

## Investigating social-cultural factors contributing to low reporting levels of gender-based violence cases

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### Abstract

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**Introduction:** Gender-based violence remains a critical societal concern, characterized by both its prevalence and the challenge of underreporting. Understanding the social-cultural factors contributing to low reporting levels of GBV cases is essential for effective intervention. This qualitative case study aimed investigating the social-cultural factors that hinder the reporting of GBV cases within the context of Chibuluma compound in Zambia's Copperbelt Province.

**Materials and Methods:** Employing qualitative methods, the study involved interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders including police officers, YWCA officials, and women residing in the compound.

**Results:** The findings reveal a complex interplay of factors that contribute to low reporting levels of GBV cases. Economic dependency on spouses, cultural norms that tolerate violence, and lack of trust in the judicial system emerged as prominent barriers. Marital violence took various forms, including wife battery, abandonment, and infidelity

**Conclusion:** The study highlights the necessity of collaborative efforts involving governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and international bodies to effectively address GBV. Recommendations include fostering women's economic empowerment, strengthening legal enforcement mechanisms, and challenging cultural norms that perpetuate violence. By uncovering the intricate socio-cultural dynamics contributing to underreporting, this research offers valuable insights for designing comprehensive strategies to combat gender-based violence in Chibuluma compound and beyond.

**Keywords:** *Gender-based violence, Reporting levels, Social-cultural factors*

## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) has emerged as a highly significant and widely discussed issue, encompassing a diverse range of stakeholders. This includes policy-makers, traditional leaders, gender activists, educationalists, and notably, the government itself. As elucidated by Bott and Mary (1), GBV's historical presence has been enduring, exhibiting itself through varied manifestations encompassing psychological, social, physical, and emotional abuses.

GBV is best understood as a form of violence directed towards individuals based on their biological sex, gender identity, or perceived adherence to socially constructed norms of masculinity and femininity. This includes a spectrum of abuses such as physical, sexual, and psychological maltreatment, along with threats, coercion, curtailment of liberty, and economic deprivation. These forms of violence can occur within both public and private contexts. Notably, women and girls bear the brunt of the impact of gender-based violence due to their heightened vulnerability. However, it's essential to acknowledge that boys, men, and sexual and gender minorities can also fall victim to this pervasive issue [1].

Nonetheless, the government has demonstrated recognition of the prevalence and seriousness of the GBV issue within Zambia. A government press statement concerning this matter has highlighted its deep concern over the escalating numbers of GBV cases, particularly impacting women. It's crucial to emphasize that GBV constitutes a violation of international law as well as the fundamental human rights of both men and women. As elucidated by the World Health Organization [2], GBV stands as a blatant infringement upon human rights, posing a dire threat to the lives, well-being, and future prospects of individuals.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) encompasses deliberate acts or behaviors aimed at causing harm, often involving both women and men, with women disproportionately bearing the brunt of victimization. These actions stem from a disturbing imbalance of power within relationships between genders. The far-reaching consequences of GBV extend beyond its immediate victims, potentially hindering national development on a significant scale. It's paramount to grasp that the reverberations of GBV permeate various strata of society, transcending individual experiences to profoundly influence broader

developmental progress.

However, in Zambia, despite GBV being illegal, communities frequently disregard laws when GBV is commonplace. According to the Central Statistical Office [3] and the Zambia Sexual Behaviour Survey, rural areas report a higher incidence of GBV (41%) compared to urban areas (23%). This underscores the pressing need for intensified governmental and non-governmental efforts to curtail the escalating cases of physically violent GBV. This urgency is underscored by the consistent rise in police reports related to such incidents from 2015 to the present. As a countermeasure, there's a compelling need to mobilize local media outlets, particularly community radio stations, to educate communities about the legal provisions that safeguard justice in cases of physical assault within the context of gender-based violence [4].

However, a contrary reality persists in Chibuluma compound of Kalulushi district, where prevailing notions deter residents from reporting GBV cases. Residents often choose silence, fearing potential assault or the collapse of their marriage and family ties. Additionally, victims frequently abstain from reporting GBV incidents, viewing them as secretive or too trivial to warrant police involvement. In light of this, it is evident that the leadership's vision is to foster a culture of reporting GBV, irrespective of geographical location. Regrettably, this scenario differs significantly in Chibuluma compound. There, a disconcerting preference for unreported GBV cases among couples prevails, leading to a rise in HIV/AIDS, depression, suicidal tendencies, miscarriages, femicides, and instances of women killing their husbands.

These alarming outcomes underscore the imperative for this research, which seeks to delve into the social-cultural factors contributing to the distressing levels of underreported GBV cases among residents of Chibuluma compound in Kalulushi district. Through this investigation, a comprehensive understanding of the factors stifling reporting rates can be attained, ultimately contributing to more informed strategies for addressing this pressing issue.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Design

In this study, we adopted a qualitative case study design, chosen specifically to facilitate a nuanced exploration of the intricate social-cultural factors

that underlie the phenomenon of low reporting levels in cases of GBV. This approach was instrumental in providing an in-depth understanding that goes beyond surface-level observations.

### *Study site*

The research was meticulously carried out within the confines of Kalulushi district, situated in the Copperbelt province of Zambia. Specifically, the focal point of investigation was Chibuluma compound. This choice of location was made after a careful deliberation, considering the complex dynamics of the region.

Kalulushi district emerged as a prime study area due to its alignment with the study's overarching goals. Furthermore, it falls within the broader Copperbelt province, which is pivotal for its distinctive socio-economic and cultural characteristics. A significant determinant in the selection process was the striking prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) within the district, with a staggering 928 reported cases, constituting 18.8% of the total GBV incidents reported province-wide.

The decision to concentrate on Chibuluma compound within Kalulushi district was strategic. This particular area presented a unique and intriguing microcosm of social-cultural intricacies, providing an ideal backdrop for the study's exploration into the factors contributing to the underreporting of GBV cases. By focusing on Chibuluma compound, the study aimed to delve deeply into the localized nuances that might be influencing the observed low reporting levels.

In essence, the selection of Kalulushi district and the specific focus on Chibuluma compound were deliberate choices that aligned with the study's quest for a comprehensive and contextually grounded analysis of the challenges surrounding GBV reporting. This approach not only ensured the study's relevance but also provided a rich framework for examining the intricate interplay between socio-cultural factors and the reporting of GBV incidents.

### *Sample size*

In order to comprehensively address the research objectives, our study meticulously targeted a diverse array of participants, each playing a pivotal role within the context of GBV cases. These key stakeholders included police officers and policy-makers affiliated with the Victim

Support Unit (2), officials from the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) responsible for managing GBV cases (3), and most importantly, the women (35) residing in Chibuluma compound, situated within the Copperbelt Province of Zambia. These individuals were deliberately selected due to their profound involvement in GBV cases, stemming from their vulnerability due to gender inequalities and deeply entrenched cultural barriers.

The methodological approach adopted in this study draws inspiration from Creswell's methodology (1998), specifically employing the concept of saturation. Through this lens, a research design was meticulously crafted, intertwining purposeful sampling strategies to ensure the utmost relevance and depth of insight from the chosen respondents, totaling forty (40) in number.

The process of participant selection further embraced the concept of purposive sampling. This entailed identifying individuals who possessed a nuanced understanding of the subject matter under investigation and were both available and willing to partake in focus group discussions and interviews. This selection criterion was deliberately employed to ensure that the respondents were not only well-informed about the study's scope but also motivated to contribute their insights.

The utilization of such a sampling strategy was underpinned by the understanding that these participants held the potential to provide valuable perspectives, which, when aggregated, could unveil the intricate web of social-cultural factors contributing to the prevailing trend of low GBV reporting levels among the residents of Chibuluma compound.

By targeting this diverse group of stakeholders and employing a judicious sampling approach, our study aimed to generate a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the complexities underlying the underreporting of GBV cases. This approach allowed us to explore the issue from multiple angles, contributing to a well-rounded assessment of the factors influencing reporting behaviors within this specific context.

### **Data collection methods**

The data collection phase of this study was meticulously designed to extract rich and profound insights that would deeply illuminate the subject at hand. Employing a combination of

interviews and focus group discussions, our approach aimed to capture multifaceted perspectives and nuanced understandings.

Interviews were conducted with police officers working under the Victim Support Unit (VSU), a key source of unfiltered and first-hand information. These interviews were purposefully structured to delve into the officers' perceptions regarding the social-cultural factors influencing the low reporting levels of GBV cases among the residents of Chibuluma compound. In this context, a specifically tailored interview schedule was utilized. This schedule facilitated oral-verbal exchanges, with the interviewer meticulously recording the responses shared by the police officers.

For a comprehensive view of the women's perspectives, focus group discussions were employed. Specifically, a group of 35 women from Kalulushi YWCA was convened, offering a platform for open discussions concerning the social-cultural factors contributing to the observed low GBV reporting levels within Chibuluma compound. This methodological choice was rooted in the understanding that a group setting encouraged candid expressions within a comfortable and supportive environment. The inclusion of men in the discussions further enriched the diversity of insights garnered. Simultaneously, this approach allowed a substantial number of respondents to be engaged at once, thus alleviating the researcher's logistical burden.

To ensure the credibility and accuracy of the information gathered, rigorous documentation practices were upheld. The researcher meticulously recorded the participants' experiences, insights, and perspectives. Detailed notes were taken, capturing the essence of the conversations. This meticulous approach not only honored the participants' contributions but also ensured that the findings accurately reflected the multifaceted dimensions of the study.

Through the strategic utilization of interviews and focus group discussions, the data collection process aimed to go beyond surface-level responses, delving into the intricate fabric of social-cultural dynamics that shape reporting behaviors in the context of GBV within Chibuluma compound. This approach sought to uncover layers of understanding that would

ultimately enhance the depth and validity of the study's findings.

### *Data analysis*

The valuable data amassed from both the focus group discussions and the individual interviews underwent a meticulously structured process to transform them into insightful findings. This methodical approach encompassed various stages, including audio recording, transcription, coding, analysis, and the subsequent grouping of information according to emergent themes. These steps ensured a systematic and rigorous exploration of the intricate social-cultural factors that underpinned the observed low reporting levels of GBV cases among the residents of Chibuluma compound in Kalulushi district.

The initial phase involved the meticulous audio recording of the focus group discussions and interviews. This ensured that no nuance, tone, or emotion was lost during the data collection process. These audio recordings formed the raw material, preserving the authentic expressions and narratives of the participants.

Following this, the data underwent a careful transcription process. This transformation from spoken to written form retained the richness of the conversations while rendering them accessible for deeper analysis. Each transcribed dialogue became a crucial text to be meticulously dissected.

Coding was the subsequent pivotal step in the analytical journey. Here, the transcribed data was scrutinized and systematically tagged with codes, representing specific ideas, concepts, or themes. This process involved a thorough review of the material to identify recurring patterns, unique insights, and overarching themes that encapsulated the essence of the participants' contributions.

Subsequently, the coded data underwent in-depth analysis. This stage involved dissecting the coded content to derive meaningful interpretations, recognizing connections, disparities, and underlying meanings within the data. Through this process, the researchers sought to uncover the nuances, motivations, and intricacies that shaped the social-cultural factors contributing to the observed low reporting of GBV cases.

Finally, the analyzed data was grouped according to the emerging themes. This involved organizing the diverse insights and perspectives into coherent categories that encapsulated the common threads running through the narratives. These thematic groupings offered a structured lens through which to view the findings, enabling the researchers to synthesize and present their conclusions in a meaningful and organized manner.

By meticulously following this multi-step process, the study ensured a rigorous, comprehensive, and systematic exploration of the social-cultural factors influencing low GBV reporting levels within Chibuluma compound. The transformative journey from raw audio recordings to organized thematic findings was an exercise in extracting the depth, complexity, and significance embedded within the participants' voices and experiences.

## RESULTS

**Table 1: Percent distribution of respondents by age**

Age (Years)	Frequency	Percent (%)
24 and below	0	0
24-29	3	9
30-34	6	17
35-40	11	31
40 and above	15	43

### Distribution of staff by age

The findings, as presented in Table 2, provide a noteworthy insight into the age distribution of the staff members. The results indicate that a substantial majority (60%, n=3) of the staff fell within the age range of 30 to 34 years. Additionally, there was an equal representation of 20% of staff members within the age groups of 35 to 40 years and above, with one staff member in each of these categories (20%, n=1).

Through an insightful interview with the manager at the Kalulushi YWCA center, illuminating narratives emerged. It was revealed that women below the age of 24 were notably less inclined to report incidents of violence. This trend could potentially be attributed to recent marriages, where violence might not have yet manifested. Many women within this demographic seemed to believe that enduring violence was an inherent

### Participant's demographic characteristics

The spectrum of participants' ages encompassed a range spanning from twenty-four years to over forty years. The subsequent analysis of the data revealed a distinct distribution across these age groups, shedding light on the demographic composition. Remarkably, a significant majority (43%, n=15) of the respondents fell within the age category of 40 years and above, signifying a considerable presence of mature individuals. Following closely were women aged between 35 and 40 years, constituting 31% (n=11) of the participants. Additionally, 17% (n=6) of the respondents belonged to the age group of 30 to 34 years, while a smaller contingent of 9% (n=3) fell within the age bracket of 24 to 29 years. It is noteworthy to mention that the data did not register any participation from individuals below the age of 24 years. These findings are comprehensively presented in Table 1 for reference.

part of their role within the institution of marriage and held the optimistic perspective that it might eventually cease. A prevailing sentiment emerged among the respondents, suggesting that they had been conditioned to expect violence within marriage, often during their marriage preparations. These women were counseled that conflicts should remain within the confines of their homes and that any grievances were best addressed within the family.

Furthermore, insights gleaned from the interview unveiled an intriguing trend among women above the age of 24. These women, having spent more time within marital relationships, appeared to encounter lower instances of violence. Alternatively, some may have chosen to exit these unions, resulting in reduced exposure to violence. This segment of respondents suggested that longevity within a marriage might influence the severity and

frequency of encountered violence.

**Table 2: Percent distribution of staff by age**

Age (Years)	Frequency	Percent (%)
30-34	3	60
35-40	1	20
Above 40	1	20

### Findings from the focus group discussions and interview

The outcomes derived from the focus group discussions with women were thoughtfully juxtaposed with insights garnered from interviews conducted with Kalulushi YWCA officials and police officers from the Kalulushi police station, specifically those working within the Victim Support Unit. The descriptions encompassed in this section were meticulously composed, striving to incorporate the exact words spoken by the participants whenever possible, while also resorting to paraphrasing for certain expressions. An intrinsic understanding lies in acknowledging that several ideas and viewpoints presented by the participants were interrelated, often straddling multiple thematic domains simultaneously. This dynamic interplay underscored the intricate nature of the data, where distinct concepts frequently converged, defying rigid compartmentalization.

### Forms and nature of violence

The interviews conducted using the structured interview guides served as a conduit for soliciting insights from the participants. The

women were prompted to articulate the specific forms and characteristics of violence they had experienced, as outlined in item number 2 of the interview schedule. The outcomes of these interviews yielded a prevalent pattern of violence encountered by the respondents. Additionally, a range of specific forms of violence surfaced during the interviews, further enriching the scope of understanding. The common form of violence and the distinct patterns that emerged during these interactions were documented as follows:

### Wife Battery

Wife battery entails a distressing manifestation of physical abuse, encompassing actions such as kicking, slapping, stabbing, pushing, burning, and the issuance of threats to inflict physical harm. This form of violence operates as a harrowing reminder of the broader spectrum of abusive behaviors within relationships.

The coordinator at the Kalulushi YWCA revealed that:

*The statistics show that there were more cases of physical violence reported to the centre than any other. This he said, because he compelled Kalulushi YWCA to create a separate drop-in centre just for battered women. The centre also offers refuge to women who cannot go back to their homes after being beaten. Women are battered for a lot of reasons.*

A notable voice emerged during the focus group discussion, with one of the participants sharing their perspective:

*She has been at the Kalulushi YWCA shelter for almost a year. Her husband, a policeman, suspected her of having an extramarital affair and severely brutalised her resulting in the loss of her left eye. When she sought refuge from her relatives he went with a gun and threatened them demanding she return home. Then she escaped using the back door and went to seek refuge at the Kalulushi YWCA. This was not the first time her husband had been violent. The husband also threatened the shelter manager demanding to see her but eventually pleaded for his wife to go back home. Kalulushi YWCA, however, has refused to release her as it is felt that the husband might kill her*

Furthermore, another participant responded as follows

*Her husband frequently beat her and her five children. They used them as farm labour at the farm he was caretaking for his brother. The husband made the wife and the children work without food and rest for long hours every day. He would sit and supervise his family and when hungry he would go and buy himself 'Maheu' (a local drink) and biscuits and eat by the roadside. When confronted by his wife, he beat her in front of children. Once he beat his daughter so severely that she had to be hospitalised and that is when his wife decided she had enough. However, the husband has also threatened to sue Kalulushi YWCA because they were keeping his wife without his consent. He argued that he had paid 'bride price and no one, not even her relatives, had the right to keep his wife as her place was with him. The violence started just after she got married. At first her husband would just threaten to beat her and would use abusive language.*

This shows the wrong interpretation of traditional beliefs play a big role in physical violence. The custom of paying bride price makes some men think they own their wives.

### Abandonment

Abandonment was the second common form of violence that was raised by the respondents. Abandonment is psychological abuse that destroys the self-confidence in most

women and leads to low self-esteem. Participants complained that their husbands had abandoned their wives and children and gone to cohabit with other women. These women were left without any food or money. This resulted in rent defaults and children stopping school as school requirements could not be provided. The respondents wanted to compel their husbands to maintain their homes. For that one participant from an interview guide had the following to say;

*There is no support from her husband. Her husband cohabits with his workmate and claims that she is not 'half the woman' his girlfriend is. However, the husband goes once in a while to check on the wife and has threatened to kill her if she even thought of finding herself another man. The time he has visited, he has forced himself on her and this has resulted in an unwanted pregnancy. The man has denied responsibility and has not been home since. At the time of the research, the husband was called to the Kalulushi YWCA and ordered to give his wife K3 000 per month for food and rent and the requirements for the baby once it was born. However, the participant said her self-confidence had been destroyed especially when her husband put her down by saying his girlfriend was more woman than her.*

Furthermore, another participant expressed that:

*She sells vegetables and gets no support from her husband, who is a security guard. The husband spends weeks out of the home, comes once in a while to inspect her private parts to check if she has had sexual intimacy with other men. This, he does by sticking his fingers into the wife's private parts. When satisfied he would then force himself on her. Once she sent her sons, a fourteen-year-old and her six-year-old to go and get money to buy school requirements for the six-year-old who was starting grade one. When the sons reached where the father was cohabiting, he told the little boy to go and ask his mother why she "does it" for free. He told the little boy to tell the mother to start charging for it so that she could buy the school requirements. The fourteen-year-old knew what the father had been referring to and just told his mother that he said he had no money. However, the little boy told his mother that the father had said if she charged 'for it' she could buy the school requirements and would stop bothering him."*

### Infidelity

During the interviews, infidelity was another form of violence that emerged but there was a controversy on whether or not infidelity is a form of gender violence. Infidelity is when a

spouse is having an extramarital affair and the partner goes through so much emotional stress. One of the participants stated that;

*She is a university graduate and working as a civil servant. She is usually beaten by her husband who has an extra marital affair. The husband does not work and uses her car to take his girlfriend to and from work and uses her money to buy gifts for the girlfriend. The husband beats her claiming she disrespects him. The man beats her probably to reassert his role as man of the house, even though the wife is the economic provider. The man (who is socially considered to be the economical provider) cannot provide in this case and the only way to vent out his frustrations is to beat his wife. Therefore, the wife wanted Kalulushi YWCA to call her husband to attend marriage counselling with her.*

However, the counsellor at Kalulushi YWCA told the researcher that women from middle and upper class came from marriage counselling when all else had failed. Previously, women whose husbands had extra marital affairs would sue the girlfriend for marriage interference and these girlfriends would be warned in court and told to pay the wives. Now the law has changed. Women have to sue their husband for reconciliation so that the husbands can be rebuked in court. This however, does not stop them from continuing their illicit affairs. That case shows that it is not only women who are

economically dependent on their husbands that experience violence.

### Other forms of violence

During the interviews other forms of violence that emerged from the respondents. These were forced sex and forced child-bearing, where the husband forced himself on the wife on several occasions resulting in an unwanted pregnancy. Besides that, mental torture is the other form of violence which emerged.

A participant made the following submission that;

*She had been abandoned by her husband. The man usually comes home drunk in the night and would force himself on her. Once or twice, he came with a friend and held his wife down while the friend had sex with her. The woman said she was so embarrassed she could not dream of telling anyone about this. She said she was confiding in the researcher because the interview was anonymous. She said she could not even discuss this with anyone. The woman was concerned with what people would say about her. The researcher got the idea she thought it was her fault like she asked for it and anyway who would believe her, she asked.*

### Socio-cultural factors promoting and causing gender-based violence

The study also sought to explore the socio-cultural factors promoting and causing low reporting of gender-based violence in Chibuluma compound. However, according to

the responses from the participants, the causes of violence are complex and multifaceted. The focus group discussions came up with a number of reasons why marital violence exists. The causes identified were; Jealousy and suspicion,

lack of communication and drunkenness, cultural and traditional beliefs, economic and social stress and the need to control.

#### **Jealousy and suspicion**

The women in the focus group discussion said that most husbands were obsessed with jealousy and suspected that their wives were committing adultery. Research

findings revealed that this was the major cause of physical violence.

#### **Lack of communication and drunkenness**

This was the other cause of marital violence that was mentioned by the participants during the interviews and the focus group discussion. In responding to that; This was confirmed by the counsellor at Kalulushi YWCA that;

*There was a lack of communication between couples. Women were usually battered over petty issues. This happens when partners do not properly talk or do not communicate with each other. Talking to each other properly would resolve the petty issues that the partners may have without the use of violence. Women were also battered over petty issues when their husbands had taken alcohol. Alcohol made men irritable and aggressive.*

#### **Cultural and traditional beliefs**

Participants in the focus group discussions said that some women were beaten or abandoned if

they denied their husband's sex. Others claimed they were battered because they argued with their husband.

*The women also claimed that at puberty and when getting married, women were taught by traditional counsellors that it was against tradition to deny a man sex or argue with him. This, they claimed, results in beatings and abandonment".*

On the other hand, the coordinator at VSU pointed out that;

*Economic and social stress is another cause of marital violence. This includes; poverty, lack of money and difficult economic conditions can lead to violence. He added that men who could not make ends meet were usually frustrated and short-tempered. Men would take it out on their wives".*

Furthermore, one of the participants during the focus group discussion stated the following,

*They had been beaten by their husbands, who were experiencing problems at work. Men are socially considered economic providers and in cases where they cannot provide, some resort to violence*

This study revealed that some wives whose husbands were unemployed, battered their wives and claimed they were disrespectful because they were the economic provider.

#### **The need to control**

In addition to the above-mentioned narration, another cause of violence identified by the respondents was their husband's need to control them. The women said their husband is controlling the behaviour of how they dressed, where they went, whom they associated with led to physical violence. The research revealed that some of the women interviewed were beaten for going to church. Their husbands wanted them to stay at home. Some women claimed that their husbands would not let them visit their relatives or have friends visiting.

#### **Effect of gender-based violence in the livelihood of couples**

The third research question sought to examine the effect of gender-based violence in the livelihood activities of women. These effects were given in response to question eight in the interview schedule for the key informants as well as the focus group discussion schedule for women at Kalulushi YWCA. However, gender violence affects married men and women. It threatens family structures causing emotional, psychological and mental damage to all involved and often leads to families breaking

up. Victims are scared for life and their lives shattered, usually destroying the trust they have in men. Under this theme, the following were effects identified in this study this include; physical injury, low self-esteem, depression, abuse of children, lack of decision-making power, gender violence and HIV/AIDS.

#### **Physical Injury**

The effects of gender violence led to physical injuries. This study revealed that one respondent was brutally beaten by her husband resulting in the loss of any eye. Another woman who had a miscarriage due to psychological abuse suffered from her husband.

#### **Low Self Esteem**

Psychological abuse destroys the self-confidence and self-esteem of women. The research findings revealed that women usually blamed themselves for the violence. Some respondents said they felt worthless and had developed eating disorders, and others said they had attempted suicide.

#### **Depression**

Generally, another effect of gender violence led to some women victims suffering from depression and stress. With focus group discussion questions that were asked to the women about the effects of GBVs, one of the women lamented the following that;

*I was thrown out of the house and divorced without being given anything. During the 15 years of marriage, my husband had acquired many minibuses and had bought three houses. My husband refused to give anything to her and said he was going to keep their five children. Then the wife wanted to be given one house and at least one minibus. She claimed that she had suffered severely during her marriage. Her husband used to sleep with most of their house cleaners and her female relatives. She said he had also impregnated her young sister. She claimed his girlfriends would come home and insult her telling her to leave the home, as the husband did not want her.*

Therefore, she has suffered severe depression and need total counselling because she tried to commit suicide twice. Depression, according to the VSU coordinator, was a major cause of wives killing their husbands. In a split

second of insanity, some women snap and kill their husbands, especially in infidelity and battery cases.

In addition, another participant said,

*She was so traumatised by her husband's infidelity that she had a miscarriage. She also experienced massive weight loss because of the stress. She claimed that her husband would bring his girlfriend to the matrimonial house and would ask her to leave the matrimonial bed as he had brought a guest. She had enough and wanted the court to assist her to get a divorce*

### **Abuse of children**

It was found in this study that gender violence is a vicious circle. Some women respondents said that they were so stressed that sometimes they abused their innocent children. This, they said, made them even more stressed because they knew they were just venting their anger on the defenceless children. In this vicious circle, the husband abuses the wives and the wives abuse the children. These children are caught up in the crossfire and are more likely to become physically violent themselves. On the other hand, some participants interviewed said they tried to protect their children by remaining in abusive marriages. This was also the reason given by women who returned to their abusive husbands.

### **Lack of decision-making power**

During the interviews with women in the focus group, the discussion revealed that violence renders some women unable to make choices that affect their lives. They cannot make decisions on their fertility or family planning. This is worse if they are being abused by their husbands, like in the cases of women who were forced to have sex. These women cannot negotiate for sex and cannot ask their husbands to use condoms even if they know their husbands have been sleeping with other women. This takes us to the next effect which greatly affects the health of women.

Strategies and measures need to address the **challenges of GBVs**

The last research question was to solicit for the measures that can help address the challenges of violence among couples. This question was presented qualitatively as all the respondents from the participant's women and key informants from Kalulushi YWCA and VSU were asked to give suggestions on the possible measures that could help address the challenges of gender violence. The responses were

presented according to the themes that came out more prominent from all the respondents.

Therefore, to mitigate marital violence, there is a need to promote gender equality which is the driver of stopping the GBVs in the communities. This will improve the participation of women in all aspects of development that affect their lives. Mitigating marital violence will greatly impact positively on the health of women and will be a direct contribution to the mitigation of the dreaded HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. However, there was an overwhelming response from the respondents under this theme; therefore, the following were the responses from the respondents. Thus, their responses on the suggestions indicated that; the women NGOs response, government and international community are the key sectors that recognised the elimination of gender violence as one of their obligations.

### **Women's Response**

Under this theme, respondents argued that to mitigate gender violence, women need to

*Women could be assisted with different business skills and funds, so that they could reduce their dependence on men. They argued that different empowerment would give them status and autonomy and husbands would not maltreat them. Further, women said this would also give them decision making power in the home and that they would have a say in socio-economic decisions, fertility, family planning and all other choices that affected them in relation to men and in relation to society. Some women participants said they wish they had finished school so that they could access economic resources*

be empowered. The focus group discussion participants revealed that;

Furthermore, one of the participants during the focus group discussion stated the following;

*She wished there were stiffer laws to punish men, especially those who abandoned their families. She said it would be better for the man to just lose everything to the woman. This she said should include all the property and the man pay maintenance until the children finished school. This, she believed would deter men from abandoning their homes*

Beliefs and customs that stated that men were superior should be discouraged. This was also

*Socialization played an important role on how men and women treat each other. She said to mitigate marital violence the whole socialization process has to be critically examined. It should be emphasised to boys, like it is done with girls, to respect the opposite sex and treat them as equals.*

As the Kalulushi YWCA is doing a tremendous job and trying hard to mitigate this gender violence. Despite lack of funds, success has been achieved especially in cases where the courts have let down the victims. Perpetrators know that they cannot influence their wives to withdraw court action if it has been done through YWCA and other organisations so they rarely default on payments. The husband gives the agreed monthly payment to the wife at the centre at an agreed date every month.

The Kalulushi YWCA has also partnered with the Zambia Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, the Zambia Police, the Judiciary and Care Zambia to form a one-stop-shop on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) project that is being funded by the European Union. This consists of a Psycho-social counsellor, a police officer, a health provider and a paralegal officer that will be at one place to receive and assist victims of gender violence.

But despite these efforts by the NGOs, gender violence is on the increase. These NGOs lack funds to help a lot of victims of gender violence. The NGOs have to raise their own funds as the government does not provide for them in its budget. This funding is mostly lobbied by donors from the international community. The other reason for the increased violence is that most women, who experience

### Women's NGOs Response

In the interview with the Coordinator Kalulushi YWCA, she explained that

echoed by the coordinator of VSU at the Kalulushi police station who said that

violence do not know of the existence of these NGOs. These NGOs confessed to the researcher that they did not do enough to advertise themselves. Another reason for the increase in violence is that most women do not report the violence and lastly the law lets down these NGOs by enforcing or by treating the women unfairly thus making them lose confidence in themselves and in the law.

#### 6.6.3 Government Response

At the time of the research, the new government through the ministry of gender was developing and implementing policies that would redress gender violence by passing and enforcing appropriate legislation. While attempting to interview the new provincial coordinator and the permanent secretary failed as the two officers were always out of their offices. However, a police officer, a coordinator at Kalulushi police station under VSU was interviewed. It was revealed that one of the measures the government has come up with to redress gender violence was the establishment of Victim Support in 1994. The government has pledged among other things to:

- Promote awareness and change harmful cultural beliefs;
- Encourage victims to report cases;
- Strengthen the Victim Support Unit, o be able to address victimisation, especially of women who experience gender violence;

- Promote awareness of legal rights, especially for women;
- Promote gender-sensitive training in schools, communities and workplace;
- Increase budgets to deal with empowering women to reduce their

vulnerability. More money should be set aside for projects and programmes that will help women to be self-sustaining.

Furthermore, the head and coordinator of VSU at Kalulushi police station revealed that;

*The law should change so that as one reports a case to the police and court proceedings have started, the case would still continue. Women withdraw cases for different reasons. Some women reconcile with their partners. Others take their partners to court at the spur of the moment but after cooling down, decide otherwise. Others are threatened by in-laws.*

## DISCUSSION

The comprehensive analysis of the study's findings delved into four primary themes, meticulously extracted from the research objectives. These themes encompassed the depth and breadth of the complex issue GBV within the Chibuluma compound, unveiling multifaceted insights and shedding light on potential pathways for mitigation.

### Extent of Gender-Based Violence Cases

The foremost objective of the study was to fathom the extent of GBV cases within the Chibuluma compound. The investigation illuminated that woman within this area confronted marital violence in diverse forms and patterns. This included the distressing phenomena of wife battery, abandonment, and infidelity. These patterns revealed a troubling reality where violence was not only prevalent but also manifested in various insidious ways. Shockingly, the study identified that some forms of violence remained unreported, such as forced sex, forced child-bearing, mental torture, and rape, due to the victims' sense of embarrassment [5].

### Socio-Cultural Factors Promoting and Causing Gender-Based Violence

A significant focus was directed towards exploring the factors that promoted low reporting levels of gender violence. The interviews provided invaluable insights into this realm, underscoring the pivotal influence of socio-economic stress. The interplay of poverty, economic dependency, and challenging financial conditions constrained women's ability to report or disengage from abusive relationships. Cultural and traditional beliefs further exacerbated the situation, with ingrained gender biases and customary practices perpetuating maltreatment [6].

Moreover, cultural norms that upheld male dominance and the practice of paying bride prices contributed to an environment where women were subjected to abuse. The tradition of submissiveness was exploited, forcing many women into silence and submission, amplifying the cycle of violence. Poor enforcement of laws pertaining to gender-based violence within the judicial system was identified as another significant factor. The courts demonstrated gender bias, often failing to hold perpetrators accountable, eroding women's confidence in legal mechanisms [7].

### **Effects of Gender-Based Violence on Women's Livelihoods**

The ramifications of gender-based violence transcended individual lives and infiltrated family structures, causing severe emotional, psychological, and mental distress among the victims. The study's findings underscored the grave impact on victims' well-being, including physical injuries resulting from brutal assaults. Victims' self-esteem and confidence were eroded, manifesting as feelings of worthlessness and helplessness. The insidious reach of this violence extended to depression, leading to dire consequences such as suicide attempts, miscarriages, and the abuse of children. The shackles of marital violence also curtailed women's agency over essential decisions like fertility, family planning, and safe sex negotiation [8].

### **Strategies and Measures to Address GBV Challenge**

The study culminated with the identification of strategies and measures imperative for mitigating the scourge of gender violence within couples. Collaborative efforts between non-governmental organizations (NGOs), women's organizations, the government, and the international community emerged as a pivotal strategy. These alliances aimed to curb violence by engaging in diverse activities including lobbying, counseling, training, education, advocacy, and provision of refuge and litigation services to victims. An empowered response was proposed through the impartation of business skills and financial support to women, thereby reducing their dependence on potentially abusive partners [9].

Government initiatives like the Victim Support Unit (VSU) and policy formulations by the Gender in Development Division (GIDD) showcased a commitment to addressing GBV. However, these measures were marred by implementation challenges, revealing a lack of government commitment. International organizations and donors, such as the United Nations and the European Union, were actively involved in funding programs that aimed to combat violence. NGOs proved to be pivotal change agents, offering critical assistance and

advocacy to women who lacked access to legal representation [10].

The transformational impact of these organizations resonated in the lives of women, fostering hope and propelling change. The study underscored the need for sustained government commitment, legal reforms, and rigorous enforcement of existing laws. Such comprehensive efforts were deemed vital to unravel the deeply rooted complexities of gender violence, fostering an environment where progress is both attainable and sustainable [11, 12].

### **CONCLUSION**

This study has shed light on the distressing reality of marital violence within the Chibuluma compound. The findings unveil various forms of abuse, including wife battery, abandonment, and infidelity. Troublingly, these forms of violence seem to find a level of tolerance within the judicial system, raising concerns about legal redress and protection against such transgressions.

The study has also revealed a concealed layer of unreported violence, encompassing forced sex, coerced childbearing, mental torture, and rape. Victims often choose not to report these forms of abuse due to embarrassment and societal stigma, perpetuating a culture of silence. Furthermore, the study indicates that marital violence often begins within the first five years of marriage, emphasizing the need for early intervention and support for women during this vulnerable period. An alarming finding is the poor enforcement of laws against gender-based violence. Gender bias within the judicial system erodes confidence in the courts, leaving victims disillusioned and questioning the pursuit of justice. These findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to address gender-based violence in the Chibuluma compound. Legal, social, and cultural measures are necessary to challenge the prevailing norms, break the culture of silence, and create an environment where women can thrive without the specter of abuse. Poor enforcement of the law perpetuated gender violence. There is a gender bias in the judgement of the law perpetuated gender violence. There is a gender bias in the judicial system. Most of the respondents had no confidence in the courts.

### **DECLARATION**

**Competing interests** There were no competing interests from all authors in this study.

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