

## Domestic Violence against Men in Intimate Relationship: An Experience Learned from Men in Zambia

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### Abstract

Gender Based Violence (GBV) has been framed and understood exclusively as a woman's issue. Much of the research on GBV portrays men as perpetrators and women as victims of this violence. While it is true that most gender based violence occur against women, it is not true that women are the only victims and that men are the only perpetrators. However, reasons why and how GBV against men is exhibited are unknown in Zambia. It is the bias in research that has led to the framing of gender based violence as solely perpetrated by men against women portraying the latter as only victims. It is on these grounds that this study aims at exploring the causes and types of gender based violence (GBV) against men from the lenses of the perpetrators (women) and the victims (men) in one of Zambia's compounds in Choma town. The study drew its sample from fifty-nine (59) wives and twenty-one (21) husbands, making a total sample of eighty (80) respondents. Data was analyzed qualitatively using themes and patterns which were identified from the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews to generate descriptions of the phenomenon under study. The study revealed that women's violence towards men was caused by: poor financial support, infidelity, beer drinking, non-involvement in household chores, suspicions and jealousy, husband's late coming and dependence of husbands on their wives (lacking source of income).

**Keyword:** Violence against men, Intimate partner relationship, GBV

### 1. Introduction

In today's language, the phrase gender based violence is almost synonymous with abuse of women and girls. While most attention is given to women who are abused by men, the latter are often overlooked victims of Gender Based Violence. According to the United States Bureau of Justice Statistics Crime Data Brief (2003), men account for approximately 15 percent of the victims of reported intimate partner violence perpetrated by women meaning that the remaining 85 percent of victims are women. These findings were further confirmed by Dubin(2004) who states that "85 percent of intimate partner violence is committed against women and only 5-15 percent of intimate violence is committed against men."

Gender based violence comes in physical, sexual and psychological (emotional) forms and all these forms are similar throughout the world. Physical violence could mean slapping, boxing, whipping, pouring hot liquid substances such as water and/or cooking oil and even breaking property. It can also include wife battery, sexual assault, dowry-related murder and marital rape. Perera et al. (2011) highlight the nature of gender based violence with regards to its types and how these have an impact on the health of women, emphasizing that this violence had a face of a woman even though most researches dispute the fact that men are victims too. However, some men are victims of violence at the hands of women in silence fearing shame and ridicule if they are reported; and the embarrassment of admitting that they are being abused by their female intimate partners, especially wives (Dubin, 2004).

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Causes of gender based violence are multi-faceted and are shaped by complex forces that operate at different levels of a person's life, such as; individual, community, societal and state level. Culture too, plays a significant role in creating and perpetuating GBV (CEDAW 2005). Traditional attitudes towards women and men around the world contribute to the perpetuation of GBV through stereotypical roles assigned to men and women respectively. These roles which are socially determined constrain women's ability to exercise choices that would improve their lives while maximizing opportunities for men. Experts in this field do not agree on what the exact causes of this violence are and because of this, there are several different and sometimes overlapping theories explaining the causes of this violence, such as, the biological, psychological, that is jealousy related; social theories in terms of behavioural aspects; resource theory in terms of power; and control theory.

In 2003, the World Health Organization (WHO) conducted a community based research on domestic violence in rural Uganda's Rakai district. Using a sample size of 5, 109 women of reproductive age, the research revealed causes and types of violence which both men and women suffered from their partners and also brought out the aspect of female against male violence. It however highlighted that, 'roughly 4 out of 5 women who reported recent female against male domestic violence also reported recent male against female domestic violence.' A critical analysis of this statement may indicate that female against male violence may have been caused by male against female violence which can be referred to as 'violent resistance or self defence' (Johnson, 2006).

Various researches have shown that both men and women are violent and further indicate that men are more violent than women. Researchers like Johnson(2006), Dobash and Dobash (2004), Heise et,al (2002), and Tjaden and Thoennes (2000) among others mention victimization of men in passing while discussing violence against women in detail. Not much research has been done in Zambia comparing intimate partner victimization rates between men and women, nor the aspect of men as victims of intimate violence. Most research in Zambia reveals why and how women are abused and show at least some interventions put in place to help the abused women (Musukuma, 2005, Mtonga, 2007). In view of the above mentioned, this research was conducted to investigate the reasons why and how wives become violent towards their husbands in one of Zambia's compounds in Choma town.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

This study drew its sample from a population of men and women in one of Zambia's compounds. The sample was composed of fifty-nine (59) married women (wives) and twenty-one (21) married men (husbands) respectively, making a total sample size of 80 respondents. The researcher used a Women's Affairs Support Group as the entry point as this was the most appropriate option at the time of the research. Once these women were identified, the researcher was indirectly linked to their husbands who were anticipated to be 59 going by the number of the women. Out of the anticipated male participants, 19 husbands refused to be part of the study alleging that the issues to be discussed were too personal to be disclosed to outsiders and that the researcher was too young to meddle into other people's marriage experiences. Focus group discussion guide and interview guide were used as data collection tools in this study. Data was presented and analyzed thematically. Furthermore, constructs, themes and patterns were identified from the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews to generate a description of phenomenon that was under study. Each respondent interviewed was evaluated by the set of thematic codes developed. Similarities and differences were identified from the participants' responses. Categories of the responses were formed, and the researcher looked for underlying themes and relationships from the categories. After examining the themes and relationships, tentative theoretical statements were constructed from among the relationships. Participants were well informed about the nature and purpose of the research prior to the research process. Hence their participation was purely voluntary.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The study revealed that the violence of women was caused by many factors. The most frequently cited inducers of this violence being poor financial support, infidelity, beer drinking, non-involvement in household chores, suspicions and jealousy, late coming and dependence (lack of source of income) (Table 1). Poor financial support was the leading cause of violence against men from the sample with 29 women of the 55 citing it. Men in this research were reluctant to admit that their poor financial support to their wives and families was a cause of violence to their women. This is seen by the fact that only 2 out of the 21 men participants in this research cited poor financial support as a cause of violence from their wives. Asked on poor financial support as a cause of violence, most of the men claimed their wives were just extravagant and ungrateful, adding that the finances they provided were enough for their families.

**Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Causes of Violence**

Inducer of Violence	Frequency
Poor Financial Support	29
Infidelity	25
Beer drinking	12
Non-involvement in household chores	9
Suspicious & jealousy	9
Late coming	8
Dependence-no source of income	2
Correction/ rebuke	2
Materialism	2
Lack of attention	2

Source: Data from Focus Group Discussions and In-depth interviews

Poor financial support attracted a host of hostile behavior characterized with denials of cooking, cleaning and laundry services. Almost all the 29 women who cited poor financial support withdrew their services to punish their husbands for their inability to provide for their families. Poor financial support did not only attract hostile behavior, it also attracted actual violence through denial of sex and beating. The two men who consented that poor financial support triggered some hostile behavior from their wives said the types of violence they suffered were denials of cooking, cleaning and laundry services. These men confirmed what the women said that poor financial support to their families caused the above service denials. They further explained the agony they went through from such denial that life became very hard because they were made to do things they were not used to do.

For instance a mother of 4 and a marketer said, ‘Sometimes my husband simply does not want to buy food or give me money to buy food. I strive to buy from my small business so that my children do not starve. But if it is me who has bought the food, I don’t give him because food is not just picked but bought. Until he buys food or gives me money to buy, he won’t eat. I don’t wash or cook for him because I want to punish him so that he realizes that am not his slave but his wife...’

Another mother of 3 aged 34 said, ‘When he is not around I buy nice food i.e. chicken and nice vegetables. I even make tea with milk and eat with my children. When he comes back and asks for food, I simply tell him there is no food. Usually he complains but I ask him where he expects me to find food if he doesn’t buy it himself. Meanwhile my children and I would have eaten already...elo kuwasha nako nileka ndaba nilibbe mpamvu, nasopo yoowashila kuliibe (I will even stop doing the laundry because there is no soap. Washing also needs energy, if I don’t eat I can’t wash). It’s not like I don’t wash my clothes, I do it’s just that I want to punish him for not being supportive.

‘...my husband is not supportive so I had to start a business selling nshima in a restaurant to support my children...I don’t even know how much he makes out of his carpentry job. I have now stopped him from

bringing his relatives because there is no way I can be buying food for his relatives and himself while he takes his money to drink beer and give his girlfriends. Now I just cook for myself and my children' (mother of 4 aged 32).

'...I don't have authority over any money in our home. Even the money we make out of the plants which I personally sale, he takes it away from me. So each time I get home after the sales, I have to account for all the plants sold. However, when he gets paid, he tells me that I have no share out of his money because I was not there when his mother was educating him. It breaks my heart to hear such words from my husband such that I can't even have sex with him and so I chase him from my house so that he sleeps in the second wife's house even when it is my turn' (mother of 3 aged 46).

'I fight hard to survive because my husband never helps me with his money. He would rather give his relatives than me. When he gets paid he shows me the money but he tells me not to touch or use any of his money. If I do, then a fight will break out until I return the money. Even when I have a problem in my family he's not ready to help. I have to work hard all by myself. Because of that, I don't give him the food I buy and for as long as he does not buy, we would stay like that. Meanwhile I would eat from my friends. Even the bible says husbands must provide for their families' (wife and teacher aged 32).

'When I beat him, he changes and come with a plastic bag hanging with some stuff inside when he knocks off from work. But when he forgets about the beatings, he stops bringing unless I administer another beating' (mother of 4 aged 36).

As earlier alluded to, only two men openly acknowledged that their inadequate financial statuses attracted violence and hostile behavior from their wives and this is what they had to say:

'Sometimes my wife complains of the little money I earn and uses that excuse in refusing to cook whatever food may be available. She also abandons washing alleging that there is no washing soap but she manages to wash her own clothes. It's hard to knock off from work and come and start cooking, cutting vegetables and tomatoes. Our only child is too small to be sent to cook... sometimes I feel like just walking away and finding another place to stay'... (the respondent did not disclose his age but looked to be in his early 30's).

'She wants us to lead a life style we cannot afford. If our neighbors cook chicken, she wants me to buy chicken even when I have no money. When I buy the rape or beans which I can afford, she refuses to cook. I feel we should lead our own life style which suits our pocket.' (husband aged 38 and a local small scale businessman).

The excerpts presented above show women strongly associating husbands with breadwinning obligations. Under this obligation, men were supposed to buy enough food and/or leave money for their families. Failure to provide was viewed as provocation.

Infidelity, was another common inducer of violence among wives in the sample. In this research, many women submitted that cheating by their husbands was common and this aroused feelings of rage and betrayal which they found hard to overcome. 25 women out of the 55 who consented to using violence cited infidelity as the cause of their violence. Infidelity was then rated the second most common inducer of violence among women after poor financial support. When asked on allegations of infidelity, all the 21 men in this study disagreed to such claims. More than 7 men out of the 21 said their wives were always suspicious of their behavior such that even visiting with friends (male and female) meant sleeping around with them. About 3 husbands claimed that their wives wanted too much attention as if they were newly married when in fact they were years old together and had gone beyond years of fantasy.

Additionally, infidelity attracted different types of violent behaviors but common among them was denial of sex. Others included physical acts of breaking household goods and use of witchcraft. Women spoke unsympathetically of how their husband's infidelity drove them into violent behavior. For instance according to one wife, '...one particular sin which I fail to overcome in my body is my husband's cheating. This particular problem is one which deserves even more serious punishment than anything else. In fact, I would prefer having no money and staying in peace than us having money which influences my husband to

leave me for other girls. I don't sleep (have sex) with him when I discover that he has an extra-marital affair because I assume he gets enough from his girlfriends' (house wife aged 39 with 6 children).

"...among the problems I experience in my marriage, cheating is the most prominent...my husband likes girls such that sometimes he sleeps out and only comes in the morning. Because of his behaviour, he has on several occasions brought Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) in our home. Because I know that it's the money he gets that influences him to behave that way, I break household goods so that his money keeps circulating by buying to replace the items I break instead of taking it to his girlfriends. I don't enjoy it but I have no option because it is the only language that makes him behave (mother of 2 aged 25 and a teacher).

'...because he is fond of girlfriends, I use juju (musamu wadada) to tie his manhood so that when he goes to his girlfriends, his manhood does not erect and therefore fails to function. When he is here with me I untie him so that his manhood functions as normal. This restrains him from going for women for fear of embarrassment and he stays home with me (wife aged 27).

'...it is normal for men who have lived with their wives for a very long time to treat them like any other common person. But my wife always expects special attention and if that attention is lacking, she becomes upset with me accusing me of seeing other women to whom am devoting my attention' (husband ad government employee). The excerpts presented above demonstrated that infidelity was a serious cause of violence among women in the study as this was confirmed by both husbands and wives. This finding therefore confirms the findings of Muponisi (2012) and Mtonga (2012) on infidelity especially of men being a cause of violence of women towards men.

Further, it was discovered that 9 of the 55 women and 7 of the 21 men cited suspicions and jealousy as the cause of aggressive behavior in the women. Such suspicions and jealousy in the women were necessitated by the men's suspicious behavior such as long unexplained absence from home, phone text messages and phone calls. Sometimes misplaced anger caused the aggressive behavior of wives towards their husbands. On the other hand, these women claimed that their men were also too suspicious of them such that they would not allow their wives to attend school, do business or in rare incidents, get employment. This just added to their anger because they claimed that their husbands knew that they were innocent of their suspicions and they just did that to cover up their own suspicious behaviors. Hence, there are two types of suspicions both inducing aggression in women towards their husbands. Suspicions stemming from men's suspicious behavior such as mentioned above (hidden messages and unexplained phone calls) and aggression coming from men's possessive behavior over their wives, made women aggressive towards their husbands. Suspicion and jealousy thus comprises the behavior exhibited by women in reaction to their husband's suspicious behavior.

The types of violence that suspicions and jealousy attracted were use of witchcraft (juju), beating and verbal abuse evident in insults, yelling and name calling. The excerpts below show that beating, insulting, yelling and name calling were the responses to provocations of suspicions of unfaithfulness and jealousy. 'I have used juju on him in the past after suspecting that he was cheating on me. Nowadays beating him works better because after beating him he comes early and stays home. Beating him has really worked for me, though for now it's been long since I last beat him and he needs another beating. Whenever I beat him he reports me to my mother' (mother of 4 aged 32 with 13 years marriage experience).

'When he comes home, he demands to inspect my private parts to check if I have had sex with another man when in fact it's him who sleeps around. Who wouldn't be annoyed of such behavior? He doesn't even allow me to visit my relatives because of his stupid jealousy' (mother of 3).

'Sometimes I find messages in his phone which I suspect are from his girlfriends and there are calls he avoids to pick up when we are together. Because of that, I yell and insult him. I don't care whether any one is listening' (mother of 4 aged 36 and bar patron). This shows that tension in many homes was caused by suspicions and jealousy. Domestic violence, jealousy and suspicions of unfaithfulness are among the significant causes of violence in most marriages as they are the common causes of hostile behavior exhibited by women (Muponisi, 2012; Roach, 2011).

Violence was common in homes where husbands alcoholism and violent behavior. These two were cited by both husbands and wives. Below is what the women said in relation to their husbands beer drinking and their violent behavior. ‘When he gets some money, he leaves home for days just drinking. When he comes back, he wants food and clean clothes. But he finds am ready for him, waiting for an opportunity to strike...Whatever he asks, it sparks an argument which deteriorates into a fight and I hit him using anything at my disposal. Men are strong and as a woman I cannot fight him with my bare hands, this is the reason I use anything like stones, logs and almost anything within my reach to hurt him.’ (mother of five with 20 years of marriage experience).

As indicated above, both men and women admitted that beer drinking attracted some hostility from their wives. Beer drinking from the women’s point of view translated into many problems in their marriages. It led to unbudgeted spending, denied spouses precious time together as their husbands spent a lot of time drinking with their friends and it exposed their spouses to risky behavior. All these factors that came with beer drinking made wives dislike beer drinking. Women in this study alluded to the fact that when their men came home drunk, they would provoke, make noise and insult while some would yell at their wives to extents of starting fights. It is well known that alcohol impairs the reasoning and judgment of the consumer and ultimately may cause them to act in an aggressive and irritating manner (Ondenko and Purdin, 2000 & 2002). Such aggression and irritations triggered hostility in their wives.

From the findings of this research and with the confirmation from other research findings cited above, it is wise to posit that beer drinking really does lead to violence in many homes in Zambia compound and induces violence in wives of those men who take it. Violence of these women varied and depended on the manner of provocation as indicated in the above excerpts. When the women also drank beer, that contributed to their violence towards the men as they claimed to rush into insulting each time they were provoked when they were drunk and hesitated to do so when sober (Muponisi 2012).

Non-involvement in household chores also triggered hostile behavior in at least 9 out of the 55 women who consented to violent behavior to their husbands. Benin and Agostinelli (1988) argue that husband’s involvement in household chores contributes significantly to marital quality and stability because according to them, wives are happy when their spouses take part in even in the smallest way possible in traditional “female” chores. Berardo, Shehan and Leslie (2007) state, “...women view men’s contribution to household chores as a considerate, supportive intimate act and evidence of their love.” This implies that when husbands entirely refuse to take part in these chores both quality and stability of such marriages are at stake. The refusal creates frustration in the partner who is left to do all the chores alone or even most of them which may result in an emotional build-up likely to cause arguments and fights in the home. Schwalbe (2001) argues that men’s non-involvement in household chores creates and perpetuates inequalities in the home and at work. “Women cannot compete as men’s equals at work if they are doing a second shift of cleaning, laundry, and childcare at home. A man whose wife does these chores for him, or a man who doesn’t do his share of work, is freer to devote himself to his job. As this freedom translates into higher earnings, a man expects and gains more power in the home because his job becomes the chief source of family income. A little extra power at home, arising out of old ideas about gender, can give a man an edge at work which can in turn, over time, amplify his power in the home” (ibid).

From the above quotation, it is clear that the writer is challenging the idea that housework is a woman’s responsibility and is also advocating for men’s involvement in household chores. In this research, women said that their husbands did not help out in any domestic chores, not even in ‘masculine’ home chores such as slashing the lawns, cutting flower hedges, digging rubbish pits or gardening. These women claimed that it would be understood if their men refused to wash dishes because these are typically done by girls and women, but where they entirely refuse to do chores that are suitable for men was totally unacceptable. This made the women hostile and they sought ways to ‘correct’ their husbands.

Generally men refused involvement in household chores claiming that they worked all day long and therefore felt less responsible for housework. They further regarded it as the responsibility of women and that they were not ready to compromise to such levels. Non-involvement in household chores by husbands

attracted a variety of hostilities. The 9 women who cited non-involvement in household chores as a cause of their hostility said they denied their husbands cleaning, laundry and catering services claiming that they were tired due to the heavy loads of household chores and other domestic responsibilities such as child care which were all left to them. Using the same argument of being tired, women denied their husbands sex. The excerpts below show how husbands' non-involvement in household chores triggered hostile behavior in wives of such husbands: 'My husband is extremely lazy. What pains me the most is that he does not allow me to have a maid to help me. At the same time, he does not help out with work at home. I have to do the laundry, cooking and cleaning all alone. Sometimes we knock off at the same time from work and we reach home tired, he will go straight to watch the television and read newspapers while I struggle alone to prepare food. After eating he quickly goes to bed while I remain to tidy up the kitchen. This leads me into punishing him by sometimes washing but not ironing so that he irons for himself. And when am very upset with him, I tell him that am not able to cook because I say I have a headache and he will have no option but to cook. Usually, I deny him sex and especially with denial of sex, I would have achieved my objective of punishing him.' (teacher and a mother of 3).

'My husband does not do any household chores. Both him and I work but in addition to my teaching job, he expects me to cook, do laundry and cleaning the house, cut the flower hedge, slash the lawns, dig the rubbish pit and do the gardening. What kind of a husband would subject his wife to such exploitation? So depending on how annoyed I become, sometimes I subject him to silent treatment where I don't talk to him while sometimes I would not respond when he asks me something. I would just treat him like he does not exist. In addition to that, I deny him sex either because after such hard work, I am too tired to have sex'(mother of 2 aged 33).

From the above excerpts, it can be deduced that husbands' non- involvement in household chores induces hostile behavior in their wives. Women suffer from a cultural bias which stereotypes them as homemakers and they are made to carry a full burden of household management. The case of above in which the husband who is the sole decision maker does not authorize the hiring of a maid but at the same time does not help out with domestic chores to lighten the burden of his wife shows how serious the issue of husbands' non-involvement in household chores is. The triple roles to which women are subjected to weighs heavily on them and is considered to be exploitation. In this triple role, women engage in the productive activities to generate income for the household through employment like teaching and hair dressing. The same women have the reproductive role of bearing and looking after children; in addition to the maintenance work of cooking food, washing clothes and cleaning both the inside and outside of their homes. These women also have a community role to play such as their membership in committees to improve the wellbeing of their communities. Men therefore should consider the wellbeing of their wives and help out with household chores. Where they refuse; women are justified to teach them their lessons.

The general picture of the inducers and types of violence in women as revealed by this research indicates that poor financial support, infidelity and beer drinking were highly pronounced inducers of this violence while denials of sex and avoidance were highly pronounced types of violence. The research also revealed that female violence is rarely physical with only 9 out of 59 using it. Female violence is mostly psychological with denial of sex and avoidance being its strongholds. The hostile behavior earlier mentioned as not amounting to violence was also a common behavior among women. This included denials of cooking, laundry and cleaning services.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Domestic violence against husbands in Zambia compound is a real phenomenon. From the findings of this research, the reality of this violence has been confirmed by both wives as perpetrators and husbands as victims. Inducers of the said violence include poor financial support, infidelity, beer drinking, non-involvement in household chores, suspicions and jealousy, late coming and dependence/ having no source of income to support oneself. The common types of violence revealed by this research include denial of sex,

avoidance, insults and yelling, fighting, use of witchcraft, beating, burning and breaking household goods. Other types of reactions which are not violent in nature include denial of cooking and laundry services.

On the characteristics of wives who are violent, the research revealed that relatively all wives of different age groups were violent but the types of violence they engaged in were slightly different. The younger ages of 23 to 36 were both physical and psychological in their violence while the older ages of 37 to 65 only used the psychological type of violence. The reality however is that all age groups were violent. Education was also seen to have some influence on female violence. The highly educated women, in this case those who had tertiary education, were less physical in their approach to violence. This category did not fight, beat or burn their husbands as did the other two categories with an exception of one woman who was in the habit of breaking household goods whenever she was provoked. Religion also had some influence on female domestic violence in that for some women, it prevented the escalation of violence while others claimed to have been cautious in the way they reacted from their husbands' provocations as such measures were only precautionary or lessons to their husbands.

This research revealed that female violence is generally psychological with denial of sex being the most widely used type of violence. With denial of sex, the type of the provocation did not matter. It is as if it was the universal type of punishment common to relatively all types of provocation. It is where the strength of the female violence lies. It is then recommended to conduct sensitization programs for both sexes so as to make them aware of the effects GBV has on either partner or those around them.

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