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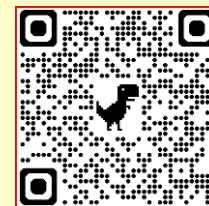
AN EVALUATION OF CULTURAL FACTORS THAT PERPETUATE COMMUNITY ATTITUDES OF VIOLENCE TOWARDS WOMEN: A CASE STUDY OF HATCLIFFE HIGH DENSITY SUBURB IN HARARE METROPOLITAN PROVINCE, ZIMBABWE.

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to evaluate cultural factors that perpetuate attitudes of violence towards women. A case study of Hatcliffe High Density Suburb of Harare Metropolitan Province, Zimbabwe. The representative sample consisted of twenty (20) participants who included both female and male adolescents, parents and other elder members of the community in the suburb, which could also influence policy formulation and implementation in the combating of attitudes of violence towards women as people hide behind the cultural values notion. A qualitative approach was employed to guide the study. Research design/method used was case study as it was considered useful in the methodology that the researcher had selected. Data was collected using the face to face interviews. Qualitative data analysis with descriptive statistics was used in the presentation, interpretation and analysis of data. The results showed that age and developmental factors also perpetuated attitudes of violence towards women. Another key finding from the study revealed that family therapy was and often, a significantly more effective treatment than no treatment, and specifically effective in the reduction/combating of attitudes that perpetuate violence towards women regardless of the context one would be coming from. Key recommendations from the study were: the need for a culturally appropriate assessment procedure with regards to relationship history and/or marriage authenticity and capacitation of governmental institutions such as the police and traditional chiefs so that they are able to combat cultural factors that perpetuate violence towards women

KEY WORDS: culture, attitude, women and community.

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is perhaps the most widespread and socially tolerated of human rights violations, cutting across communities, race, ethnicity and religion. The impact of gender-based violence (GBV) is devastating. Individual women who are victims of such violence often experience life-long emotional distress, mental health problems and poor reproductive health, as well as being at higher risk of acquiring HIV and intensive long-term users of health services. In addition, the cost to women, their children, families and communities is a significant obstacle to reducing poverty, achieving gender equality and ensuring a peaceful transition for post-conflict societies. This, in conjunction with the mental and physical health implications of gender-based violence, impacts on a country's ability to develop and construct a stable, productive society, or reconstruct a country in the wake of conflict.

The construct of attitude is located in the disciplinary field of social psychology. Attitudes have been a central component of social psychology since its beginning (Krosnick *et al.* 2005) and in fact, the discipline of social psychology has been defined as the scientific study of attitudes (Ajzen *et al.* 2005). The study of attitudes involves an investigation of the factors influencing how they are formed and changed and how they are translated into motivation and behaviour (Albarracin *et al.* 2005). There are a variety of different theoretical frameworks for understanding attitudes, and no one theory dominates (Albarracin and Fishbein 2005). Thus, the construct of attitudes has been defined in a wide variety of ways throughout its history (Fabrigar *et al.* 2005). Nevertheless, several features of attitudes receive consistent emphasis. First, most definitions focus on the process of evaluating an object on a scale ranging from positive to negative (Fabrigar *et al.* 2005). Eagly and Chaiken (1993), for example, define an attitude as 'a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour of disfavour' (cited in Albarracin *et al.*).

Second, attitudes are distinguished from beliefs. It is argued that beliefs can usually be verified or falsified by objective criteria, whereas attitudes cannot be assessed as either true or false (Eagly and Chaiken 1993). Beliefs are said to be based upon knowledge and those holding beliefs tend to believe that such knowledge is correct (Wyer and Albarracin 2005). So while beliefs may be changed by the presentation of factual information, attitudes may be more difficult to change. Third, the mainstream theory of attitudes argues that attitudes are stable dispositions. This is in fact regarded as one of their defining features. Most literature assumes that an evaluation is accessed from memory and represents a global assessment of the object under scrutiny. In this view attitudes are seen as 'learned structures that reside in the long-term memory and are activated when the issue or object of the attitude is encountered' (Kruglanski and Strobe 2005: 324). In this view, attitudes are regarded as 'enduring psychological constructs that exercise a guiding function on thought and behaviour' (Bassili and Brown 2005: 545). For example, 'sex role attitudes' held by individuals (the focus of considerable social psychological research on gender) are seen as stable and internally consistent (Billig *et al.* 1988).

Community attitudes may show greater intolerance towards violence but this does not necessarily mean that violence will decline as a result. In an attempt to explain this disparity, some researchers distinguish between implicit and explicit attitudes. Basili and Brown (2005: 546) argue that 'implicit attitudes represent a more accurate reflection of people's inner feelings than explicit attitudes'. In their view, implicit attitudes are more influential is shaping how we think and act. This notion is offered as one explanation to explain the gap between high levels of discrimination against women whilst stereotypical attitudes had apparently changed.

Rather, gender-based violence in Zimbabwe, as elsewhere in the world, is a complex issue that has as its root the structural inequalities between men and women that result in the persistence of power differentials between them. Women's subordinate status to men in many societies, coupled with a general acceptance of interpersonal violence as a means of resolving conflict, renders women disproportionately vulnerable to violence from all levels of society: individual men, within the family and community, and by the state. In 1993, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women offered the first official definition of gender-based violence:

Article 1: Any act that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action expanded on this definition, specifying that gender-based violence includes violations of the rights of women in situations of armed conflict, such as: systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy, forced sterilisation, forced abortion, coerced or forced use of contraceptives, prenatal sex selection and female infanticide. It further recognised the particular vulnerabilities of women belonging to minorities: the elderly and the displaced; indigenous, refugee and migrant communities; women living in impoverished rural or remote areas; and women in detention. Although violence against women has begun to receive more attention globally over the last two decades, the scourge of violence against women in Africa particularly is still largely hidden.

This is so for a number of reasons: the predominance of the system of patriarchy across Africa has meant that women are still perceived of and treated as subordinate to men; violence against women is accepted as the cultural norm in many societies and is often condoned by community and sometimes state leaders; the stigma attached to female victims of violence has resulted in very low rates of reporting; and often if women do report violence against them, they are either turned away because the authorities see violence against women as a matter to be dealt with privately or within the family, or they struggle to access justice in a criminal justice system that is not informed by or sensitive to the needs of women. These factors result in a dearth of information and data about violence against women across Africa, and this affects the ability of policy makers to: guide legislative and policy reforms; ensure adequate provision of targeted and effective services; monitor trends and progress in addressing and eliminating violence against women; and assess the impact of measures taken.

It is imperative that accurate and comprehensive data are gathered on violence against women in order both to increase societal awareness around the issue and to ensure that nation states are acting to eradicate violence against women and can be held accountable for their progress or lack of it. It is against this background that this study evaluated the cultural factors that perpetuate community attitudes of violence towards women: A case study of Hatcliffe High Density Suburb of Harare Metropolitan Province. In so doing, the study examined the legal framework, the size of the community, women organisations in place and government institutions in place within such a community. Furthermore, an exploration on the strengths and weaknesses of the current legal and institutional arrangements that regulate violence against women was done.

Statement of the problem

Which cultural factors perpetuate community attitudes of violence towards women?

Research Question

What are the cultural factors that perpetuate community attitudes that influence violence towards women?

Purpose of the study

The study sought to evaluate cultural factors that perpetuate community attitudes of violence towards women.

Method and Materials

In this study, the researcher made use of the mixed methodology. A case study research design was used in the study. Thus the population for the research study entailed a total of two hundred and ten (210) participants which consisted of both parents and adolescents from Hatcliffe high density suburb. The researcher used purposive and random sampling techniques to select the research participants who were parents and adolescents residing in Hatcliffe high density suburb of Harare Metropolitan Province. The sample size of the study consisted of ten (10) adolescents and ten (10) parents from Hatcliffe High Density Suburb. In-depth face to face interviews and questionnaires were used to gather data from the research participants.

Results/Findings

The present study targeted individuals who were adolescents and parents from Hatcliffe High Density Suburb in Harare Metropolitan Province. In terms of employment status levels, the study conducted revealed that at least twenty percent (20%) of people were formally employed and eighty percent (80%) were informally employed. In terms of the literacy level, fifteen percent (15%) of the participants had done "O" level, whilst five percent (5%) had attained diplomas, certificates or degrees and the rest of the population only reached their ZJC or Grade Seven. As of the source of livelihoods, most people in the suburb stated they lead their lives through selling tomatoes, vegetables, small groceries and second hand clothes on the roadside in the suburb. Some of the findings of the research study included:-

- Unwanted pregnancies due to acts of violence, unsafe abortions, infection with sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS
- Age and development of people contributed to the perpetuation of violence towards women on the cover of culture.

Conclusion

Cultural factors that influenced community attitudes toward violence against women are shaped by a multitude of factors at all levels of the social order. Two clusters of factors have a multilevel influence on attitudes. Both gender and culture are powerful influences on attitudes, and both operate at micro- and macro levels including individual socialization, the norms and relations of particular contexts and communities, and the society-wide workings of the media, law, and other factors. Gender and culture themselves intersect, in that different cultural contexts involve particular norms and relations of gender that shape attitudes toward violence against women. In addition, a wide range of other influences on attitudes operate among individuals, organizations, communities, or in society as a whole, and many of these operate at more than one level. For example, particular institutions such as schools and workplaces shape their participants' attitudes through both formal policies and structures and informal norms; they are locations for informal peer relations that shape attitudes, and such institutions are themselves shaped in dynamic ways by wider factors such as the mass media. In turn, the influence of societal factors such as the mass media is affected by the local contexts in which media representations are seen and individual variations in experience and understanding. The intersections of gender, race and ethnicity, and other social divisions cut across all of these levels and help to reproduce the social relations and institutional structures that perpetuate pro-violence attitudes and violence toward women.

Recommendations

- Need for a culturally appropriate assessment procedure with regards to relationship history and/or marriage authenticity.
- Capacitation of governmental institutions such as the police and traditional chiefs so that they are able to combat cultural factors that perpetuate violence towards women

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