



How a Polarized Dialogue on Gender-Based Violence Has Been Exploited by Perpetrators

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Abstract

For several decades, the world has been wrestling with addressing the root causes of gender-based violence (GBV), particularly against women and girls. In the same discourse, there is sharp disagreement over what constitutes violence against women, some of which were briefly reviewed here. The disagreement exists amid a growing number of attempts to explain why women face violence from men. It has been a polarized dialogue—weakening the “ability to deepen and widen” interventions against GBV. In this paper, some understanding of how polarized dialogue on GBV has been exploited by men to inflict all forms of pain on women is provided.

Subject Areas

Sociology

Keywords

Polarized Dialogue Gender Based Violence Exploited, Men

1. Introduction

1.1. Contribution to Theory

Disagreement over what constitutes violence against women, amid also a growing number of attempts to explain why women face violence from men, inevitably blocks opportunities for problem-solving and leads to polarization of intervention. Violence against women is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon, and over the years, there have been a number of theoretical approaches that have attempted to explain this complexity. This article adopts an integrated, ecological framework by [1] for understanding the origins of gender-based violence. An ecological approach to abuse conceptualizes violence as a multifaceted phenomenon grounded in an interplay among personal, situational, and

sociocultural factors. Important to this article, is the notion of the interplay among personal, situational, and sociocultural factors, which have been reviewed to highlight how these factors polarize the dialogue on GBV. The result is the weakened “ability to deepen and widen” interventions against GBV, which men exploit to inflict all types of physical and sexual abuse on women. Ultimately, this paper encourages a more integrated approach to theory building regarding gender-based abuse by including polarized dialogue to the list of factors that emerge as predictive of abuse at each level of the social ecology.

1.2. Study Strategy and Outline

Building on the secondary data collected for the previous studies on gender-based violence, this paper scoped relevant grounds to consolidate the role of polarized dialogue in perpetuating violence against women. In the initial chapters, the paper discusses the posture of dialogue on gender-based violence, including what GBV is all about within its contested definitional understanding. The paper goes on to have a conversation on factors precipitating violence against women that interplay among personal, situational, and sociocultural levels. Relying on information on the back-and-forth dialogue, the paper argues this phenomenon has indirectly “created” an intense disagreement on the moral and legal standing of the interventions. Simply, the paper demonstrates how polarity problematizes the determination of legitimate dialogue and how women are impacted and the implications for the promotion and protection of their human rights. To weave the discussion together, in the succeeding chapters, the paper looks at how fragmented dialogue ultimately benefits perpetrators of GBV. It straps up the discussion with a perspective on the social functions of cultural rules to precipitate the existing crisis and makes a conclusive and summarized version of the outlook of the paper.

2. Dialogue on Gender-Based Violence

According to Dr. Harold Saunders of the Dialogue Institute, dialogue is a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn. Kaplowitz, Donna [2] echoes that dialogue is a style of interactive communication that facilitates shared understanding rather than debate. In this regard, it could be construed that dialogue on GBV for several decades aimed to enhance shared understanding of the holistic nature of the vice rather than continue debating. The assumption is that, as GBV has been experienced across the world, societies should be changed by what they have learned about GBV and its impact on their well-being.

Although there are numerous definitions of GBV, most agree that it is a typology of violence inflicted largely on women by male perpetrators to draw some attention to a particular cause—mostly man’s dominance. UNODC and UN Women Report [3] show that, on average, more than five women or girls were killed every hour by someone in their own family in 2021. Of all the women and girls intentionally killed during this period, some 56 percent were killed by inti-

mate partners or other family members (45,000 out of 81,000), showing that home is not a safe place for many women and girls (ibid).

The article discusses the extent to which dialogue on GBV has not produced consensus to adequately protect women's rights. Instead, the fight against GBV has remained largely at the crossroads of universal values such as women's rights on the one hand and hardline nonconformist men who use violence to serve their interests, on the other. And the implications this might have on how protection programmes are implemented in collective societies (global level) with different values and forms of social organisation. It recognizes the general agreement on cultural equality and differentiated application of laws against GBV as the latent recipe for the continued exploitation of women's rights.

It argues further that, inculcating a worldview of human rights into cultural settings has faced some resistance because it is viewed as a negative norm which indirectly has urged people to take a stance in the dialogue, and functions as an alarm signal stimulating action against it. The stance is practiced as a vital part of restoring societal dignity, as opposed to prescribing new rights. This article, therefore, makes an important contribution to what is at best a partially researched topic of polarity in gender dialogue, which ultimately perpetrates violence against women. The article provides a deeper understanding of how culture turbulently intersects with gender when seeking to build a sustainable fight against GBV that is forward-facing. In this regard, the current gaps are perceived as "overreaction of gender activists" without recourse to how this process is turbo-charging polarization of attitudes, especially among men in traditional societies, which has severely impacted prospects for inclusive social validation of women's rights as human rights.

3. What is Gender-Based Violence?

According to the United Nations (UN), GBV is defined as "any act of violence that results in or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" [4]. Similarly, GBV is an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and that is based on socially ascribed (i.e. gender) differences between males and females [4] [5]. According to UN Women [6], to effectively combat GBV, there is a need to understand the issue holistically. However, consensus on what constitutes GBV is problematized by the way the public perceives the legitimacy of such acts.

In this case, perpetrators of GBV do exploitatively take advantage of disharmony in the dialogue, and lack of consensus on the interpretation of how gender is intrinsically linked to human rights. Simply, conversations on *meaning-making* of GBV have remained a coin of different faces, which perpetrators exploit to their skewed interest as violence allows them to achieve the desired goals. In this sense, GBV is partly committed because it has strategic effectiveness, as perpetrators gain what they want due to polarized dialogue on it. The

contest is in the dichotomy between violence which is largely legitimized as normal and the violence condemned as GBV, regardless of having normative, legal, and policy implications. For example, some Muslim societies in Asia do not allow girls to attain formal education or women to operate beauty salons while others permit them as part of the promotion of women's rights and sustainable social development.

This means that GBV involves any acts that inflict physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering including threats, forced virginity testing, or female genital mutilation [7]. While GBV can affect both men and women, the majority of reported GBV cases involve women and children [7]. According to the World Bank, GBV affects one in three women globally. Additionally, it is argued that 35% of women have experienced either physical violence, intimate partner violence (IPV) or non-partner sexual violence worldwide [8] [9]. Besides that, in some regions of the world, the proportion of women who became victims of physical and/or sexual violence perpetrated by men can range between 65 and 70% [8] [10]. UN Women [10] also adds that men, as a group, perpetrate more physical as well as harmful types of violence than women.

Research by WHO reveals that the sub-Saharan African (SSA) region has the highest lifetime prevalence of intimate partner violence at 37% [8]. This is evidenced by surveys conducted with 13 to 24-year-old adolescents and young women in seven African countries. Results from these surveys showed that sexual violence rates were more than 20% among girls under 18, in all countries sampled [11]. This means that sexual violence is widespread in SSA. Indeed, recent evidence also illustrates that two out of five women had reported intimate partner violence in SSA countries [12]. Similarly, another study conducted in low- and middle-income countries gave consistent results [13]. Presumptively, this could be an underestimation as a result of underreported and/or unreported associated GBV cases. While there are laws and legislation put in place to promote reporting of GBV, some women are reluctant to do so due to numerous cultural, religious and other barriers.

The social construct of GBV through accepted daily practices regardless of their impact on human rights, becomes a recipe for the commission of endemic violence against women. By default, such cultural orientation provides perpetrators with "socially endorsed" incentives for non-compliance with anti-GBV rules, laws and norms. Ultimately, the porousness in the dialogue creates conditions conducive to the use of GBV for achieving skewed goals. In short, perpetrators have a strategic rationale for committing the act. Different views on GBV are prioritised in respective local settings which leads to different interpretations of what it means for human rights. During joint Statement with UNODC on the study done by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and UN Women [3], UN Women Executive Director Sima Bahous said;

"Behind every femicide, the statistic is the story of an individual woman or girl who has failed. These deaths are preventable—the tools and the knowledge to do so already exist. Women's rights organizations are already monitoring data

and advocating for policy change and accountability. Now we need the concerted action across society that will fulfil women's and girls' right to feel and to be safe, at home, on the streets, and everywhere."

The Statement identifies a lack of concerted action across society, which weakens prospects for shaping new identities of GBV, which leads to enhancing response capabilities, coordination and effectiveness. Additionally, the inadequacies affect consensus to unlock women from the yoke of cultural practices that are blind to human rights and facilitate new lines of fighting GBV. As noted by UN Women [6], the tools and the knowledge to prevent the scourge are available, therefore, this paper argues that the deficits lie in the shared understanding of GBV discourse as illustrated by prolonged debate on the scourge, consequently evading global community action. The current dialogue has only managed to harden intergroup gender interpretation boundaries and, portray gender advocacy as a well-organized error that translates the existing efforts as unattractive to many. Simply, the vents left by lack of consensus at every level of society create loopholes for perpetrators to use violence to achieve the intended outcome rather than compliance with norms, laws or other societal prescriptions.

Recognising that gender theory tends to emphasise Western conception, this research also shows there is a need to engage with different gender assumptions and develop anti-GBV methodologies that speak to different local assumptions. It also asks whether or not gender processes are asking the right questions in culturally diverse and divided societies. Framing interventions to GBV, solely on political policy decisions at national, regional or global levels such as the United Nations, sustains the impetus to inadequately deal with the competing worldviews on GBV and their impact on intergroup relations. It undermines concerted efforts to build a sustainable front against GBV in culturally diverse societies. Such shortcomings depict what happens in a culturally diverse society when competing values and ways of interpreting reality collide. There are implications for GBV and the goal of gender mainstreaming, as valuable and needed contributions to how GBV interventions can become more sustainable are weakened. This paper argues that the impact is adverse if these efforts are not tied into local values and embedded in a society's system of *meaning-making*.

4. Factors Precipitating Violence against Women

The trend toward globalization of gender mainstreaming in all sectors of human security and intervention to GBV have liabilities as well. Interventions have frequently clashed with local conflicts of interest among members of society. However, some of the open factors that lead to an individual's adoption of violence to achieve goals include adverse childhood experiences, history of child and family abuse, culture, tolerant attitudes to violence, social inequalities, alcohol and substance abuse etc.

4.1. Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is the expression used to describe all

types of abuse, neglect and other traumatic experiences that occur to individuals under the age of eighteen years of age. From a developmental psychopathology perspective, ACEs include exposure to domestic violence, child neglect, and physical or sexual maltreatment by parents or other caregivers. Others include sexual assault by adults, exposure to parents' or caregivers' domestic violence, bullying by peers or siblings, and violence within the context of an adolescent romantic relationship. Collectively, these are harmful to children and bring about negative consequences [14], as they always call for some kind of reaction that could either be exhibited immediately or later in life.

Indeed, numerous studies have shown that there is a strong association between adverse childhood experiences and GBV [15] [16]. Besides that, exposure to violence may exacerbate the development of severe externalizing disorders such as antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) and psychopathy in adulthood [17]. ASPD is characterized by impulsive, reckless, and aggressive behaviours that commonly result in persistent criminal offending beginning early in development [18]. The diagnosis for ASPD reveals that children exposed to different forms of violence are more likely to become survivors themselves or perpetrators of violence in the future because ASPD is associated with severe trauma history [15].

For example, Tu and Lou [19] empirically analysed in their study the risk factors associated with IPV in China's Shanghai city using cross-sectional data of married rural migrants. The study revealed that husbands experience of childhood abuse contributed to their use of GBV. Moreover, other researchers argue that the effects of child neglect could also play a role in adult violence [20] [21]. This is because the associated trauma involved in child neglect negatively impacts human physical, cognitive and socio-emotional development [16]. This trauma also has a lifelong impact on the health and the quality of a child's life and deprives children of the 'average expectable environment' [22], which is critical for the adaptive functioning of a child. Therefore, deprivation of children leaves them vulnerable to the interpersonal, cognitive, emotional, and biological factors that contribute to ASPD later in life. In particular, the "safe base" provided by a secure attachment relationship that children enjoy in their environment is seen as fundamental to the child's ability to acquire a number of fundamental developmental capacities that protect against the development of criminal and antisocial behaviour in interaction with one another [23].

A conducive environment for children is critical in that, it facilitates the development of capacities for basic trust, ego resilience, self-control, emotional regulation, empathy, perspective-taking, social understanding, interpersonal problem-solving, mastery motivation, executive functions, and moral judgment [24], all of which are compromised by abuse and neglect. Accordance to UNICEF's view [24], maltreated children may develop distinct maladaptive cognitive processes involving distorted beliefs about themselves, others, and their environment, which consolidate over time and shape how they later interpret their experiences and respond in social situations. For example, the social processing

perspective by Crick and Dodge [25] highlights that aggressive behaviours could result from maladaptation and distortions in encoding and interpreting information. This means that someone would interpret a neutral stimulus suspiciously, leading to identifying goals that are self-defensive, which would automatically resort to biased ways of executing responses. Experiences of abuse and neglect alter information processing in social situations involving threat and provocation, resulting in increased tendencies to focus preferentially on threatening stimuli (e.g., others' aggression), interpret neutral or ambiguous actions as hostile, and resolve conflicts in an aggressive manner [26] [27] [28] [29].

The social learning theory also gives more elaboration on the link between childhood experiences and ASPD. This theory states that children who are victims or observers of violence in the home may model their parents' behaviour. It is possible especially when they perceive such violence as one accompanied by rewards in the form of compliance to one's wishes and interpersonal dominance over others. This augments the illustration in this paper that the commission of GBV sometimes occurs because it has a strategic rationale with it. As fathers in homes are disproportionately the perpetrators of family violence, this might inspire boys to imitate the differentiated models they present [30], thus contributing to an increased vulnerability to delinquency amongst maltreated boys. This means that early maltreatment experiences are associated with the development of long-lasting criminal thinking styles. As a result, when children grow into adults, they may attend to salient social cues and respond to their environment in a manner consistent with their pre-existing schemas [31], leading to an increased risk of criminal offending, including GBV.

4.2. Culture

As diverse as cultures are, Fitzgerald [32] defines "culture" as referring to the shared concrete and abstract meanings and patterns, including the norms, values and behavioural scripts, which help individuals make sense of their surroundings and facilitate adaption and coordination in society. Cultural beliefs regarding social norms about the proper roles and responsibilities of men and women could precipitate GBV in one way or another. In some instances, many groups lobbying for women's rights usually withhold their denouncing of GBV when it is associated with the 'culture' or 'religion' of a certain community [33]. These groups tend to play down violence against women and girls as an authentic practice justified for preserving the cultural, religious, and traditional sovereignty of the communities.

Normalizing violence based on culture and religion conversely deprives women and girls of their self-determination rights as well as control of their bodies and sexuality [34]. Since those who employ culture and religion to justify GBV do it because of their interpretation, it is critical to demystify such beliefs by exposing the alternatives to them [33]. Many societies have normalized the attitudes and systems that elevate religious doctrine endorsed by male authorities and these patriarchal structures have also regularized violence in the society [35]. For ex-

ample in Zimbabwe, cultural beliefs are girded by the male-dominated influence which seeks to protect the family name, even if that meant sacrificing a family member's dignity [36]. In fact, a study by Perrin *et al.* [37], in Somalia and South Sudan, noted the stigma associated with being a member of the family where the emphasis was placed on addressing GBV within the family rather than reporting to authorities. This was done to protect the family name over the safety and well-being of the victim.

Most cultural and social norms socialize males to be aggressive, powerful, unemotional, and controlling, and hence, contribute to a social acceptance of men as dominant [38]. Similarly, expectations of females as passive, nurturing, submissive, and emotional also reinforce women's roles as weak, powerless, and dependent upon men. This kind of socialization of both men and women has resulted in an unequal power relationship between men and women and can be traced from an individual childhood background that upholds such norms [39]. One in three surveyed women agree that a man is justified in beating his wife in some cases, including if she burns the food, argues with him, goes out without telling him, neglects the children, or refuses to have sexual intercourse with him [40]. Some of the social and cultural norms which were listed by the World Bank group document [9] included:

- Men are socially superior to women and have the right to assert power over them.
- A man has the right to "correct" or discipline a woman's behaviour if he considers it "disrespectful," "childish," or "idle".
- A man has the right to control his wife's mobility and access to social and economic opportunities.
- Physical violence is an acceptable way to resolve conflicts within a relationship.
- Discussing intimate partner violence is taboo.
- A dowry or bride price (a financial payment from the husband to the bride's family) is equivalent to purchasing and thus owning a wife.
- Sex is a man's right in marriage; it is the wife's duty to bear but not enjoy it. Women who work all day, especially in the formal sector, are tired at the end of the day, so a man must forcefully take what is his.
- Girls are responsible for controlling a man's sexual urges. Victims of sexual assault are blamed for the type of dress they wear.
- Sexual violence is an acceptable way of putting a woman in her place or punishing her.

Ultimately, these social norms clearly indicate that there is social acceptance of wife beating, and there are legal and communal sanctions regarding a man's right to discipline and control female behaviour.

4.3. Societal Level Inequalities and Alcohol and Substance Abuse

Social science scholars have long underscored the connection between gender inequalities, structural inequalities, interpersonal power relations, norms of

masculinity, and men's perpetration of all types of violence [41]. Pleck [42] developed a model to explain male dominance over females by stating that, the existence of cultural standards of masculinity can result in individual men's perpetration of violence against others either through reclamation of masculinity for those who are not meeting expectations of masculinity, or discharge of emotions through violent means for men who feel pressure to meet the expectations of manhood. Other factors related to alcohol and substance abuse as illustrated by Zambia Police statistics [43] that alcohol is one of the most commonly used drugs in Zambia. Research has also shown that between 50% and 80% of patients with alcohol dependency present impaired cognitive function [44]. Another study done among females aged between 11 and 24 in Zimbabwe by [36], revealed that alcohol abuse in the family was a strong predictor of GBV.

5. Effects of GBV on Women

If defining violence against women is the subject of much debate, the same can be said about theorizing the effects of GBV on women. Violence against women means a "woman living in a culture that sexually objectifies the female body, acceptance of interpersonal violence and harassment of women by men, cherishing societal attitudes supportive of violence against women, and that treat their bodies as subject to other humans". All culminating into a mountain of factors that make change of attitudes and behaviors of men against women, a more challenging task.

Various reports have recognized GBV as one of the global major public health issues [45], with physical, sexual, and psychological abuse of women still occurring in public and/or private life [46]. The phenomenon is worse in developing countries including Sub-Saharan Africa [47], where the experience of GBV threatens the lives of many women and lowers their self-esteem. It also precipitates mental health distress in them, involving emotional disturbance that may have an impact on the social functioning and day-to-day living conditions of individuals [48]. This distress breeds mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety [49] and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Others include psychological traumas, alcohol and drug dependency [50] and somatization disorders as well as suicidal ideation and attempts [48] [51] [52].

In fact, evidence illustrates that between 50% and 70% of women encounter mental health challenges as a result of GBV [48] [53]. For instance, both recurrent episodes of violence as well as sexual violence have been linked to PTSD. Besides that, some forms of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) are linked to an increased risk of anxiety and depression [50]. These mental health consequences of GBV come about as a result of the failure of the victim to come to terms with the experience of violence. This failure weakens a woman's standing in society, making her more vulnerable to abuse. Worse still, their acceptance of the physical and health consequences that come with it, lowers their resilience. For example, a woman who develops a physical impairment like loss of an eye or limb due

to physical abuse would have a hard time adjusting to living with such an impairment for the rest of her life. This would obviously precipitate feelings of sadness, worthlessness, and many others.

Apart from that, many women develop fear and worry of experiencing another episode of GBV and this results in severe anxiety. Correspondingly, verbal abuse may bring about depression in that, it decreases the self-esteem of women, thereby making them feel worthless, guilty and a failure in life. They also feel less attractive, discouraged about their future, fail to make independent decisions and develop suicidal thoughts. Sexual violence, which is another form of GBV may lead to feelings of worthlessness, self-disgust, and loss of interest in intimate relationships as well as suicidal ideation. Further, victims of GBV are highly likely to suffer from alcohol use disorders. In fact, recent evidence estimating the health burden associated with intimate partner and sexual violence shows that women who experience either form of violence are approximately twice as likely to have alcohol use disorders and more than twice as likely to have depression, compared to women who have not experienced such violence [8]. This is obviously due to the emotional distress they face as a result of GBV. Engaging in alcohol misuse is viewed as a means of managing the psychological and/or emotional distress that they go through. Unfortunately, this alcohol misuse by victims leads to family neglect which results in more GBV. Ultimately, all forms of GBV invade the mental space of the victims and contribute to high incidences of mental health challenges.

GBV is not only linked to negative mental health consequences in women but also other health outcomes. It adds to the burden of disease and imposes a strain on women's physical and emotional well-being. The health consequences linked to GBV include sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancies, induced miscarriages and forced abortions [54] [55] [56]. All these conditions have a detrimental effect on the socioeconomic development of society. They can negatively impact young women's academic capabilities by undermining their chances of pursuing their academic studies [57] —due to disruption to the victim's life by health challenges emanating from the violence. For instance, GBV may destabilize the education of the victim by decreasing attention to the class lectures, increasing absenteeism from the school and drop-out rates. As a result, victims would face hindrances to continue their education as desired. Moreover, this in itself would affect enrolments that schools are expected to yield and may also increase drop-out rates. An increased rate of girls dropping out of schools consequently leads to low economic status among women; thus, increasing women's vulnerability to more GBV as they later become economically dependent on their male partners after marriage [58].

In recent years, the concept of "humanness" of women has received a considerable amount of attention from social psychologists, feminists, advocates, activists etc. Dekeseredy and Schwartz [59] argue that whatever theory resonates with us for understanding the causes of GBV, it is undeniable that the long-term attention given to the issue of violence against women has created profound op-

portunities for social transformation. At the core of this social change was the act of naming violence as an issue in itself, rather than as a reaction or inevitable outcome of another problem. Naming violence against women by their male partners as a separate problem symbolically transformed women from invisible feelers of male intimate partners to separate individuals [59] [60]. Addressing polarization of the dialogue on the abuse against women would have a profound impact on harnessing the fight against their human rights violators. Of course, this paper calls for further studies on the niche of polarization in gender discourses.

6. How Does Polarized Dialogue Benefit Perpetrators of GBV on Women?

While both legal rules and cultural norms guide societal behaviours, the cultural realm has a big proportion. Culture shapes the public view of violence against women, especially when analysed in conjunction with variables such as perpetrator's identity, the form of violence, and the type of target. Open research indicates that perpetrator's characteristics, particularly ethnicity or tribe, shape the extent to which communities view certain acts as violence or not. In addition, when media coverage is in favour of cultural practices that regard GBV as normal, the polarization is enhanced and "institutionalized" in the minds of many. For a perpetrator, this is an endorsement of the use of violence against women.

Also, individuals who belong to a rebel group, for example, are more likely to be viewed as deviants perpetuating GBV than members of a particular church. This illuminates the significance of social membership in understanding gender and GBV dynamics. Other perspectives have focused on attributes of the violence itself, including the type and its severity, as influencing dissected contests over GBV acts. For example, incidents with higher casualties such as rape are more likely to be considered GBV than those without casualties, as might be expected with a slap. Also, the type of target of GBV matters in how the public perceives violence, based on both physical nearness and personal proximity to the victims. For instance, female university students are more likely to view violence against their colleagues as GBV as opposed to violence against a school dropout selling in a marketplace, which makes her more vulnerable to violence.

In recent decades, many reforms in Western criminal justice systems have been characterised by increased gravitation towards the voice of the public [61]. The arguments from this study underscore how societal biases can skew our sense of which acts of violence are justifiable, thereby influencing what we rationalize as morally permissible or defensible. In this regard, the process of meaning-making of GBV is put into the societal contest, yet it does not discriminate, nor does it confine itself to specific communities, socio-economic standing or income levels. Any person of any race, age, gender, sexual orientation or religion can be a perpetrator, victim or survivor of GBV. While a lot of criminal justice reforms are taking place around the world, making meaning out of GBV has remained a daunting challenge. Gerald Caplan, an early pioneer in

crisis intervention, argues that people are in a crisis when they face an obstacle to important life goals that is, for a time, insurmountable through the utilization of customary methods of problem-solving [62]. Therefore, perpetrators exploit the void in what GBV is all about and use this foggy understanding of GBV to achieve personified goals.

The legal approach to dealing with GBV could be delivered in the form of prosecuting offenders through the courts of law or any other established justice system while the cultural lens could only dictate the use of community condemnation of GBV. The flipside of these two approaches is the crisis in the form of great disagreement, and confusion which creates gaps in response to GBV. Michael E. Lillibridge and Philip G. Klukken [63] echo that a crisis is “an upset in equilibrium at the failure of one’s traditional problem-solving approach which results in disorganization, hopelessness, sadness, confusion and panic”. This gap is exploited by perpetrators of violence for what could be termed as “strategic rationale” of GBV.

It drives individuals to adopt GBV as a method to achieve their goals. In this sense, strategic rationale simply means that legal protection of women’s rights, including the moral imperative not to commit GBV has been outweighed by the perpetrator’s conviction and acceptance of it as the means to achieve their goals.

Therefore, inadequate defense of women and girl’s rights, implies the legal and normative rejection of GBV has remained underweight against the strategic objective of violence. Adopting strategic effectiveness to commit GBV, simply means rejecting or denying a woman the legal and normative protection of her human rights. Crisis, though an inevitable part of human existence, affects not just individuals but systems as well [64]. It is a threat to homeostasis, quality of life and equilibrium [64]. Therefore, because of the disadvantages it portends for women, and to which GBV has remained increasingly high, the gaps should become an object of study that could be theorized, and this paper attempts to provoke further research on it.

For example, the Zambian government adopted the Anti-Gender-Based Violence (AGBV) Act [65], and the recently established fast-track courts for GBV cases in the cities Kabwe and Lusaka of Central and Copperbelt provinces respectively. The courts are intended to dispense justice efficiently and sensitively for survivors of GBV and allow those cases to be processed separately from other judicial matters. However, the AGBV Act and fast-track courts are mostly accessible in Zambia’s urban areas, where statutory law is dominant. For Zambians living in rural towns or villages, matters are more frequently settled in local or customary courts and /or within homes. Zambia is among the countries with high incidences of GBV cases. According to Zambia Police Service, Annual Gender Based Violence Data Analysis [43], a total of 20,540 cases of GBV were reported countrywide in 2021 compared to 26,370 cases recorded in 2020. The difference in statistics illustrates a decrease of about 22%, which implies the prevalence is still high to threaten the rights of women. The analysis also indicated that out of the 20,540 GBV reported cases, 85% were criminal-related in nature.

Though the data is not sex-disaggregated, men shoulder the largest proportion of committing GBV in the country. It is, therefore, critical to investigate reasons why perpetrators have continued to use GBV as a method of seeking concessions or compliance from women in challenging times of their relationships or co-existence. Hypothetically, this investigation may assist in coming up with more strategies to reduce GBV incidences further.

Therefore, both law and culture are directives of behaviour by humans, backed by enforcement of other humans. But the crises emanating from enforcement of the law and culture are generally born out of a) the identity of those who initiate the rules; b) the rules' underlying purposes and values; c) how these rules are 1) initiated, 2) developed, 3) expressed, 4) and enforced; and d) the extent of their acceptance by those to whom they apply (Tamar and Tomasz 2021) [66]. As women's existence is more prescribed in cultural terms as opposed to human rights, it problematizes achieving consensus on GBV. The Cambridge Dictionary is explicit that morals relate to the standards of good or bad behaviour, fairness, honesty, etc. that each person believes in, rather than to laws. It could also mean behaving in ways considered by most people to be correct and honest. In this sense, cultural norms are conceived as the bedrock of societal fabric.

The interactive combination of perpetrator identity, kind of target, the severity of the violence, group memberships of the perpetrator and victim, societal norms, beliefs and traditions, etc., all bring the question of approving or disapproving of GBV, into serious contestations premised on conflicting public perspectives. One of the fundamental questions is whether culture—understood as a set of rules and desired postures, and behaviours forming the heritage of contemporary societies—can be helpful in eliminating, or at least diminishing, the harms that rules are designed to prevent. Does culture have a cure to prevent violations of rules [66]? One might reasonably assume that cultural prescriptions could be the most effective panacea to resolving gender-related issues. This is on assumption that culture cultivates certain orderly arrangements into and within society, illuminated in beliefs, worship, religion etc. Intuitively, it seems to make sense that if the problem is “culturally lensed”, then the proposed solution should be “culturally developed” as well. Although there is recognition that sanctions upon perpetrators were required in order to curb GBV, the reality has shown some signs of strategic rejection of anti-GBV rules in this regard.

The obstacles to better responding to GBV appear to be stuck in the social organizations of societies. Tamar and Tomasz [66] argue that the emergence of rules originates from the needs formulated by the community to which those rules regulate. They add that the normative character of rules therefore corresponds, above all, to the need to remove the state of chaos, disorder, and unpredictability. In this regard, when dealing with GBV, the crisis emanates from societal failure to remove the state of chaos, disorder, and unpredictability of anti-GBV efforts. It weakens the solidarity for illegitimizing GBV that women face, hence rendering the fight against GBV, an element undermined by the partial social construct of gender. The public disapproval of GBV shakes the validity of

anti-GBV efforts and detrimentally distorts attempts to legally deal with violence against women. This underscores why investigating public opinion on violence against women is important. Most acts of violence are illegal, yet the public does not always agree with or “believe in” that legal basis, especially if the ends are perceived as justifying the means—intentional dimension of GBV. Thus, this study argues that an individual’s choice to adopt GBV against a woman could also be viewed as containing “premeditated logic” because it inspires submission, and provokes “positive response” —at least in many instances, from the victim.

In this regard, GBV can be understood from a rationalist perspective as “forced bargaining” over ends, and this triggers the propensity to use it. “For coercion to work, the challenger must signal not only a credible threat to inflict pain when concessions are withheld but also a credible promise to remove the pain in the event concessions are forthcoming” [67], in Noyon [61]. It is done despite the fact that sometimes-violent actors generally suffer from a “credibility puzzle” which decreases incentives for their victims to give concessions. Similarly, language as a means of this transmission plays an important role in law and culture. It is an integral part of culture and sometimes equally culture is a part of what language describes [66]. This denotes that constraining the exercise of humans’ power over each other is primarily based on rules of law generally enforced and imposed by governments while rules of culture are enforced widely in non-stringent structures compared to the former. In turn, this has implications for how we prosecute GBV crimes.

For example, Noyon *et al.* [61] argue that in recent decades, many reforms in Western criminal justice systems have been characterized by an increased gravitation towards the voice of the public. In this sense, the fight against GBV is squarely a public-opinion-oriented approach, which is not fixed or static value but an interactive and unpredictable nature. Since the subjects of the rules are not identical, they are likely to differ in their reactions and these differences may affect the degree of compliance with the rules [66]. Generally, humans serve to support one another in their daily endeavours. However, the same humans may not have a genetic restraint against hurting each other [66]. Thus, as human beings interact, they are placed in mingling spaces where they are potentially exposed to the danger of abuse by others.

7. How Social Functions of Cultural Rules Precipitate the Existing Crisis

Considering the ad hoc manner in which the strategic objectives of GBV have been conceived, this paper attempts to utilize the work of Tamar and Tomasz [66] to highlight the social functions of culture. The idea is to demonstrate that in discharging social functions, culture has potential to directly or peripherally generate conditions that predict men’s perpetual use of violence against women;

1) Culture plays a function of an inherited message and a continuation role. The most important element of this function is continuity, and consequent building and rebuilding and upbuilding upon predecessors’ legacies. Every in-

interruption of continuity can be harmful and retrograding to culture. Culture creates its value by adding new elements to the existing ones. One of the key elements around which culture is created is its own integrity, coherence, and inseparability. Culture needs to be continued. It is neither created immediately nor finished at any specific moment of its existence. Culture is being built, overlaid, but also corrected; it is meandering, and it continues.

2) Culture also has the normative, and ordering function. The normative, regulating character of culture stems from the need to establish, consolidate and order the current desired patterns of behaviour, but also the needs, aspirations, anxieties, and feelings in a specific moment on the timeline. The liquid and constantly changing reality of societal relationships needs to be structured and often this happens with the help of culture. A good example is the cultural norms of co-existence based on trust that are indispensable in business. Studies on culture seem particularly actual in the context of cultural norms and their junction with legal norms—the two types of rules and principles that (should) regulate societal behaviours.

3) Culture has a normative, altering function. This function consists of postulating new paradigms and breaking down existing patterns. This function is inborn and refers to existing norms. It is particularly visible in the activities of artists who perform their objections to the existing reality. They do so through their own creative manifestations. In fact, this is the expectation towards the role of artists in society. As a result, new streams of sensitivity are created, which in time become acceptable, then patterning and consequently normative. From the initially elitist they transform into popular and, ultimately, become universal.

4) The valuing, judging function, which is backed by a unique form of sanctioning drawing on a catalogue of values to which individual and collective attitudes, affirmations, behaviours, and creations are related.

5) Focused social opposition often manifests in activities of engaged activists representing various subcultures, off-cultures, or alternative cultures. The result of this function of culture is not a change of norms but a manifestation of disagreement with the surrounding phenomena in the lives of societies. This disagreement with the norms does not necessarily have to mean any change in these norms. Instead, the result of them may be a change in the surrounding environment.

8. Conclusion

This study has not only enlisted factors affecting prospects for solid dialogue on GBV but also demonstrated that addressing GBV is not “one-size fits all event”. This is because, the permissibility of the “strategic value” of violent actions against women, thrives in multifaceted societal factors, that affect response capabilities, coordination and effectiveness. The confusing intersection between GBV and culture is another area that this study has immensely discussed to demonstrate its corrosiveness to the spirit of inclusivity and resilience against GBV. The deadlock is persistent in conflicting interests needed to jump start transforma-

tion of change which undermines concerted efforts. The polarity invalidates the fight against GBV, and perpetrators exploit it with ripple effect which could be intertwined in premature and less effective interventions. However, this paper also advocates that common position can still emerge out of consistent conversation and research on dialogue on GBV, which could be embodied in consensus. It is clear that continuation, ordering, altering, judging, and social opposition roles of culture are not free from inherent and disagreement with each other. This rivalry is exacerbated by the complex interaction of culture and legal approaches to interventions accorded to women's rights against GBV. The push and pull factors have been illuminated and likewise, GBV occurs where there is the deficit of concerted voice. Therefore, persistent inadequate cohesion renders the fight a "well-organized error" that translates the existing efforts unattractive to many. It is only through the whole-of-society approach that making content out of the controversy can be achieved in order to make anti-GBV discourse a subject worth investing our efforts. Currently, parties are failing to function as an organism because the focus is on diversity and not cohesion and inclusive capability. It is time to have unified stewards as opposed to fundamentally flawed systems or stand-alone mechanisms that perpetrators of violence have exploited against women's rights across the world.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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