Lobola and gender based violence: Perceptions of married adults in Gweru urban, Zimbabwe.

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Marriage as an institution in the traditional African society is a vital mechanism for social control and social stability. Zimbabwe like any other patriarchal society regards marriage as a cornerstone of development and the general maintenance of society in its most traditional form. In the Zimbabwean society, for the marriage to be morally and socially acceptable and respectable, lobola (bride wealth) must have been paid by the bride groom. However, it is the contention of this paper that lobola exacerbates gender based violence (GBV) in these marriages. Most critics of lobola argue that this traditional practice has been commercialised because of the dollarization of the economy and has since lost its real value and function as men use it as a tool to oppress, exploit and dominate women. The sample for the study consisted of forty participants who were victims, survivors and perpetrators of gender violence. Qualitative methodology using modified grounded theory techniques was used in the study. The paper maintains that lobola exacerbates gender based violence against females and that gender constructions of masculinity condone and encourage male violence. Patriarchy as a system thrives on the use of sexual violence and rape, the threat of and the actual use of force resulting in GBV in the home and the institution of marriage.

Key words: Gender violence, economic inequality, lobola, Zimbabwe.

INTRODUCTION

In most parts of Africa the majority of marriages are premised on the payment of lobola to the bride’s family by the groom. The payment of lobola as a gendered constructs which constrain both the men financially and the woman by stripping her of her human rights. The lobola transaction is carried out between the woman’s paternal male relatives and the husband-to be male relatives. She literally has no say in the exchange and neither do the few women who witness the proceedings. As a result most women in marriage have less bargaining power as well as economic power and lack gender empowerment as the unequal power relations are premised on lobola. A social analysis of marriages in the Zimbabwe context reveal that certain social and economic factors place most women in situation of increased vulnerability. Kalipeni (2000) refers to vulnerability as consisting of entitlement, empowerment and political economy. It is further argue that cultural and societal expectations and norms create an environment where it is acceptable to practice gender based violence. Gender based violence is rooted in socio-economic, inequality, and takes many forms- physical, emotional and sexual abuse- sexual assault, rape, spousal violence and violence between intimate partners. In 2006 a UN in depth study on all forms of violence against women reported that HIV positive women are more likely to experience violence and women who experience violence are at greater risk of exposure to HIV. The power, importance and strength of religious and cultural practices and beliefs mean it is
difficult to change, women continue to be vulnerable to
gender based violence because of their differential status
from birth to death which is compounded by lobola.

With an appreciation of the complexities of human and
environmental interaction and social context, as well as
viewing cultural practices as greater than individual
behaviour gender analysis was adopted in the study on
the links between lobola and gender based violence
within marriage in this study. Gender analysis is premised
on "From the very beginning.. there is inequality between
boys and girls which is translated into unequal power
relations between men and women at all levels of society" (Monnathoko, 1998). In a patriarchal society like
Zimbabwe, men have control, power and authority over
women in all facets of life. Gender analysis therefore
seeks to examine the social relations of domination and
subordination between men and women structured into
the institutions and workings of society. The marriage
institution is one such institution where the social
relations and socio-cultural and economic factors make
women more vulnerable to gender based violence. For
McFadden (1998) putting relations of power and
gendered inequality at forefront of African scholarship
would cater for the inadequacies of mainstream
theoretical frameworks.

Culture tries to establish the normative order in society
and these include the customs and rules essential for
sustenance of the group. In functionalist terms the norms
ensure the survival of the group and are reached through
consensus while in terms of the conflict theory they are
enforced by the dominant class to sustain the social order
which benefits the ruling or powerful group as seen in the
payment of lobola. From a functionalist view the ritual of
lobola payment is important as it ensures and cements
the relationship between the husband and wife and the
consensus that is reached in the exchange is between
the males. Fox and Luxton (1993) are of the view that the
roles that are delegated on a gendered basis where men
assume the primary responsibility for instrumental roles
and women expressive roles engender specialisations in
society. In an African context males' instrumental role
therefore includes paying lobola which in a way
perpetuates males' control over the women's labour
especially in social reproduction and other domestic
duties (Hartmann, 1981). However, from a conflict
perspective it would be a case of enforcing this practice
of lobola payment by the male so that the social order
which is sustained benefits the male more who in this
instance exercise power and authority over the women.
As a result culture reinforces gender inequality and
female subordination through the standards that are
established such as payment of lobola. It would further be
premised that given such a back drop there is no end to
violence within the marriage institution because the
woman is not party to the exchange which decides her
fate by setting a price. Therefore, the marriage institution
can be viewed as a source of conflict and gender based
violence.

It can be said that feminism has opened up discussion
for the practices of family life (Butler and Scott, 1992). As
a result of feminism it became permissible to question
family practices that otherwise would be considered
personal concerns and of no interest to the community.
Research shows that individuals are still hesitant to
disclose information about incidents of family violence
because these happen in the privacy of one's own house.
The radical feminists would blame women's exploitation
and inferior status on the patriarchal system based on the
family (Bryson, 2003). Marxist feminist scholars would
contend that marriage itself is a property relation in a
class based society and the family is viewed as an
element of the super structure and apparatus of the state
(Bryson, 2003). It is within the institution of marriage that
the Zimbabwean woman has been disempowered
through the payment of lobola of which practice is
perpetuated by both males and females. The feminist
approach to domestic violence is grounded on the
principle that intimate partner violence is the result of
male oppression of women within a patriarchal system in
which men are primary perpetrators of violence and
women are the primary victims (Dobash and Dobash,
1979; Walker, 1979). Male violence within intimate
relationships results from historic and current power
differentials that keep women subordinate, primarily
through the use of control including physical, sexual,
economic and psychological abuse, male violence is
often attributed to socialisation. Feminists believe that
most problems faced by women especially violence are
caused by social, cultural and political forces requiring
action at policy level. Matters pertaining to family are
frequently perceived as private and not for discussion
outside family context- a view that transmits through
customs, social attitudes and public opinion, along with
many other ways (Fargaris, 1986). The UN adopted
Domestic Violence Resolution in 1985 and Zimbabwe
only got to enact the Domestic Violence Act in 2007 after
protracted debate as domestic violence was deemed a
private affair within the household. In its Progress of the
World's Women 2000: UNIFEM Biennial Report, UN
officials stated that "violence against women and girls
constitutes the single most prevalent and universal
violation of human rights" (UN Development Fund for
explanations for domestic violence other than feminism:
psychological, sociological and neurobiological. Under
these broad categories fall more specific explanations for
intimate partner violence; male shame, men feeling
powerlessness rather than powerful, intergenerational
transmission of violent behaviour strategies, psycho-
pathology and personality disorder, substance abuse,
negative self concepts, male proprietariness, ineffective
couple communication skills, poor anger management
skills, childhood abuse and or neglect, poverty and family conflict rooted in the everyday stresses of family life.

METHODOLOGY

As the researchers are not currently working with individuals who are abused, or with an agency which provide services to such individuals, males and females were invited to participate through the medium of a third party. This lack of familiarity with the participants in the study is seen by Morse (1994:27) "as an advantage as it reduced threats to the validity of the data". The researchers sent a written outline of the study and asked social workers in agencies in Gweru to approach married females and males whom they felt would be willing to participate. The sample was generated through a letter sent to the organisations working with gender violence in Gweru. The targeted group were victims, survivors and perpetrators of violence. The invitation indicated that the participants would study the Domestic Violence Act of 2007 and a focus group would be convened to discuss it as well as gender violence. The sample had 40 participants who included 30 females and 10 males. The ages ranged from 24 to 57 years. The researchers got the contact details of those who agreed to participate. The researchers rang each participant and explained the purpose of the research and means by which the interview would be recorded. All the adults who were contacted by the researchers agreed to be interviewed.

A focus group was convened to allow participants to respond to the feminist approach of domestic violence. Data were collected using grounded theory methodology. A focus group is a qualitative data collection method that involves bringing a group of homogeneous participants together with a moderator to discuss a particular issue or topic (Berg, 2003). Focus groups are advantageous in that they allow for generative interactions between participants and yield information in a timely and cost effective manner (Berg, 2003). Participants received a copy of the Domestic Violence Act of 2007, two months before the focus group deal of p meeting and viewed a brief Power Point presentation outlining the main tenets of the act prior to the discussion. The interviews began with a detailed explanation to the participants regarding the purpose and structure of the discussions. Participants were asked to take note of their observations, understandings and forms of gender violence that they are aware of. The session lasted two and half hours with the last 30 minutes devoted to reconceptualising what the participants had intimated in the open floor discussion and summarisation of the points noted.

Qualitative methodology using modified grounded theory techniques was used as the research questions were exploratory. Qualitative research method was utilized in this study because it answered the needs of the research problematic and fitted the method chosen. The sample that was invited to participate in the study should be capable of providing both validity and reliability. Grounded theory examines textual data systematically gathered and analysed to develop theory, Strauss and Corbin, (1998). According to Strauss and Corbin (1998:22) “Theory denotes a set of well developed categories (eg themes, concepts) that are systematically interrelated through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework that explains some relevant social, psychological, educational, nursing or other phenomena” (italics in original). Data were analyzed. Analysis of interview data using grounded theory allows discovery of new understandings of the phenomena under study. Data analysis for generating grounded theory proceeded with open coding. Open coding involves naming and categorising basic concepts, patterns and themes from raw data itself (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). According to grounded theory, open coding provides an opportunity for data based categories to emerge, categories and themes from existing theory may also be borrowed. The research data are analysed and discussed using themes, properties and dimensions that emerged from the study. Data was checked for accuracy. The focus group was audio taped and what transpired was then transcribed for analysis. After transcription the interviewees were invited to add questions to interview protocol before and during data collection. Once transcribed, interview transcripts were returned to appropriate participants for clarification and final approval. All requested transcription changes were made to retain confidentiality and preserve the intended and original meaning of answers. The purpose of the study and participants’ right not to participate were explained verbally and in print form before the focused group discussions were conducted. The participants gave their informed consent to participate in the study after explanation about the study’s objectives, confidentiality and ethical considerations with assurance regarding the voluntary nature of participation.

RESULTS

The following are the research findings which emerged when the researchers analysed the contributions of the research participants.

1. Eighty percent of the respondents believed that lobola exacerbates gender based violence.
2. The respondents unanimously agreed that gender constructions of masculinity condone and encourage male violence.
3. Gender issues such as negative self concept, ineffective couple counselling, ineffective couple communication, the concept of power and HIV (Human Immuno Virus) and AIDS (Acquired Immuno Deficiency
Syndrome) were cited as factors which fuel violence in the home.

4. Fear of being rejected or divorced was mentioned by 70% of the female respondents as a credible reason for staying in violent marriages.

5. The female respondents unanimously lauded the domestic Violence Act (2007) as a worthy contribution to the country’s legislation which empowers both women and men.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The findings are grounded with the use of direct quotes from the participants to provide a rich array of their manifold responses. To be representative in selecting comments for inclusion, all the responses that represented diverse thought, actions or decisions associated with the research questions were included. The recurrent theme is women’s oppression through gender inequality and perpetuation of the patriarchal system. The participants made reference to the unequal relations between women and men which are exacerbated by the payment of lobola. It is premised that the traditional and cultural practice of paying lobola continue to impact negatively on women and men’s socio cultural equality. The social and economic impact of lobola has been debated extensively by various scholars. Several views have been posited, uniting and consolidating assets within the extended family system (Schapers and Comaroff, 1991; Driel, 1994; WLSA, 1997; Mvududu and McFadden, 2001) and as a means of consolidating patriarchal power and control. It is also a means of acquiring labour of women and children for agricultural production and asserting husband’s control over the wife. Following is an in depth discussion of the group dynamics emerging from the study.

**Norms of masculinity**

The respondents unanimously fervently indicated that gender constructions of masculinity condone violence. Kambarami (2006) says lobola gives men all rights whilst women are stripped of their freedom and rights. The woman is reduced to the level of property. Gender roles and expectations are not entirely created by men but instead are created by both women and men. Men are often seen as fuelling the paying of lobola as well as gender violence yet both women and men engage in both practices. Men are constrained by gender constructions that determine what is seen as appropriate male behaviour within a relationship. Prevailing norms of masculinity include that a man should discipline his wife once in a while; the discipline is in the physical, emotional, economic or psychological form. Mapara (2007) says men who abuse their wives on the ground that they paid lobola do not understand the essence of the cultural practice. A male respondent referred to the wife as a little less than his property among the responses to do with masculinity as follows:

*I paid ten cows, 1000 Zimbabwean dollars when I married my wife in 1983. She does not work and I do everything for her like I do for my children so I discipline her now and then to remind her of her place.*

The aforementioned response from a male participant shows that the men use the wealth they would have parted with to explain why they resort to domestic violence. During the data collection phase the male participants used gender socialisation to explain the violence perpetrated against their wives. They also made reference to tradition as the forefathers had practiced these since time immemorial. A study of 336 undergraduates in United States of America showed that both men and women who abuse their partners had strong masculine gender orientation that esteemed control and domination (Thompson, 1991) cited in Wood (2001). Cultural and societal expectations and norms create an environment where marital violence is acceptable and justified by the payment of lobola as the participants in the study indicated. According to Wood (2001) gendered violence is practiced and socially permitted around the world. The epidemic of gendered violence reflects cultural values that are communicated through social practices and structure. Bourdillon (1998) perceived lobola as just and responsible and describes it as a stabilising factor, a significant gift, acknowledgement of priceless debt which the groom’s family group owes the bride’s family group. The participants’ responses also show that there is an element of intergenerational transmission of violent behavioural strategies as in ‘exercise power and authority given to you by the gods’. The participants’ responses had the following insights to add to the dimension on intergenerational violent tendencies:

*I hated my father for what he did to my mother he beat her at the slightest irritation. My mother would cower in my father’s presence and I did not like it and vowed not to do it to my wife. On 23 December 2001, I hit her. She had answered me back and I felt she had challenged my authority and decisions as the man of the house. When I go to my paternal aunt to complain about the beatings I get from Musa, she says her husband was and is still no different as he still beats her. My aunt says there is nothing to do once ‘cows’ are paid. Society sanctions violence as the community insist he is right.*

There is an element of intergenerational transmission of
violent behaviour strategies. Some individuals learn and model violent behavioural tendencies during primary socialisation in the family and perpetuate it in their own families. This learned behaviour has serious ramifications on the marriage institution as the behaviour is repeated and becomes like the norm and is couched in ‘a veil of silence’ as it takes place in the private sphere. Feminists challenge male entitlement and privilege and the traditional notion that domestic violence is a private family matter. The above responses show how society turns a blind eye to cases of domestic violence. It appears as if a matter. The above responses show how society turns a blind eye to cases of domestic violence. It appears as if a man is entitled to use violence against the wife if she errs and cultural norms perpetuate it. The participant who thought her aunt could be an agency to a violent free marriage was sorely disappointed by the aunt and the patriarchal structure of society. These seem to subtly condone gender violence by their silence. The cultural practice of paying lobola widens the gap between women and men and makes women subordinate. The ability of the man to pay lobola from his own earnings may reduce the power and influence of his extended family in regulating the relationship especially in conflict resolution. Therefore, this may make the women more vulnerable to gender based violence as she has little recourse to report to as some men may have loose ties with their kith.

The concept of power

Power as a concept is another dynamic that was explored by the participants where men feel powerlessness rather than powerful. Most men have been socialised to exert power and influence over women. When these men perceive failure they take it out on the women. Both women and men use power as a means of control of the partner. One respondent showed how her increased earnings over those of her husband made her to be in control of the family resources. For a male respondent his lack of adequate finances made him to be angry and violent towards the wife Heise (1998) adopted an ecological approach to understanding that gender based violence is namely recognising the multifaceted nature of violence and the interplay among personal, situational and socio cultural factors. The economic meltdown has made some of the men to be rendered powerless as they do not have the financial clout to be in charge of the family upkeep. In some way this has emasculated the men and they may use violence to deal with their personal demons. The women also contribute to the powerlessness that the men feel because they have taken the role of the breadwinner which is traditionally the preserve of the African men. Therefore these socio cultural factors intersect with gendered violence bringing sociological explanations to violence. According to Wood (2001) police often avoid interfering in violence between intimates and judges often fail to impose firm sentences on proven perpetrators. This means the use of power is perpetuated.

Substance abuse

A significant proportion of the respondents acknowledged that substance abuse can lead to gender violence as the inebriated individual may resort to force if he does not get his way. Studies have shown a link between gender violence and substance abuse. Upenyu is an opaque beer which is readily available in Gweru and it is affordable for even those who are not gainfully employed. One respondent cited an incident in which she was violently assaulted by her drunken husband and she bled profusely from the nose, was stitched and hospitalised. Drunken behaviour can be traumatic to the recipient of the abuse and may lead to repeated acts of gendered violence. It can also lead to a low self esteem on the part of the perpetrator of the violence as she or he feels that the drug or alcohol that they are abusing is to blame. Some even blame the victim for making them behave the way they do. The longer it takes a perpetrator of gender violence to admit that he or she has a problem the longer it takes the family and the community to realise that there is a problem. In some instances this has had devastating consequences on the victim of the violence in the form of permanent physical harm, emotional instability and death. The perpetrator may spend time in jail if the police and the law courts impose stiffer penalties upon report of the violence. Studies show that some of the children reared under such violent conditions may repeat the cycle in their relationships as the youth and adults.

Negative self concepts

Some research participants also made reference to the issue of negative self concept. A negative self concept can lead an individual to be abusive as he or she tries to grapple with his or her misperceptions about their ‘self’. A significant proportion (60%) of the respondents acknowledged that an individual may blame the society, the family or anyone in contact with him or her and not apportion the blame on their own. A male respondent explained it thus, it may be that the individual feels inadequate or feels that he or she is owed by society or that they got the short end of the stick. It is therefore evident that such feelings of inadequacy contribute to a negative self concept and often lead to gendered violence. As boys become men, they are most likely to resort to violence when they feel unsure of themselves, want to prove their toughness or feel they need to gain control (May: 1998a). Some men who are abused by their wives develop a negative self concept. During the data collection phase of the study 5% of the male respondents
admitted to have suffered abuse at the hands of their wives. However, these men may keep silent because they fear others will question their manhood and for most of Zimbabwean men manhood includes being able to keep the woman in her place and this is what shows society that they are men.

**Ineffective couple communication**

The respondents unanimously agreed that ineffective couple communication skills are interlinked to the issue of financial management in most homes. The majority of the respondents (80%) pointed out there seem to be mistrust between couples on their finances and economic abuse is widespread and is perpetrated by both males and females. From the discussion it became evident that most of the couples do not disclose information on their joint financial status. This seems predicated on the financial environment the country is experiencing. The couples may withhold information on their finances from each other or expect the spouse or partner to account for every dollar spent if they give them money. Most couples fail to communicate effectively and often resort to violence when they cannot get their message across. Of the sample, 40% agreed that they had perpetrated violence against their partners. Some of the above respondents explained that their use of force and violence was a means of getting things done and also as a way of disciplining their partners. The use of violence is a means to an end as talking through the problem or misunderstanding may not produce any tangible results. The following are some of the responses made by the participants:

- *It’s difficult to get anything across to my wife as she does not take the time to listen. She just does what she wants and when she wants and that infuriates me. I just feel like hitting her.*

- *I want someone I can sit down with to discuss major issues affecting our lives and relationship but I don’t get that from my husband.*

There is need for couple counselling so that they can communicate effectively and not resort to violence of any form. The multifaceted nature of gender based violence and its interplay among the personal lives of individuals mean that couples have to adopt proactive agencies of settling their differences.

**Gender based violence and HIV and AIDS**

Among the respondents the women identified sexual assault, rape, spousal violence and marital rape as the forms of gender based violence. Violence between intimates is inflicted primarily by men and primarily on women. According to Wood (2001) women experience seven times as many non fatal assaults as males do. In 2006 a UN in depth study on all forms of violence against women reported that HIV positive women are more likely to experience violence and women who experience violence are to a greater extent at risk of exposure to HIV. The participants made reference to women’s unequal relations with men. Many traditional and cultural practices continue to impact negatively on women’s socio cultural equality. These include family and societal expectations such as that the woman infected the man with the HIV virus. This was echoed by the majority of the female respondents. The woman continue to be vulnerable to HIV infection as she is expected to carry out her reproductive and productive gender roles as ‘a good wife’ which puts her at further risk. The power, importance and strength of religious and cultural practices and beliefs mean it is difficult to change, women continue to be vulnerable to HIV infections and lobola silences them into submission with the threat of being sent back to their parents. However, some of the women do not mind the ‘shame’ of being sent back to their paternal homes than to survive under the threat of or of violence. According to Musasa Project in Zimbabwe most women face difficulties in negotiating safe sex in heterosexual relationships. This could be as a result of the payment of lobola, women’s low position in society and male violence against women. It is premised that women are likely to gain control of their reproductive rights through challenging and transforming the gender relations which put them at risk of gender violence and HIV. It is critical to view cultural practices such as the payment of lobola as greater than individual behaviour and as such may offer complexities which make it difficult for the individual to understand the nature of transctions of the people with their physical and socio cultural surroundings.

**Gender and counselling**

Counsellors who understand what gender is all about more often than not execute their counselling services objectively as most issues that are brought to the counsellors are gender related. In the light of domestic violence a counsellor can meaningfully influence the client by helping accordingly and pointing out how the terrain is changing socially and culturally. The majority of the participants pointed out the unequal gender relations in the access and control of resources are a prelude to gender violence. Custom reinforces gender violence in the payment of lobola but an effective counsellor can be able to adopt a multicultural approach to counselling which then makes it possible for him or her to identify other issues related to access and control of resources.
which may not necessarily be lobola. Such issues could be land, cattle and houses among others. During the data collection phase some of the participants alluded to the above resources under the pretext of lobola. The participants unanimously agreed that there is need for counselling services to be advertised and made public knowledge so that people have access. However, the counsellor needs to be gender responsive. When gender responsiveness is built into counselling gender parity and gender equality through advocacy of choice and independence for both sexes, as through hands-on initiatives that focus on attitudinal and behavioural changes in communities can then be apparent (Steven, 2002 and Rogers, 1990).

The domestic violence act 2007

Domestic violence is defined as any pattern of behaviour usually in an intimate relationship, that controls another person, causes physical harm or fear, makes someone do things they do not want to do, or prevents them from doing things they want to do (Domestic Violence Act, 2007).

The participants were all in agreement with the afore definition and the Power Point presentation assisted in their understanding. The explanation that domestic violence is a Human Rights issue and how communities are affected negatively generated debate as 90% of the male participants thought otherwise. However, an explanation of how communities are affected negatively put the discussion into perspective as it was agreed that community includes children, men and women. This also premised the interplay of the discussion by explaining how men, women and children all have to actively participate in the prevention and combating of the scourge of domestic violence. All the participants could safely identify the various physical forms of abuse such as punching, hitting, slapping and throwing things at a person among others. However, a debate ensued on the phrase ‘refusing to help your spouse or partner when they are sick, injured or pregnant’. All the male participants felt abandoning a pregnant woman is not abuse and explained it away as a man trying to put his house in order. Twenty five percent of the female participants were of the opinion that they can refuse to help the spouse or partner if they are sick. They argued that the sickness could be HIV related and the men could have been practising unsafe sex in extra marital affairs. This was linked to ineffective couple communication skills where the men may not disclose their HIV status and put the woman at risk and further violence.

The discussion of the various forms of sexual abuse, rape or threatening to rape proved to be an emotionally charged dynamic. Twenty five percent of the females and eighty percent of the male participants vehemently denied that there is rape in marriage. The payment of lobola was said to include all the conjugal rights as and when the men felt the need and these sentiments were made by the males. The women said the payment of lobola seals the deal. It appears as if the woman has to surrender her sexual rights as well as reproductive rights because the men would have paid lobola. One male participant echoed the sentiments that the use of condoms does not work with one’s wife as one would have claimed the woman through the traditional practice of paying lobola.

Emotional abuse proved contentious and misunderstood by the participants as it was something they had not identified as domestic violence until they came across it in their study of the Domestic Violence Act. The Power Point presentation on this aspect made them realise and appreciate how emotional abuse is overlooked by society in general. The society may not realise how belittling one’s spouse may lead to a very low self esteem which may aggravate the occurrence of gender violence. This proved educational for the participants and after the discussion they were able to pin point some of their behavioural traits which can be construed as abuse. The participants identified the following as forms of abuse they were unaware of such as being overly jealous of a partner or spouse, threatening to kill your partner or spouse or to leave them or throw them out and ignoring your partner or spouse. Both the female and male participants were equally in the dark on the above forms of emotional abuse.

Many cases of domestic violence go unreported because of cultural and traditional practices such as the payment of lobola. An emerging trend is of the woman’s family refusing to bury their dead daughter as surety for outstanding lobola (Kethusegile, Kwaramba and Lopi, 2000) from the son in law. This is a form of Human Rights abuse which needs urgent attention from the family, the traditional leaders and other stakeholders. Some of the victims and survivors of domestic violence do not report the violence as they are afraid of the cultural laws or resort to the traditional ways of resolving conflict through the aunts or traditional leaders. The Law has been enacted to help them get legal recourse and it is not meant to destroy the marriage institution. The Domestic Violence Act has made domestic violence to be a criminal and public act that is punishable by law. Generally the participants were in agreement that the piece of legislation has a place in Zimbabwe as it aims to prevent and protect females and males from committing gender violence.

Recommendations

The high prevalence of domestic violence calls for urgent prevention strategies to reduce the occurrence of the
crime. The Domestic Violence Act 2007 is one such way of combating gender violence and it calls for concerted efforts on the part of all stakeholders such as the government, NGOs working with gender violence and traditional leadership. Most mainstream feminist advocacy efforts are all intimate abuse is heterosexual, all violence warrants state response and that women want to leave rather than stay in their abusive relationships (Mills, 2003). Not all women want to leave their marriages but rather want an end to gender based violence. There is need to encourage and empower communities to research and identify positive aspects of their culture that would enhance behaviour change and power relations. Empowerment is a difficult process for older people to increase women’s agency but it can be an avenue worth pursuing. Traditional leaders can also be encouraged to promote other ways of not making lobola transnational. Furthermore, traditional leaders could further promote the idea of a man performing work at the bride’s family for a period of time as was the practice in the past (Sonke Justice Network, 2007). A starting premise would also be the socialisation of children where most of the inequities and inequalities are engendered. The government should ensure that budgets, programmes and policies and human resource commitments reflect its thrust to deal with domestic violence by way of allocating effort and resource towards improving girls and women’s disadvantaged position in society. Many survivors of gender based violence fear losing support and do not therefore report the perpetrators of violence of whom they may be economically dependent. There have been reports of how self employed women in Cambodia, India and Peru have exploited numerous opportunities offered by e-commerce (World Bank, 2003c) and the same could be explored for the Zimbabwean woman to further empower them. It is recommended that a further study be carried out to assess the impact of the dollarization of the economy on the amounts levied on the sons in law by their wives’ paternal relatives. This study failed to explore that emerging theme as the scope of the study was on the interrelatedness of domestic violence and lobola and did not assess the impact of the amounts levied as lobola. Further studies could be done with a more diverse sample covering a wider geographical scope.

Conclusions

The study explored the interplay of domestic violence and the payment of lobola. The study found out that there is a direct link between gendered violence and lobola. The payment of lobola should be seen as a cultural practice that unifies and strengthens families and communities and not a money making scheme. It is not acceptable for individuals to be disempowered economically, physically, socially and sexually as a result of lobola. The subordination of women discussed in this paper by no means implies that women are weak but they are rendered weak through the payment of lobola. This study has shown that gender violence affects everyone and society seems to tacitly condone it.

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