringing such as exposure to child maltreatment or witnessing violence in the family, harmful use of alcohol, poverty and lack of education are risk factors for being a perpetrator in addition to attitudes accepting violence and gender inequality.

Women can be violated in the name of culture and society accepts it without a whim. 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 (Ariffin, 1997). Here the victim takes the blame for the violent acts performed on her body whilst the perpetrator is justified. In a study by Stewart and Jacquin (2010), they found that victims were blamed for the violence if they have been taking alcohol yet perpetrators are judged less harshly if they consumed alcohol. This was also supported by (Maurer & Robinson, 2008; McMahon (2007) who found that a drunken woman has less credibility and more worthy the blame. However, McMahon (2011) argues that if we focus only on individual characteristics as the cause of sexual violence, we fail to see the larger picture of factors that contribute to the perpetration of sexual violence such as community norms and myths which typically blame the victim and/or excuse the perpetrator.

The fact that women are blamed more for rape than other crimes such as robbery (Bieneck & Krahe, 2011) has negative consequences for survivors who may end up with self-doubt and blame and may not report the incident.

McMahon (2007) found that respondents would not directly blame the victims for their assault, but expressed the belief that women put themselves in bad situations by dressing in a certain way, drinking alcohol, or demonstrating other behaviors such as flirting. In a study by O'Neil & Morgan, (2010) the participants cited certain situations that victims put themselves in, making them more vulnerable, such as going to bars or dressing provocatively. This means that the moral judgments by the public may also influence the perception that certain groups of people cannot be "real" victims of sexual violence.

Role of culture in sexual violence

World Health Organization (2005), reports that there is a high correlation between sexual assault and cultures. Brownmiller, (1975); Sanday, (2007); Schwartz & DeKeseredy (1997) all agree that there are different perceptions of sexual violence and these maybe related to culture. They all claim that in a culture that supports and tolerates sexual violence, the more severe forms of violence against women are noted. Cultural norms, such as male honour, masculinity, and men's sexual entitlement, foster societal acceptance of sexual assault and this societal ideology of male superiority emphasizes dominance and physical strength which encourage rape. In many societies, women, as well as men, regard marriage as entailing the obligation on women to be sexually available virtually without limit (WHO, 2005). As a result, Guy (2008) has pointed out that the continuum should be re-visited to understand and acknowledge cultural beliefs as men behaves according to the norms of his culture.

In many societies women are treated as the property of men who keep them under subjectivity and to do as told without any question (Ncube, 1998). In the African culture, married women are expected to be sexually passive and submissive to their husbands, whereas men are expected to be the initiators of sex and also set the conditions for the sexual encounter (Kambarami, 2007). On the same note, Messer (2004) states that women are expected to satisfy the sexual desires of their husbands. As a result, when a husband wants sex, the wife should comply because that is part of the marriage contract (Madlala, 2002). In Ferro et al's (2008) study with undergraduate students revealed that rape within marriage is false as compared to acquaintance situations. Professionals working with victims in domestic violence programmes, (Bergen (2006), may not ask about marital rape because of societal views regarding the intimacy of marriage and the complexity of defining consent in marriage. Anderson (2007) asked participants to describe what they considered to be a "typical" rape and found that participants conceptualized rape to the classic stranger rape stereotype rather than the acquaintance rape scenario. Thus, 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 (Kambarami, 2007). This tends to suggest that man can have sex whenever he wants and the woman will agree because that's the way she was socialised.

Marriage is regarded by many societies as entailing the obligation on women to be sexually available virtually without limit (World Health Organization, 2002). According to Jewles (2006), the payment of lobola entitles a man to his wife's reproductive system and earns him conjugal rights. As a result sex in marriage is just a marriage 'deal' which should be fulfilled whenever the husband demands it. The woman however just puts up with it as they were socialised to do the husband's bidding and should not complain about sexual assault (Nkosi, 2006). In other words, in the African culture, sexual violence does not exist within the context of marriage. This is supported by Jones (1999) who explains that the societal ideology of male superiority emphasizes dominance, physical strength and male honour which encourage sexual violence. Sexual violence is based on gender hierarchy and sexual entitlement in the African man since their culture implies that man has a right or even duty to force himself onto a woman (Jewles, 2006). In agreement, Madlala (2002) states that sexual violence makes the African man more powerful and virile. In their study Jigsaw, et al (2010) found that there was a general belief that involved parties are expected to care for each other's feeling and one should have sex to please his/her partner even if s/he does not want to, after all marriage is about helping one another and satisfying a husband's sexual desire is an instance of help a wife can do easily. A married woman should not refuse sex as that might prompt her partner to involve in extramarital affairs (Jigsaw et al, 2010)

Socialisation of the boy child, according to Mungwini and Matereke (2010) can lay a foundation for sexual violence in the Shona culture where the boy is taught to pursue a girl proposing and the girl is expected to play hard to get otherwise she is labelled as sexually weak and promiscuous. It is for this reason that when a boy makes sexual advances to his girlfriend, he does not take seriously her attempts to say "no" because he anticipates them anyway, and this adds to his aggression and use of force (Mungwini and Matereke, 2010). The authors further highlighted that, it is believed that success in getting a girl to bed depends in part on the amount of force that a man uses relative to hers. The fact that sexual aggression is culturally sanctioned is reflected in the figurative language that Shona men

use to recount their sexual exploits to their peers: *kuumburudza*(rolling), *kudhonora*(thrashing)and *kurikita* (beating) which paint a picture of a helpless female who has been subdued by the man and taken through the whole sexual ordeal like some kind of sex slave. The whole act is true punishment which the man enjoys to administer (Musarurwa, 1988). The male organ as well, is figuratively portrayed as a *sjambok* (whip) used to mete out deserved punishment on the female. How this organ is used therefore must be through rape. Musarurwa (1988) goes on to explain that the stated Shona derogative terms capture a situation that is characterized by a severe struggle typical of a wrestling match that culminates in the woman or girl submitting or lying helplessly. It is from such kind of language that one can discern the roots of rape in the Shona culture.

The rape, sexual politics and the construction of manhood among the Shona of Zimbabwe depicts the crying and groaning of a woman from pain to signify male superiority, and is consistent with the idea of thrashing, submission and conquest (Mungwini and Matereke, 2009). In support of this, Chimhundu (1995) noted that, among the Shona, sexual relations involve victory and conquest on the part of the male, and defeat and surrender on the part of the female. The orientation one gets as an adolescent in talking to one's peers about the subject of sex is one where the male figure has to be merciless when it comes to sexual encounter. In addition, the way the Shona use language to capture sexual encounters is in itself, an incubator for sexual aggression which promotes and instigates rape (Mungwini and Matereke, 2009). According to Mungwini and Matereke, (2010), the female organ is culturally portrayed as a delicacy like honey, hence it heightens men's drive for it, and one cannot rule out rape for those who cannot properly negotiate for sex. Man has been reported to have told a woman that he would not mind going to jail because of rape, as he was dying to 'have a taste' of her! ((Mungwini and Matereke, 2010).The portrayal of female bodies as commodities to be enjoyed or feasted on by men as well as the socialisation of the boy child in the Shona culture may promotes sexual violence.

Objectives of the Research

To establish the perceived forms of sexual violence by men in Gweru.

To explore the factors leading to the behaviour of sexual violence in men.

Research Questions

What are the perceived forms of sexual violence among men?

What are the factors that predispose men to a sexually violent behaviour?

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative interpretive research approach. This approach was aimed at elucidating what the participants had to say with regard to sexual violence. The approach was chosen as it enabled surfacing deep issues and making voices heard (Creswell, 2010). It also allows the researcher to gain understanding of the social phenomenon of sexual violence from participants' perspectives in their natural settings (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010:315).

The research was conducted in Gweru Urban Zimbabwe. The study constituted 30 men who were conveniently selected for individual interviews and focus. Two focus groups of 8 participants each were also conducted at a college to triangulate data from individual interviews. Focus groups of men with different backgrounds were believed to increase the quality and richness of data, more than a one-on-one interviewing could have done alone (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010:360). In order to increase understanding of the data and to present the findings clearly, data was transcribed from focus groups and individual interviews thematically. This identification of themes provided depth to the insights about understanding the individual views of men on the phenomena of sexual violence.

Findings and discussion

This section presents the results of the study. The results will be presented as follows;

- Perceptions of men on sexual violence.
- Culture and socialisation.
- Peer influence.
- Women provoke the behavior of sexual violence.
- Lack of self control and lust.

- Poor communication skills in both partners.

Perceptions of men on sexual violence

The study revealed that men had a very restricted definition of sexual violence. According to the findings from focus groups, sexual violence occurs in conjunction with physical violence as indicated by these statements;

“How can a woman say she been raped without any injury?”

“In sexual violence there must be an element of force.”

These statements give an indication that sexual violence only occurs if there is physical violence. From the interviews 96% of the men do not consider sexual violence without physical force. Such statements as, “How do you expect to marry if you do not coerce someone until she agrees? I don’t see harassment as sexual violence either,”

These sentiments portray a perception that men believe that there is no rape in marriage. These findings concur with McMahon (2007) who found that harassment or degrading language was believed to be harmless and unrelated to violence. Sexual violence is understood to be non-consensual, unwanted and forced; hence the belief that acts of sexual violence must result in some sort of physical harm (O’Neil & Morgan, 2010). If men view sexual violence as related to force and physical harm, then some of the acts of violence maybe done out of ignorance.

When asked, if there was sexual violence in marriage, the interviewed men said that there is no sexual violence in marriage. The findings are similar to those of a study by Jigsaw, et al (2010) who found that there was a general belief that; involved parties are expected to care for each other’s feeling and one should have sex to please his/her partner even if s/he does not want to after all marriage is about helping one another. This is evidenced by the following sentiments;

“In marriage a man and a woman are one so there is no force”

“Marriage is a commitment by two people to please each other and the self ceases. If one wants sex, then the other partner should do so.”

“The bible tells us not to deny the other’s needs. During the marriage ceremony you declare your love in public so how can one be forced to have sex?”

“Marriage is an indication that a man needs sex so the woman should play her role obediently.”

From these statements, the men regarded marriage as a license to have sex at will and the woman should be agreeable all the time. These sentiments of the men in Gweru are similar to other societies as reported by (W H O, 2002) that marriage is regarded by many societies as entailing the obligation on women to be sexually available virtually without limit as a result men do not view it as sexual violence.

Culture and socialisation

It came out from the study that culture is permissive to sexual violence to a certain extent. It seemed that coercion and harassment are permissible in the Shona culture according to these statements from the participants;

“Culturally a man should pursue a woman until she agrees”

“A well behaved woman should play hard to get”

“A girl should be coerced until she gives in as it is uncultured for a girl to agree there and then”

“Culture teaches a boy to continue persuading until he gets what he wants”

“Girls never say yes so they have to be forced especially for the first time”

The participants of this study proved what was noted by Sanday, (2007) and Schwartz & DeKeseredy (1997) who concur that there are different perceptions of sexual violence which maybe related to culture. From the study, it appears as if cultural norms and men's sexual entitlement, foster societal acceptance of sexual assault and this encourages rape. According to this study, sexual violence does not exist culturally unless there is physical assault.

Coercion and harassment are part of the sexual violence continuum but men feel that they are the victims of the definition. Most of the interviewed men (68%) claim that it has become very difficult for them to pursue the woman of their dream as they are not sure of how far to go.

“This issue of harassment confuses us. I do not know when my good intention of finding a partner ends and becomes harassment.”

The study also revealed that the socialisation process emphasises that virtuous women are hard to get and may sometimes need a little bit of force. This is in consensus with the findings of (Mungwini and Matereke, 2010) that in the Shona culture, a boy is taught to pursue a girl proposing and the girl is expected to play hard to get otherwise she

is labeled as sexually weak and promiscuous. Because of this norm, when a boy makes sexual advances to his girlfriend, he does not take seriously her attempts to say “no” because he anticipates them anyway, and this adds to his aggression and use of force. This perception can be depicted from the following statements;

“When growing up, we were made to understand that girls do not give in easily.”

“As we grew up we heard bigger boys saying that a girl who plays hard to get becomes easy after you force her to have sex.”

However some men from the focus group argued that the way they were socialised whilst herding cattle is different with this generation where the media is doing the socialising. The implication is that this generation is violent because of what they see in the media.

“The young generation is watching pornographic movies which will lead them to rape even their sisters”

“The ‘*dare*’ (men grouped to share ideas) has been replaced with movies which drive the young generation to have no morals and have sex even with a minor”

Women provoke the behavior of sexual violence

It came out from the study that women can provoke violence in men by their behaviour and dressing. From the interviews, 70% of the men claim that women are naturally attractive to men so when they expose themselves it becomes risky. This is similar to what is reported by Mungwini and Matereke (2009), that the female organ is culturally portrayed as a delicacy like honey hence it heightens men’s drive for it and as a result one cannot rule out rape for those who cannot properly negotiate for sex. The following statements were common from both focus groups;

“What do you expect if a woman wears a skirt which ends where it starts exposing her delicacy?”

“When going out for a date some women dress to seduce you so they should not complain when what they wanted happens.”

“Some women talk with their eyes”

These statements reflect what Chimhundu (1995) implied when he said that man has been reported to have told a woman that he would not mind going to jail because of rape, as he was dying to ‘have a taste’ of her! In other words, the men blame the women for the sexual violence they encounter if they portray their bodies as commodities to be enjoyed or feasted on by men.

It also came out from the focus groups and interviews that women can be misleading. When they want sex, they do not ask for it but behave in a way which is suggestive then they claim that they were forced. The men (68%) claimed that women agree to go to secluded areas because they want sex.

“When a woman visits me knowing that I stay alone, I automatically think that she came for sex”

“By agreeing to go out with me to some secluded places, it means that she is submitting to everything that will happen there.”

“Sometimes the women indicate willingness then the consequences make her change her mind to protect her image.”

Peer influence

The study revealed that men can influence each other resulting in sexual violence. Comments such as the one below can influence other men to use force.

“When a man initiates sex, there is no room for excuses from the wife.”

“If you let your wife decide, then you are not the man in the house”

“How can a woman you paid lobola (bridal price) for say no to sex when you want it”

These statements portray the man as the all powerful being who can even force to get what he wants. So when other men hear such comments, they are influenced to behave like ‘the man’ and will do what it takes to be accepted by others. Chimhundu (1995) noted that, among the Shona, sexual relations involve victory and conquest on the part of the male, and defeat and surrender on the part of the female and this can be picked from these statements. The majority 96% of the men agree that men do not want to be viewed by other men as a weakling so such comments can evoke the behavior of sexual violence.

As for those still dating, peers can also influence the behavior of violence. According to Chimhundu (1995), the orientation one gets as an adolescent in talking to one’s peers about the subject of sex is one where the male figure has to be merciless when it comes to sexual encounter. The participants claimed that comments like the ones below can encourage date raping.

“If you do not do it when you go out with a girl, she will think that you are not man enough.”

“A girl will never say yes so you have to trick her”

“If she plays hard to get, make her yours then she will follow you like a puppy”

It came out from the focus groups that men usually describe their exploits especially those with prostitutes. It is from these discussions that men will now force their wives to do what they will have heard.

Lack of self control and lust

From the focus groups, it came out that some men can not control their feelings and these are the men who rape women. The men claimed that there are some men who can be aroused easily and can not control it to the extent of even raping children.

“There are some who just must have sex when aroused”

“Some women can play with you until you reach a point of no return then she says no. She is then forced”

“Women should know not to play with fire and stick to public places”

Utterances such as, “Men are not like women, they can not be switched off easily,” gives the impression that self control is not easy in men. The animal instinct is believed to be behind men’s behavior of sexual violence (Thornhill and Palmer, 2000).

Poor communication skills in both partners

From the interviews, 98% of the men felt that women are violated because of poor communication. They believe that a woman never says no so they rely on the woman’s actions.

“Women should act what they say.”

“A wife will say I am tired instead of saying I do not feel like it.”

“If a long time lapses without sex, a man can force himself on the woman because of duty not because he wants to.”

Conclusion

The African culture, especially the Shona does not really condemn sexual violence but views it as male superiority. In addition to this, the eruption of pornography to a culture which is not used to such sexual exposures may result in loss of self control to men.

Globalization has lead to the modification of culture and this is bringing conflict between cultural norms and the definition of the continuum of sexual violence. From the analysis of the study findings, men perceive sexual violence as a violent act where there is physical injury and completely disregard harassment and coercion. The men do not have parameters determining where harassment or coercion starts and ends or where conjugal rights should be enforced. As it is, men can be caught in the web of sexual violence whilst he is behaving as he was socialised to.

The men have a feeling that their rights are being ignored at the expense of the women and this distances them from gender issues.

Recommendations

After analysing the themes that emerged from the study, these recommendations are advanced;

- Since culture is dynamic, the boy child needs to be reoriented as to what is morally expected in this day and age.
- Society should also put the same emphasis on the boy child as it does on the girl child so that boys accept the girls as equals in society and not sex toys.
- There is need for both parties to come together and address cultural issues and come up with methods of bridging them.
- The organizations which fight for the women’s rights should also focus on men so that they appreciate women and see the effects of violence. Their concerns should be considered and ways of rectifying the gender imbalances be reached by all parties. The rights of each partner should be spelt out.

- Church organisations can be platforms for couples meetings and conferences to discuss issues of sexual violence and open up avenues of communication.

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