

## **Building a Nexus between Feminist Perceptions and Gender-based Violence: The case of Harare Province**

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### **Abstract**

The study sought to interrogate men and women's perceptions of feminism and build a nexus between those perceptions of Gender-Based Violence. Gender-based violence manifests as physical, social, emotional and psychological violence among people especially when interlinked with feminist discourse. The study was carried out utilizing the mixed methods paradigm. One hundred males and 100 females took part in the quantitative study while 4 focus group discussions were conducted with 40 persons and 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews. Findings from the study show that 76% of respondents from the study recognise the concept of feminism as the fight for equal rights, 12% as the empowerment of women, 6% acknowledged it as a move to take over the roles of men while the other 6% understand feminism as a move to ensure that women make decisions normally made by men. Forty percent of the respondents stated that the call for equality breaks families apart, 27% of the respondents indicated that feminism unites families while the other 20% indicated that feminism is a necessary evil. As such, this article recommends the alignment of feminist discourses to indigenous practices in a manner that does not seek to disrupt the social order of African society.

**Keywords:** Feminism, gender, equality, gender-based violence, engendered, discourse

### **Introduction**

Globally, issues of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) continue to top the agenda in international protection discussions where nations strive to find the root cause and ameliorate interventions to alleviate women and men in the society of the menace. Violence is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) (2013) as the intentional use of physical force or power against oneself, another person, or a group that results in the likelihood of injuries, death, psychological harm, or deprivation. Gender-based violence, therefore, refers to the violence inflicted on a person due to stereotypes and roles attributed to or expected of them according to their sex or gender identity (PLAN

International, 2021). The United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees (2021) further refers to gender-based violence as harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender.

Gender-based violence has manifested itself in society in many forms such as physical assault, intimate partner violence, sexual assault, emotional and psychological assault. The World Bank (2019) indicates that 35% of women worldwide have either experienced physical or sexual intimate partner violence; 7% have been assaulted by someone other than their partner while 38% of murders of women are committed by an intimate partner. At the extreme, approximately 200 million women have experienced female genital mutilation. Such statistics have resonated with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (2022) which states that 1 in 3 women aged 15 to 49 has experienced physical violence and 1 in 4 women has experienced sexual violence since the age of 15. Hence, such a shocking and unprecedented rise in statistical information pertaining to gender-based violence prompts researchers to delve deeper into analysis to see how strides in promoting equality among sexes have necessitated acts of violence against women and see the possible solutions to dealing with the bane.

The study sought to bring to light the knowledge and perceptions that people hold about feminism and the relationship that such knowledge and perceptions have on GBV. Such manifestation of thoughts and beliefs can help in modelling strategies that promote the empowerment and liberation of women in a manner that does not threaten the existence of cultural beliefs and traditions. Hence, this study brought to light empowerment strategies and recommendations on how to promote the empowerment of women while advancing feminist efforts. As such, the study adds a new angle to the debate on GBV by characterising GBV issues from a sociocultural lens. This approach to GBV makes a contribution to the existing body of knowledge on feminist issues and gender-based violence in the academic realm. More so, a study on knowledge and perceptions of people on feminism ensures that feminism as an ideology will be more acceptable in a patriarchal society such as Zimbabwe. Social workers would appreciate ideas on how to tackle feminism-related GBV incidences in society with a clear conception of how people perceive feminism and how such conceptions impact their everyday lives.

Many times women bear the brunt of gender-based violence and the egregious effects of the menace continue to leave indelible marks of the ordeal that women face at the hands of men. Such instances of violence, however, appear to be heavily informed by masculine dominance in major aspects of society. The Feminist movement for equality and recognition of women's rights and potential came as the "Messiah" for the ordeal that women have been facing

in society. Furthermore, through women's movements, United Nations Organisation member states took a stand to bring equality between men and women by enacting legislative instruments that support women's rights. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights was the parent legislative instrument that recognised men and women as equal in their indispensable right to access basic life services. This was followed by the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women which is often regarded as the international bill of rights for women and it made a call for nations to eliminate discrimination against women and girls in all areas and promote their equal rights. The 1993 World Conference on Human Rights urged the international community to promote and protect the rights of persons belonging to ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) was a call to completely cease the violence against women and speak to the sexual, physical and even mental violence against women and further proffers ways to stop such. The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action and the European Union Gender Equality Strategy (2020-2025) was the turning point in history, which indicates that violence against women constitutes a violation of women's rights and fundamental freedoms and impairs or nullifies their enjoyment of those rights.

At a local level, the Government of Zimbabwe made significant strides to support the call for equality by enacting the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Act No. 20 of 2013. Section 17 of the constitution of Zimbabwe amendment No. 13 Act of 2013, mandates the state to take positive measures to rectify gender discrimination and imbalances resulting from past practices and policies. Section 56 (i) of the said constitution further purports that all persons are equal before the law and have the right to equal protection and benefit of the law and part (2) further states that women and men have the right to equal treatment including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres. This means that the government sought to address the prevailing social disparities among men and women as well as advance equality for people who have been disadvantaged by unfair discrimination in society. It further goes to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of sex or gender.

Literature on feminist discourse suggests that it evolved with women's movements to claim their rights from the masculine members of society. Feminism evolved during the Enlightenment period and gave birth to female intellectuals like Olympe de Gouges who published the "Declaration of the Rights of Women and of the Female Citizen" in 1791. She declared that women be not only equal to men but be his partner. Through this, she challenged the notion that women exist to please men and that they are objects

easily abandoned as per the will of men. Feminists who were descendants of the second wave like Rebecca Walker, Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards were born (Burkett et al, 2021). Smedley (2021) states that these women, being raised to be ambitious, self-aware, empowered and high-achieving women, sought to battle obstacles by inverting sexism, racism and classist symbols. This was informed by fighting patriarchy with irony, answering violence with stories of survival, and combating exclusion with grassroots activism and radical democracy. The “Metoo” movement which was done in 2006 in the United States of America gained more attention in 2017 in a bid to assist survivors of sexual violence. Through such advocacy efforts, survivors of sexual violence began to share their stories worldwide using the “hashtag #metoo” on social media. This age of feminism is heavily anchored on advancing equality of sexes and the condemnation of dozens of powerful men in politics, business, entertainment, and the news media. Such acts proved powerful and empowering to women who had raised a generation of rights fighters who were there to liberate themselves from the shackles of male dominance and abuse based on authority.

Few scholars have tried to build a nexus between these movements and gender-based violence. Camarasa and Heim (2007) indicate that feminist epistemologies have claimed that knowledge is dynamic, relative, and variable and cannot be considered an aim in itself but a process. Hence, feminist trajectories have evolved over time redefining culture, traditions, and gender roles and bringing a new face to gender-based violence issues. As such, one can safely attest that feminism arose as a challenge to male supremacy, freedom, and dominance with its roots in Western ideologies. Throughout history, women’s rights were sidelined to the fringes of society as they were confined to the kitchen with little or no exposure to conquer professional and academic spheres (Meah, 2016). This is supported by Goffman (1959) in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* where he explicitly states that the kitchen became the symbolic heart of domesticity and the women that challenged this domesticity were often marginalised. Burkett, Eleanor and Brunnel (2021) indicate that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in medieval Europe, women were denied the right to own property, to study, or to participate in public life. While in some parts of Germany, husbands had the right to sell their wives. Burkett et al (2021) further purport that even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century women neither had the right to vote nor hold elective office in Europe. The Conversation (2022) documents that in countries like Afghanistan, women did not have the right to walk alone in public spheres, were required to wear fully clothed materials, and could not attend public schools. They were discouraged from conducting business without the company of a man be it a husband, brother, father, friend, or legal agent. In the African context, women were subjected to widow burning and pledging, child pledging, female genital mutilation, female infanticide, used as payment and pledges for appeasing

ancestors and avenging spirits, confined to the peripheries of the kitchen with no decision-making power but heavily furnished with information on how to serve their husbands and brothers to make them happy (Falana, 2021). These ordeals of women heavily influenced by patriarchy subjected women to egregious and inhuman treatment at the hands of their male counterparts; hence, they formed the foundation of feminist advocacy.

Furthermore, in African culture, the family socialises women and girls to accept sexually differentiated roles from a very young age. African men are socialised to see themselves as breadwinners and heads of households while females are taught to be obedient and submissive housekeepers. Hence, Charvet (1982) states that such differentiation and discrimination make society view women as sexual beings and not human beings. Further to that, unpaid domestic work is rarely recognised, recorded, or appreciated by men who are said to occupy prestigious positions in society (Hudson, 2001). Such thinking and mindset brewed ground for feminist discourse, which sought to level the playing ground for both men and women so that women could reclaim their independence and be recognised as meaningful contributors in society.

In addition, this injustice encouraged women to revolt and reclaim their rights so that they could actively participate in society. Brunell and Burket (2023) document that Feminists like Christine de Pisan challenged prevailing attitudes towards women with a bold call for female education and this was followed by Laura Cereta, who published volumes of letters dealing with a panoply of women's complaints from denial of education and marital oppression to the frivolity of women's attire. This marked the radical evolution of feminist discourse from a liberal to a social and radical point of view. This is where liberal feminists sought to fight for the participation of women in all spheres of development while radical feminists sought the reordering of society. Burkett and Brunell (2021) indicate that feminists challenged the stereotypical images of women as weak, passive, virginal, and faithful and redefined them as powerful, assertive, and in control of their sexuality.

At the international level, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal number five is aimed at promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls to actively participate in society (United Nations Development Program, 2023). While such efforts are commendable in promoting human rights, peace and sustainable communities, they seem to attack the cultural foundations of black people who idolise the male counterpart of the family. A cursory analysis of the situation shows that men are regarded as 'lords' in their families, whose word goes unopposed in

decision making and should be listened to in every situation. Feminists therefore, who seek to equate themselves with men in such domains face restriction and at best pay heavily through acts of violence as a way of disciplining them.

Gender-based violence issues, when viewed through the lens of theories like the social learning theory by Albert Bandura in 1967, point to a situation where gender-based violence is heavily informed by the behaviours that individuals learn based on their interactions within the environment that they live in. Copp et al (2017) recognise this theory as one of the long-standing traditions to explain gender-based violence; hence, it was essential for guiding this study. The social learning theory espouses that violence is a learnt behaviour that can be triggered by several factors like stress, alcohol and drug abuse, empowerment movements and money to mention a few. Such behaviour can be learned through modelling, observing or imitating the behaviour of others. The assumption in this theory is that individuals learn patterns of behaviour in the early stages of their lives. This is to say that children who grow up in abusive environments are likely to imitate the behaviour and may in turn not see anything wrong when they are abused. Murell et al (2007) support this notion indicating that there is evidence that witnessing or experiencing violence is related to different patterns of abusive behaviour. Hence, exposure or orientation to issues of feminism determines one's approach to them. This is to say that when one appreciates feminist discourse, they are unlikely to perpetuate incidences of violence, but when they do, they have a likelihood of perpetuating violence as a way of safeguarding their initial orientation. As such, the social learning theory assists in understanding how the equal rights feminist movement is correlated to gender-based violence, hence covering the dearth of literature with regard to feminism and gender-based violence.

The call for equality of the sexes challenged male supremacy in society, a move that was not easily welcomed and appreciated in the African culture. Much of the discourse surrounding gender-based violence hinges on the impact of poverty, culture and religion (Global Gender Gap Report, 2023, Muzavazi et al, 2022, Irish Consortium on GBV, 2014) but there is a dearth of literature on how gender-equality feminist discourse has permeated these circles and perpetuated the incidences of violence and how such can be married to have a gender-based violence-free community. This study therefore sought to fill that gap in the literature. Hence, at the crux of this study was the need to establish the nexus between feminist discourse and the correlation that the feminist movement has to gender-based violence issues in a multicultural environment like Harare Province.

## Methods

### *Study design*

The study employed the survey research design as the quantitative approach end to collecting data. This allowed the researcher to find patterns and averages, make predictions, test causal relationships, and make predictions to the general population. Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were employed as the qualitative approach end to data collection. The result of the quantitative-qualitative duality of approaches in one study was a mixed methods design.

The study was heavily informed by the fusion of data collection methods in the mixed methods paradigm in assessing the concept of feminism and gender-based violence in society. Merging a philosophical principle such as feminism with a practical social problem such as GBV called for both thick description and generalization which can only be attained through mixed methods. This was done by methodological triangulation, theory triangulation as well as resource person triangulation which could only be possible through the merging of both qualitative data and quantitative data so as to elicit information on feminism and gender-based violence. Utilising the mixed method paradigm also helped to counter researcher bias in the data collection process while at the same time promoting depth and breadth of information on the issues under investigation. This is supported by Molina-Azorin and Fetters (2016) and Creswell (2017), who state that mixed methods design is imperative in offering several benefits to approaching complex research issues such as those on perceptions of feminism and their correlation to gender-based violence by interweaving philosophical frameworks of both post positivism and interpretivism in a manner that ensures that research issues are meaningfully explained. Hence, one can note that mixed methods design enables researchers to answer questions with sufficient breadth and depth, which in turn helps to generalise findings and implications of research issues to a wider population. Data from qualitative and quantitative methods were triangulated to come up with the best possible conclusions for the study. This is supported by Teddle and Tashakori (2009), who state that collecting diverse data from various methods provides more valid and stronger inferences than a single method.

### *Study area*

The study was conducted in the Harare metropolitan province with a focus on the high-density suburb of Mbare and the central business district. Given that the aim of the study was to capture knowledge and perceptions that people in Harare province have regarding feminism and its correlation to gender-based

violence. Locating the study in Harare provided the researcher with a variety of research respondents who are specialists in different fields who can clearly articulate the concept of feminism from different viewpoints. Harare's central business district is the central convergence point for people of all ethnicities and nationalities in Zimbabwe who come to the capital city to pursue different socio-economic, political, and cultural gains. These include Europeans, Americans, Asians, as well as Tonga, Shona, Ndebele, and people from other African nationalities. Harare province is a hub for many socio-economic prospects for people from many different parts of the country. Due to the large number of people (population approximately 1 578 000 people (World Population Review 2023) and activities that take place within the district, incidences of gender-based violence are numerous. As a result, responding to such issues becomes a priority.

#### *Target population*

The study targeted men and women in Harare province who are above the Zimbabwe legal age of majority which is 18 years. These are people who are viewed as being in a position to critically analyse and contribute meaningfully to the concept of feminism and gender-based violence as a result of their level of maturity, education and experience of different world views. According to Macrotrends (2023), Harare province is comprised of 1 578 000 people and the study utilised a sample of  $n = 200$  people.

#### *Sampling procedure and data collection*

The study utilised the simple random sampling technique. This means that the researcher intentionally selected participants who are representatives of the population so that results can be generalised to that particular population to ensure that the information was collected in a manner that adequately depicts the phenomenon under investigation. The sampling principally focused on equal representation between men and women in the study.

#### *Sample size determination*

Sample size for the target population was calculated using statistics of the current population of Harare province which is 1 578 000 (Macrotrends, 2022) using the formula:

$$n = \frac{k^2 N p q}{e^2}$$

Where:

- **n** is the sample size
- **N** represents the population size which is 1 578 000
- **p** is the baseline indicator which is equated to 50 percent
- **e** is the absolute error which is the level of precision that the researcher has and for this assignment is at 5 percent
- **q** is calculated as  $1-p$

- $k$  is the confidence level which is 95 percent

$$n = \frac{(0.95)^2 \times 1\,578\,000 \times (0.5)^2}{(0.95)^2 \times (0.5)^2 + (0.05)^2 \times 1\,578\,000}$$

**n = 200**

200 questionnaires were randomly distributed to men and women (100 male and 100 female) by the researcher in Harare province. Convenience sampling was used to identify 20 interview participants and 40 focus group participants. The participants for interviews and focus groups comprised equal gender representation. The quantities of interviews and focus group discussions were informed by the need to reach data saturation. The sampling and justification of interview data and focus group data are discussed further in the later sections.

#### *Instruments for data collection*

A focus group discussion guide was used as the data collection tool during focus group discussions. Focus group discussions lasted for one hour each with data recorded using a smartphone and paper notes. Participants were asked to sign consent forms before the onset of the focus group discussion. These served to provide more insight into group perceptions of feminism and gender-based violence, provide an understanding of how people experience the world, analyse their behaviour and perceptions of issues of feminism and gender-based violence. These served as fertile ground for cultivating group thinking on issues of feminism and gender-based violence.

The study utilised semi-structured in-depth interviews with male and female participants in the study. Mack et al (2005:29) indicate that in-depth interviews are important for giving a human face to research problems as they are designed to capture a vivid picture of the participant's perspective on issues of feminist discourse. These proved to be a method of acquiring supplementary research data, means of tracking change and development as well as verifying findings by other methods of data collection.

#### *Administration of research instruments*

The study was significantly influenced by the survey research data which is usually suitable for large populations (n= 200). The questionnaires were electronically distributed and coded through Google Forms. The data set was then statistically analysed to find patterns of information through SPSS to come up with knowledge and attitude scores.

In-depth interviews captured the knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions that people have regarding feminism and gender-based violence using an in-depth

interview guide which comprised of 10 questions. These were done with key institutions and organizations dealing with gender-based violence issues. Organizations in which staff were interviewed include Musasa project (1 male and 1 female), Department of Social Development (2 male and 2 female), Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare (2 male and 2 female), Ministry of Women's Affairs Small and Medium Enterprises (2 male and 2 female), Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association (1 female), Victim Friendly Unit (1 female and 1 male) and Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (3 women and 2 men). The total number of interviews was 20 persons from different fields of expertise. The reason why these organizations and people were interviewed was that they represented a diversity of views in their work of advancing the rights of women, ensuring their access to resources, empowerment of women and fight against gender-based violence. Interviews were recorded using smartphones and note-taking during the course of the interview. These were later transcribed verbatim before analysis. Participants signed consent forms and consent to undertake research in the province was acquired from the city council.

A total of four focus group discussions were conducted with two groups comprising of men and the other two focus group discussions were conducted with women in both Mbare district and Harare central business district. Focus group discussions were attended by 20 men and 20 women on each session with n=40 people. Participants were of different age groups and ethnic origin representing the larger population. The participants who were interviewed were excluded from focus group discussions since their views and input had already been harnessed.

#### *Methods of data analysis*

Data collected for this research was transcribed verbatim by the researcher and her assistant. Themes and codes were then generated which were used to clarify responses to the research questions (Lopez et al, 2008). Creswell (2017) supports the use of themes in social research stating that thematic clusters are used to gain insight into the lived experiences of respondents. The analysis focused on participants' knowledge and perception of feminism in relation to gender-based violence. Participants were given pseudonyms and codes for anonymity for the purposes of the research where "A" was used as the code for in-depth interviews, "B" was used as the code for survey respondents, and "C" as the code for focus group discussion participants. As such, for example, code "A010" would then be used as code for respondent number 10 during in-depth interviews. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse quantitative data, with tables, graphs, charts and illustrations drawn from the resulting computations.

**Results**

The study sought to incorporate respondents from all walks of life so as to adequately capture more detail and depth to the findings. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of research respondents. Fifty percent of the respondents were men while women constituted the other 50% of the respondents. About 39% of the participants were aged between 18 to 24 years, 34% were aged between 25 to 35 years. A significant proportion of the respondents, 19%, were aged between 36 to 45 years, A small proportion, 6%, were aged between 46 to 55 years and 2% were above 55 years.

Given the nature of this study and its attempt to probe the level of knowledge and perceptions that people in Harare province have regarding feminism and gender-based violence, there was a need to capture the perspectives of people from different ethnic backgrounds to see how ethnicity, culture and tradition influence perceptions of feminism and gender-based violence in society. As such, the majority of the respondents, 93% Black. Only 4% and 2% of the respondents were Coloured and White, respectively. This race or ethnicity distribution is reflective of the population distribution of Zimbabwe and Harare in particular.

About 51% of the respondents had attained a bachelor's degree or its equivalent. This level of literacy was regarded as important for this study. When literacy levels are high, the quality of responses generally tends to improve in both quality and quantity. The findings also show that 18% of respondents had attained a high school level of education while 14% had attained a diploma level of education. 6% had attained their master's degree, 2% had primary education, 5% had certificates and 4% had doctorate degrees.

**Table 1: Percentage distribution of respondents' demographic characteristics (N=200 )**

<b>Demographic characteristics</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Sex</b>	
Male	50.0
Female	50.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Age group</b>	
18-24	39.0
25-35	34.0
36-45	19.0
46-55	6.0
Above 55	2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Ethnic origin</b>	
Black	93.0
Coloured	4.0
White	2.0
Group of people who share the same cultural background	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Level of Education</b>	
Doctorate	4.0
Masters	6.0
Degree	51.0
Diploma	14.0
Certificate	5.0
Secondary	19.0
Primary	2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Marrying perceptions of feminism to gender-based violence requires that the researcher interrogate whether people possess knowledge about the phenomenon. Hence, putting forward answers to that question will form the baseline for understanding the relation that this knowledge level has to gender-based violence. Eighty-three percent of the sampled population attested to having heard about feminism. This means the philosophical concept is popular and generally known to the majority of the people in Harare. 10% of the respondents attested that they may have heard of the concept of equal rights and equal opportunities, while 6.9 % of the sample indicated that to them the concept of feminism or equal rights was a foreign

phenomenon that they had never heard of as illustrated in Table 2. These results show that no matter the level of information dissemination that has been done since the 1980s, some people are still ignorant of changing trends in their culture.

**Table 2: Percentage distribution of respondents' knowledge of feminism (N=200)**

<b>Knowledge on feminism</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Respondents who have heard about feminism	83.1
Respondents who have knowledge on equal rights	10.0
Respondents who have neither heard of feminism nor about equal rights	6.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Findings from the study further show that people acquired knowledge about feminism through different means which influenced their understanding of the phenomenon and how they perceive it. Quantitative data from the study shows that the majority of the respondents, 66%, reported that they acquired knowledge on feminism from reading books (Table 3). Nearly one fifth of the respondents reported television as their source of information about feminism. About 5% of the respondents reported that radio was their source of information and Instagram, Facebook and newspaper were each reported by a paltry 2% of the respondents.

**Table 3: Percentage distribution of respondents' sources of information (N=200)**

<b>Source of information</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Reading books	66.0
Television	18.0
Radio	5.0
Instagram	2.0
Twitter	1.0
Newspaper	2.0
Multiple sources	1.0
Gender workshops	1.0
Never heard of feminism	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Data from the study also shows that people in the province define the concept of feminism in different ways. Table 4 shows evidence that 76% of respondents from the study perceived the concept of feminism as the fight for equal rights between men and women, 12% as the empowerment of women,

6% acknowledged it as a move to take over the roles of men, and the other 6% understood feminism as a philosophical disposition that seeks to ensure that women make decisions normally made by men. When these results are viewed by gender, there is a notion that men heavily view the concept of feminism in a negative light. This is probably because they appear to be threatened by the new and developing nature of feminist discourse.

**Table 4: Respondent's definition of feminism (N=200)**

<b>Definition of feminism</b>	<b>Percent</b>
The fight for equal rights between men and women	76.0
Move to take over the roles of men	6.0
Empowerment of women	12.0
Feminism is a philosophical disposition that seeks to ensure that women make decisions normally made by men	6.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The manner in which people perceive issues of feminism matters heavily for issues of gender-based violence. Data from the survey indicates that while a significant number of the population recognised feminism as the fight for equal rights, there were also sceptical views of feminism as a radical movement that challenges social order. When respondents were asked how they perceived the concept of feminism, findings showed that the majority were not willing to accept the dictates of feminism within the household. Only a small portion of the population possessed adequate knowledge on the tenets of feminism through their exposure to academic and professional spheres and acknowledged that there was the need to liberate women from traditionally acceptable means of communication. However, the majority of the respondents were unwilling to accept the concept in their households. Forty percent of the respondents stated that the call for equality breaks families apart, 27% indicated that feminist views unite families, and the other 20% indicated that it is a necessary evil.

### **Religion**

Religion forms the bedrock to which people in the Harare province judge the concept of feminism. Tutorials-point (2021) postulates that religion helps to create an ethical framework and a regulator for the values of everyday life. As such, religion acts as an agency of socialization building values like love, empathy, respect, and harmony among a particular set of people. The study reached out to people of different religions including 89% Christians, 2% Muslims, 1% non-believers, 2% who are not affiliated to any religion, 1% Hindu believers, 1% from the white garments church, 1% from the red

garments church and any religion, and 2% who believe in African traditional religion.

Religion affects the approach with which people encounter issues. In addition, different faiths teach different things regarding gender relations. While some religious organizations teach equality between sexes, others seem to interpret equality differently, situating it in specific contexts. To the latter, men and women were never meant to be universally equal. Respondent B003 during the interview indicated that:

The equality between men and women will remain a dream since the Quran as well as the holy bible disagree with the sharing of power between men and women. I can say that the main cause of gender-based violence is this issue of equality. ... Religion clearly states how gender roles work and we should just read and follow those scriptures (B003).

This submission indicates that men and women in Harare regard their religious beliefs as very important, influencing how they approach feminism and by extension gender-based violence. According to Ebere (2011), religious observance in major religions and indigenous spiritual traditions is a resolutely male affair in both symbolism and hierarchy. Hence, a man is considered to be at par with God. The woman's responsibilities are to serve and cater to her 'god' who is the husband. A woman is recognised for her ability to maintain the home, cook, feed, and bath her husband and children. So, the principles of feminism defy those religious beliefs. Across a wide range of religious teachings, women are given the role of nurturing, caring, and giving birth. While these roles are presented positively and as essential, they reinforce the gender norms in society and patriarchal power structures. Hence, when women decide not to conform to the dictates of their religion by advocating for equal rights and opportunities, they are not only deviating from gender norms and family expectations but also considered to be deviating from God's will too.

In the religious division when one deviates from the will of the superior being, they are bound to face punishment and are given room to reconcile with their God. As such, women who deviate from the dictates of their religion are bound to be punished through the stipulated laws of the religion or by God as a way of correcting and reverting them to the right path. Respondent A114 postulates that:

"The scriptures have made it clear that women should always be under their male counterparts hence, gender-based violence is a punishment for women who forget their position in a household (A114)."

The view of gender-based violence appears to accept that some people have the power to punish others on grounds of gender. In this view, women should not 'forget' their place in the family structure lest they risk punishment. This is supported by Ebere (2011) who indicates that it is common knowledge that the African systems of thought have constructed a religious language that describes God of patriarchal family and ancestry with little or no accordance to females.

### **Marriage**

In addition, the study sought to marry qualitative and quantitative data so as to have depth of information regarding feminism and gender-based violence. As such, qualitative data from the study showed that the concept of feminism was not acceptable in modern-day society as reflected by the sentiments of participant B001 who stated that:

"I do not want to lie to you, my daughter. These issues of equal rights have caused rampant prostitution in this country. Married women are engaging in prostitution on the guise that people are equal. Therefore, I think they should abolish equal rights. A woman will never be equal to a man. It is not possible. What is wrong with submission?"

The argument posed by some respondents was that men and women could never be the same by virtue of their being biologically different. One participant indicated that it was unheard of for a man to be seen cleaning and cooking in the presence of their wife. Unless this happens by the man's choice, this statement clearly dismisses the concept of equal rights and opportunities especially in the household, as the man and the woman cannot hold the same position within the household. In the view of the respondent, there are clear demarcations and divisions in what happens in the home and at work. Participant C012 indicated that:

"The bible proclaims the man as the head of the household, with the woman as the helper." (C012)

This was seconded by one participant who submitted that:

"Men and women were never created to be equal and a push for a society of equality causes more harm than good. The western cultures have decayed the rightful morals and the order of the African society.... Our culture has already created social structures for every gender and size. So, why should we try and change it because of western culture? (B003)."

Respondents and participants appeared inclined to the concept of feminism as espoused and applied in the work environment rather than in the home. One participant indicated that:

“My wife does what I want. And when we are in the home, I advise her on what to do. Even in our culture, that is the order of things. Have you ever seen your mother over-ruling your father?” (C008)

The rhetorical questions point to a man who asserts his control over his wife in a manner that the wife should dare not defy. When such men are defied, they often resort to violence. In their view, their whole existence would have been violated. Hence, participants indicated that promotion of women’s rights at work can be done but still, there are jobs that women struggle to do like gold panning and driving heavy duty vehicles due to the low stamina they possess compared to their male counterparts.

One participant indicated the views of some men on gender roles as follows: “40-60 is enough, 50-50 is a NO! NO! (A015).”

These results show that some men are not ready or willing to do away with patriarchy. Compromising on the issue to a 40 and 60% rate was quite interesting. How this participant settled on the specifications was baffling. This notion was advanced by another respondent during the survey who stated that;

“Women are oppressed because men pay lobola for them. If you voice out the man accuses you of becoming the man (B010).”

### **Culture**

Respondent A012 posed a question to the researcher condescendingly as follows: “What is this feminism that you are talking about? What is this issue of equal rights and which rights are you women even fighting for? Who took those rights from you (A012)?”

The emotive nature of this rhetoric points to deep-seated resentment on the part of the participant. A sense of rejection to the principles of feminine upliftment emerges when the final part of this submission is analysed. It indicates that, to the respondent, the issue of feminism is non-existent because women already have rights enough for them. The respondent went further to state that:

Women already have those rights, which you are talking about. Where have you ever seen bride price paid in the absence of the aunt? Or even a family without a woman? In African culture, we say the woman makes the home. That means we recognize the rights of women already. Why are you making all this noise?

The association of feminism with noise portrays that men heavily contest issues of rights. In the views of these men, women have rights adequate for them. This is so as women’s rights are recognized already in society and by culture, hence, feminism has no basis to be advocating for rights as those

rights are there already in the African society. The respondent therefore perceives the concept of feminism as a borrowed trait that people in Zimbabwe are trying to adopt. This dovetails with the African feminism perspective that locates equal rights within African culture. When divorced from African culture, women begin to bite more than they can chew. The dictates of African culture set by ancestors should not be disrupted because it accords women a place in society.

Data acquired in the study further points out that feminism has paved the way for stigma and chastisement for those women who advance feminist efforts. Participant C015 indicated that:

“Feminism is absent in African culture. If you look closely, you will see that advocates of feminism are often singles. They failed in the family. When single mothers are rejected, they find solace in rights issues. Marriage failures run with rights issues. Married women desist from such.”

Name-calling, stigma and chastisement, therefore, decorate the everyday living of females who advocate for equal rights. The belief in communities is that women who have failed marriages are the ones who engage themselves in feminist advocacy efforts. Such name-calling and stigmatization fuel gender-based violence. Hence, one can conclude that feminist advocacy efforts, when withdrawn or delayed, pave the way for gender-based violence efforts given that society comes with harsh names that categorize a ‘certain type of woman’.

## **Discussion**

This study dealt with perceptions of men and women on feminism in Harare metropolitan province. What emerges from the discussions here and the questionnaire data is that feminism is a divisive, contentious and distorted issue in families. While men tend to interpret African culture in ways that point to clear divisions between the roles of men and women as well as biblical interpretations that appear to favour men, there is a feeling that the principles of feminism in general are acceptable to men if they ascribe to social structure and order. Radical feminism appears to generate massive emotional and extremist responses from men in general. The way matters of rights are packaged would require sensitivity to the concerns of men. This is not surprising as Falana (2021) and Meah (2016) already noted women’s rights have been sidelined to the fringes of society since time immemorial. When appropriately packaged and disseminated, data in this study appears to project equal rights as amenable to both gender, particularly resonating with learned men. Some practices in tradition may require to be re-negotiated to align them with the new thinking on women’s rights, such as the ways by which lobola is practiced.

Global trends and perceptions on issues of feminism and gender-based violence are deeply rooted and informed by cultural beliefs. A set of people is defined and guided by cultural expectations and ways of doing business which guide how they accept and react to new ideologies. In the cultural context, the issue of feminism or feminist values and beliefs of equality are relatively new as noted by Brunell and Burket (2023). The cultural dictates of the Zimbabwean people have been defined by ancestral beings who define the identity, social roles for men and women and expectation of duties that each gender is supposed to fulfil in society. The issue of bride price or 'lobola' forms the basis of the cultural expectations in Zimbabwe. The belief is that before a man and a woman start staying together as husband and wife, the man is supposed to pay a token of appreciation to the woman's family known as lobola. This culturally solemnises their relationship. By virtue of a man paying bride price for the woman, culture dictates that the man acquires certain rights over the woman since she is married and she is required to submit to the husband. This definitely will encourage discrimination as noted by Burkett and Brunell (2021). It is these attitudes embedded in cultural beliefs that form the bedrock of gender-based violence efforts as supported by the social learning theory by Bandura in 1967 (Bandura, 2021) who states that individuals learn a way of conduct from their models. Thus, the way they observe their models behave is likely the behaviour they would exhibit while modelling their significant other.

In addition, the structure of society contributes to the subjugation of women (Falana, 2021). The practice of paying bride price is implicated here as contributing to the oppression of women. Such thoughts indicate that women are always below their husbands by virtue of men paying bride price for them. As such, bride price reduces women to commodities that men buy, and by extension use or disuse, the way they feel. This finding opens way for conversations in which lobola must be re-explained and re-discussed with the view to demonstrating appreciation and as a token to cement relations between the two families. When lobola becomes exorbitant, there arises tensions that may propel gender-based violence. Men always demand value for their money rather than contest. The view here is that when lobola is marked properly, negotiated in good faith, and for the right intentions, the practice remains a necessary practice in African culture to unify the two families. When the male part begins to feel aggrieved there opens gaps for gender-based violence as a way to recoup costs. Despite it being a cultural obligation and sign of respect to the wife's parents, men in Harare province seem to share the common view that because one paid bride price, it means that the woman automatically has to give in to their husband's demands. As such, when a woman defies her husband's demands she should be punished

accordingly. Findings from the study show that men feel obliged to discipline their wives through beating or sexual assault as a way of whipping them into line as it is their right to do so.

More so, the nexus between knowledge and perceptions of the concept of feminism and gender-based violence lies in the way that people of various ethnic origins construe gender. A majority 93% of respondents identified themselves as black people who come from a patriarchal society. From their point of view, a man is expected to get his conjugal rights whenever it pleases him. Such perceptions indicate that the wife was designed to 'serve' the husband and bid to his whims without her expressing the need to rest.

According to respondents from this study, the order of society has been set since time immemorial, hence efforts to make women participate in spheres that do not belong to them are the cause of gender-based violence. Gender-based violence is therefore a 'punishment' for women who deviate from the ways of God. Ebere (2011) postulates that a religious world that is masculine has been taken for granted and accepted as the natural order of things. This is to say that in the realms of religion, beliefs and values matter most in shaping public and private understandings of masculinity. This is seconded by survey results where 24% of the respondents indicated that women were created to be below their husbands, hence the culture is solid. When sentiments such as these are aired by a significant size of the population, a quarter of the sample in this study, it tends to project the work of advocacy and education as incomplete.

It is imperative to note that the majority of religious preachers or custodians of religion are men, and they write and interpret the gospel from a masculine lens, which in turn restricts the freedom of women. This is supported by Suwaed (2017) who states that religions are not the direct cause of women's exploitation and oppression although they are at times used as a tool employed to this end. However, the cause is a patriarchal society. She further argues that powerful men in society reinterpreted religious beliefs and ideas to benefit themselves. This is supported by Gelling (2021) who states that rules on abortion and contraception and unequal rules relating to marriage and divorce put significant restrictions on women's life choices that are not placed on men. There is a fallacious conventional wisdom from several scholars who have reported on child marriage cases perpetrated against children by male prophets who want polygamous marriages under the pretext of dreams. Spiritual matters are hardly opposed by congregants as they believe that the prophet would have uttered prophetic words of marriage while possessed by the Holy Spirit who is a divine being, hence cannot be questioned.

The emancipation of women to hold an equal share in participation and recognition in society is a dream far from reality because her identity is attached to that of a man. The way society relates to her in the church environment is directly informed by who they are married to. Given the age of civilization where other women decide to stay alone and refrain from marriage, they are recognised as the failures of society who are not able to handle the marriage institution. The emotional and psychological trauma associated with such acts prevents women from fully actualizing their potential because they are deterred from participating in important matters of the society where their skills and expertise may be of importance. As such, one can conclude that the issue of gender equality, equal participation and the overhaul of male domination in society is a pipe dream. The rules governing religious institutions are made by men, favour men and ensure that women maintain a second-class citizenship in society even in their participation.

On another note, there was a view that the concept of feminism is a hypocritical movement by some women to advance their needs, yet they do not want to take responsibility for the equal rights they are advancing. Respondent A053 indicated thus: *“Women speak of equal rights when they want to and when it benefits them. If you ask them to assume responsibility for paying bills, they bulk off but clamour for equal rights.”* This assertion implies that issues of equal rights are deeply entrenched. The principle of equal rights and opportunities cannot be achieved when women are not yet ready to bear the responsibilities that come with shouldering the burden that men carry. The argument is that women want equal opportunities but reject accountability that comes with that equality. The argument posed here is that women fight for equal rights, yet they shy away from responsibilities that come with equal rights. When the various arguments against feminist values are aggregated, what emerges from data is that civilization on issues of rights, equity and equality are embedded in cultural, social, religious silhouettes too entangled to untie. A lot of effort is required to educate both men and women that humans are created equal but society distorts social order.

Findings from the study also proffer the understanding that feminism appears to have brought forward the liberation of women from oppressive cultural expectations. With feminism came issues of free dressing and freedom of expression through clothes and words. One respondent indicated that the way women dress these days was provocative and paved the way for violence against them. Some respondents indicated that women dress in revealing clothes that lure men who at times may not be able to control themselves. One participant indicated that the way in which women dress degrades the African culture, which perpetuates violence against women. As such, such perceptions

perpetuate sexual, physical and verbal violence against women mostly from their male counterparts.

This violence is not only limited to women as men are also equal victims of such. Men are viewed as providers as noted from the research findings. One element of this study that seemed to impinge on data was the aspect of economic decline in Zimbabwe and the resulting effects this had on the home and workplace. As such, when they fail to provide for their families, they are 'tormented' by their spouses and reduced to nothing. An act which diminishes their self-esteem as noted by one respondent. This violence manifests through the verbal use of abusive and demeaning words when men fail to fulfil their responsibilities even in the wake of equal division of labour.

In addition, the issue of freedom of expression being expressed by women is another issue that can be attributed to the abuse of men by women and has spiked debate on the concepts of feminism and gender-based violence in this study. From a discourse analysis point of view, women are heavily responsible for abusing men through their improper dressing. To women, the name-calling done by men when they are wearing skimpy dresses and revealing attires is harassment while men see it as a defence mechanism from being lured into committing crimes. Thus, the narrative has it that clothing sends messages to the people around in a manner that elicits concomitant responses, which means that women in their quest for freedom of expression through their clothes, expose themselves as prey to men in the streets. Forty-five percent of the respondents disregarded the notion that men are the sole perpetrators of gender-based violence, indicating that females also prey upon men.

Fifty percent of the women who participated in the study indicated that the call for equal rights started from way back in the 90s with iconic people like Paul Matavire singing about equal rights. Respondent A014 quoted verbatim Paul Matavire's song: *"You are at the beginning when some of us are at the end ... you and I ... are the same. If you cannot stand it, then give way,"* my translation.

Such illustrations show that even singers popularised the gospel of equal rights in a bid to emancipate women from the shackles of culture and domination by men. However, very few men embraced the concept of equal rights to give women the same place in society. While some are based on cultural beliefs, many indicated that even the dictates of their religious beliefs rule out any opportunity for men and women to be equals. Hence, men should maintain their status as the lords of families.

### **Implications for policy, programming and practice**

The findings from this study show that the concept of gender equality is still very far from daybreak. Social workers being people who work with people from various backgrounds, this study offer an opportunity for social workers to appreciate diverse views on feminist ideology and ways of approaching them from an indigenous perspective. Findings from this study pave the way for social workers to view the concept of gender equality from a cultural lens. Practice and approaches in social work should be indigenised to ensure their acceptability in the African context by indigenous people. This, however, should be practiced in a manner that appreciates the diversity of people in society and their views on such issues. Hence, findings from this study provide a leeway of addressing social work in the country and beyond. This is so because a social worker needs to have adequate appreciation of the context in which they are operating and this enhances their approach to issues presented to them. Such practice builds confidence in clientele in the profession.

Of importance in this study was the finding that men and women are progressively competing and occupying equal roles in the profession. This provides an opportunity for the profession to diversify as well as appreciate the contributions of both genders in the academic and professional arena. Such findings contribute to strengthening the knowledge base on social work research by contributing to the literature. Such literature is imperative in shaping new ways and approaches to practice. This also provides an opportunity for universities to inculcate some of the aspects of this study into their curriculum so as to build an appreciation of diversity among upcoming social workers and how they can deal with gender-based violence issues in society. Findings in this study also pave the way for other social workers to explore other research areas that may help strengthen the social work discourse.

In addition, findings from this study on the correlation between feminist discourse and gender-based violence, promote the development of legislative instruments that criminalize perpetrators of gender-based violence. Thus, giving room for effective intervention methods not only by social workers but also by those in the law sector. This is so as the legislative framework provides the yardstick against which all forms of violence can be criminalized. Findings from this study through recommendations provided herein also advocate for the provision of a specialised and well-trained set of cadres in handling gender-based violence issues. This would promote the effective use of survivor-centred approaches to gender-based violence in a manner that upholds the integrity of the social work profession.

People do not have adequate knowledge of the dictates and core tenets of feminism and thus, when it is employed in a radical manner by people who do not have adequate knowledge, it risks being rejected and perpetuates violence. As such, social workers, other civil society organizations, and the government at large need to scale up awareness-raising and information dissemination efforts among people. People need more educational material on issues of feminism because when people are provided with accurate information about feminism, they tend to own it and therefore utilise the information to appreciate, enrich and develop their society.

Indigenisation of the concept of feminism is key. This means that people must practice feminism in a culturally appropriate manner that does not seek to undermine the tenets of African society and the philosophy of Ubuntu which is the bedrock of society. It is recommended that in the pursuit of equal rights and participation in spheres of influence, women should seek to align such with cultural expectations. This is so because, when feminist issues are practised through the lens of wanting to reorder society, they risk being unaccepted as they would attack the belief system of a specific group of people. Such is heavily informed by the value of social justice in social work where social workers strive to pursue social change with and on behalf of vulnerable individuals of society. The National Association of Social Workers (2021) supports this notion stating that social workers strive to ensure access to needed information, services, and resources, equality of opportunity, and meaningful participation in decision-making for all people.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined how men and women perceived feminism in the Harare Metropolitan Province. What emerges from the discussions here and the questionnaire data is that feminism is a divisive, contentious, and distorted issue in families. While men tend to interpret African culture in ways that point to clear divisions between the roles of men and women as well as biblical interpretations that appear to favour men, there is a feeling that the principles of feminism in general are acceptable to men if they ascribe to social structure and order. Men appear to have a strong emotional and extremist reaction to radical feminism. The way rights issues are packaged would necessitate sensitivity to men's concerns. When appropriately packaged and disseminated, data in this study appears to project equal rights as amenable to both genders, particularly resonating with learned men. Some practices in tradition may require to be re-negotiated to align them with the new thinking on women's rights, such as the ways by which cultural marriage of paying bride price is practiced. Because of the contentious nature of the debate, what came out prominently in this study was the finding that people in the Harare province generally appreciate the principles of feminism in general. Gender-based violence also appears to be a learned behaviour as

espoused by the social learning theory where men practice acts of violence as per the culture inculcated in them to assert their dominance over female counterparts in society. However, the overarching view was that the application of feminist principles and practices should be embedded in the African feminist strand and respect African conceptions of the family and its structure. Other radical interpretations of feminism appeared to provoke strong resistance from both males and females. As such, the indigenization of the concept of feminism could be a starting point in addressing the scourge of gender-based violence.

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