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A Study on the Impact of Gender-Based Violence among Women in Rural Settings in Matapa Village, Lilongwe District, Malawi

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Abstract

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a prevalent issue that affects women in rural settings, with significant implications for their physical, emotional, and social well-being. With focus on Matapa Village in Malawi, the study reveals that GBV remains a prevalent problem, with a recent study reporting that 42% of women in rural areas have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime (National Statistical Office, 2016). This includes intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and harmful traditional practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation. The impact of GBV on women in Malawi is profound, with far-reaching consequences for their health and livelihoods. Research has shown that women who experience GBV are more likely to suffer from physical injuries, mental health disorders, and chronic health conditions. (World Health Organization, 2013) ^[18]. GBV can restrict women's access to education, employment, and social support networks, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization. Furthermore, GBV has intergenerational effects, as children who witness violence in the home are more likely to perpetrate or experience violence themselves in the future (UNICEF, 2014). In Lilongwe District, 45% of women reported experiencing physical violence from an intimate partner. 30% of women in rural areas of Lilongwe have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime and 60% experiencing emotional abuse (Ministry of Gender, 2018) ^[14]. This underscores the urgent need for comprehensive interventions that address the root causes of GBV and provide support for survivors in rural communities.

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1. Introduction

Gender-based violence is a wide spread issue that affects women worldwide, with particularly devastating consequences in rural settings. In Matapa Village, Lilongwe District, Malawi, GBV is a significant concern that has far-reaching impacts on the physical, emotional, and social-well-being of women (Mhango, C., & Phiri, T. 2020) ^[15]. This paper aims to explore the impact of GBV on women in rural areas of Matapa Village, shedding light on the challenges they face and the potential solutions to address this pressing issue. By examining the prevalence of GBV, its root cause, and the barriers to seeking help, better can understand the complex dynamics at play and work towards creating a safer and more equitable environment for women in rural Malawi.

1.1 Problem Statement

Gender-based violence is a pervasive issue in rural settings, with significant impacts on individuals, families, and communities. Despite efforts to address this issue, there is lack of comprehensive understanding of the specific impact of gender-based violence on this population. (Jewkes & Morell, 2018).

The problem is particularly prevalent among women who are often more vulnerable to gender-based violence due to their age and gender. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2013) approximately 1 in 3 women worldwide have experienced physical or sexual violence in their life time with the majority of these cases occurring in intimate partner relations.

In Malawi, a small landlocked country in south-eastern Africa, Gender-based violence is a significant issue that affects a large portion of the population. This is revealed in a study by Malawi Demographic and health survey (MDHS) in 2015 found that 42% of women aged 15-49 had experienced physical violence and 22% had experienced sexual violence (National Statistical Office, 2017). The statistics indicates the prevalence of GBV in Malawi and the urgent need for action to address the issue.

To address this gap in the rural setting of Lilongwe District, Malawi in Matapa Village where poverty, lack of access to education and healthcare, and cultural norms and beliefs contributes to the perpetuation of gender-based violence among women.

By exploring the experiences of survivors, the responses of communities and service providers, and the broader social and cultural context in which gender-based violence occurs, this research seeks to highlight and advocate for the urgent need for the implementation of effective interventions and support services in these settings.

1.2 Significance of the Study

The study on impact of gender-based violence among women in rural settings in Matapa Village, Lilongwe District, Malawi is important to everyone as gender-based violence can solely happen to anyone. In the context of rural settings where access to resources and support services may be limited, understanding the impact of gender-based violence on women is crucial hence need for developing effective interventions and policies to address this issue.

By examining the prevalence and types of violence experienced, as well as the social, economic, and health consequences, the study will provide valuable insights into the unique needs of this population.

The study will explore the barriers faced by women in rural settings in accessing support services and seeking help, as well as the cultural and societal factors that perpetuate gender-based violence. Therefore, by identifying these barriers the study can inform the development of targeted interventions that are tailored to the specific needs of women in rural settings. It also has the potential to contribute to the existing literature on gender-based violence and inform policy and programming efforts to address the issue.

1.3 General Objective

The study aimed at exploring The Impact of Gender-Based Violence among Women in Rural Settings in Matapa Village, Lilongwe District, Malawi.

Specific Objectives

The study was guided by the following research objective.

- To understand the prevalence and forms of gender-based violence experienced by women in rural settings.
- To identify factors contributing to gender-based violence in rural communities.
- To explore the barriers to reporting and seeking help for gender-based violence among women in rural settings.
- To identify effective strategies and interventions for preventing and addressing gender-based violence in rural communities.

1.4 Research Questions

- What are the prevalent and forms of gender-based violence experienced by women in rural settings?

- What are the factors contributing to gender-based violence in rural communities?
- What are the barriers to reporting and seeking help for gender-based violence among women in rural settings?
- What are effective strategies and interventions for preventing and addressing gender-based violence in rural communities?

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Prevalence and Incidence of Gender-Based Violence among Women in Rural Settings

In Malawi, a country where patriarchal norms and traditional gender-roles are deeply ingrained, women in rural areas face a heightened risk of experiencing GBV. A study conducted by Kishindo *et al.* (2017) ^[11-12] in Lilongwe District found that GBV is a significant problem in the area with high rates of physical, sexual, and emotional violence reported by women. It also highlighted the detrimental effects of GBV on women's physical and mental health, as well as their social and economic well-being. Women who experienced GBV are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder, and were also at increased risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

2.2 Consequences of Gender-Based Violence among Women in Rural Settings.

Mhango *et al.* (2019) ^[16-10] in rural Malawi revealed that GBV has far-reaching consequences for women's economic empowerment and economic independence. Women who experienced GBV were less likely to participate in decision making processes within their households and communities, and were also more likely to be economically dependent on their partners. This perpetuated a cycle of poverty and disempowerment, further exacerbating the impact of GBV on women in rural settings.

A study by Chirwa *et al.* (2018) ^[2] highlighted the role of traditional gender norms and cultural practices in perpetuating GBV in rural Malawi. It founded that beliefs about gender roles and expectations contributed to the normalization of violence against women, making it difficult for women to seek help or escape abusive situations. This underscores the need for comprehensive interventions that address both individual and structural factors contributing to GBV in rural settings.

Furthermore, GBV can have far-reaching social consequences for women in rural settings. Studies have found that women who experience GBV are more likely to face social stigma and isolation from their communities (Jewkes *et al.*, 2010) ^[10]. This can further worsen the psychological impact of GBV, as women may feel ashamed or afraid to seek help from others.

2.3 Barriers to Prevention and Seeking Help of Survivors of Gender-Based Violence in Rural Settings

One of the primary barriers that survivors of GBV in rural settings face is a lack and limited of awareness and education about GBV. This is so because there is a lack of understanding about what constitutes GBV and the resources available to survivors. The lack of awareness prevents survivors from recognizing that they are experiencing GBV and seeking help for their experiences (Ellsberg, Jansen, Heise, Watts & Garcia-Moreno, 2008).

Another significant barrier for survivors of GBV in these settings is the stigma and shame associated with experiencing violence. This is so as in many rural communities, there is a culture of silence around GBV, and survivors fear judgement

or retaliation if they speak out about their experiences. Hence this prevents survivors from seeking help and accessing the support they need to heal and recover from their experiences. Additionally, survivors face barriers related to access to services and resources. Rural communities often have limited access to support services such as shelters, counselling, and legal assistance, making it difficult for survivors to access the help they need. Transportation and financial barriers, as they may not have the means to travel to a service provider or pay for the support they need.

Social and cultural norms that perpetuate violence and inequality. In many rural communities, traditional gender roles and power dynamics making it difficult to seek help. Survivors may fear backlash from their communities or families if they speak out about their experiences, further isolating them and preventing from accessing support (Dutton & Goodman, 2005).

2.4 Recommendations to Address Gender-Based Violence among Women in Rural Settings.

According to WHO (2013), strengthening community-based support systems have been shown to be effective in addressing GBV in rural settings, as they can provide women with access to support services and resources within their own communities. These interventions may include establishing local support groups, training community members to recognize and respond to GBV, and collaborating with local organizations to provide services such as counselling and legal assistance. Increasing access to resources such as healthcare, legal services and economic opportunities can exacerbate the risk of GBV among women in rural areas. To address this, interventions should focus on increasing access to these resources through mobile clinics, legal aid clinics, and economic empowerment programs.

Additionally, efforts should be made to improve infrastructure in rural areas, such as roads and transportation systems, to facilitate access to services. Empowering women through education and awareness-raising. Education and awareness-raising campaigns can play a crucial role in preventing GBV and empowering women to seek help (Abramsky, 2014) ^[1]. These campaigns should be tailored to the specific needs and cultural norms of rural communities, and may include workshops, community events, and media campaigns. By increasing awareness of GBV and promoting gender equality, these interventions can help to shift social norms and reduce the prevalence of violence against women.

Engaging men and boys in prevention efforts is essential, as they play a key role in perpetuating or challenging harmful gender norms, interventions should focus on promoting positive masculinity and challenging traditional notions of masculinity that contribute to violence against women. This may include engaging men and boys in workshops and awareness-raising campaigns as well as providing training on gender equality and respectful relationships.

In-conclusion, addressing GBV among women in rural settings requires a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach that takes into account, the unique challenges faced by this population. By strengthening community-based support systems, increasing access to resources, empowering women through education and awareness-raising, and engaging men and boys in prevention efforts can work towards creating safer and more equitable communities for women in rural areas.

2.5 Research Gap

Despite of the literature review discussed there could be lack of comprehensive studies focusing specifically on the experiences and perspectives of women in these communities. Existing research may have primarily focused on urban areas or may have been more generalized in nature, overlooking the unique challenges and dynamics faced by rural women. Therefore, the study aims to fill the gap by conducting in-depth qualitative research that engages with rural women to understand their experiences of gender-based violence, the barriers they face in accessing support services, and the specific cultural and social factors that contribute the prevalence of violence in their communities. This research could provide valuable insights for policymakers, service providers, and community organizations working to address gender-based violence in rural settings in Malawi.

3.0 Research Methodology

This is a systematic process of planning, conducting, and analysing research studies in order to answer specific research questions and objectives. Therefore, in line with this study which aimed at exploring the impact of gender-based violence among women in rural settings, the appropriate research design, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques will be used in order to ensure the validity and reliability of the research findings.

3.1 Research Design

This is the overall plan or strategy that a researcher uses to investigate a particular research question or hypothesis (Creswell, 2014). In the context of studying the impact of gender-based violence among women in rural settings in Matapa Village, Lilongwe District, Malawi a phenomenological research design is focused on exploring the lived experiences of individuals and understanding the meaning they ascribe to those experiences.

3.2 Population of the Study

This refers to the specific group of individuals who are the focus of the research (Cresswell, 2014). In the context of the study, the population involve all individuals living in Matapa Village with various age groups, education levels, occupation and socio-economic backgrounds. In line with the study topic on the impact of gender-based violence among women in rural settings in Matapa Village, Lilongwe District, Malawi, the population of the study would include women who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing gender-based violence. These women would be the target participants for data collection and analysis in order to understand the effects of gender-based violence on their lives and well-being.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

In the context of the study qualitative research methods was used. The researcher employed various methods such as in-depth-interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation. In-depth interviews were conducted with women who have experienced gender-based violence, as well as key stakeholders such as community leaders, healthcare providers, and social workers. These interviews helped the researcher understand the specific forms of violence experienced by women, the impact on their physical and mental health, and the barriers they face in accessing support services.

Focus group discussions were also valuable method for exploring the social norms and cultural beliefs that contribute to gender-based violence in rural settings. By bringing together a diverse group of participants, researcher facilitated discussions on topics such as gender roles, power dynamics, and community responses to violence. Participant observation further enhanced the research by allowing the researcher to immerse themselves in the daily lives of women in rural settings, gaining a first-hand understanding of their experiences and challenges. In addition, primary data collection methods, researcher also conducted a thorough review of existing literature on gender-based violence in rural settings, drawing on academic studies, reports from government publications, and non-governmental organizations.

Overall, a qualitative research approach provided a rich and deep understanding of the impact of gender-based violence among women in Matapa Village, Lilongwe District. By incorporating the voices and experiences of women themselves, as well as key stakeholders in the community, this research will inform policy and programming efforts to address gender-based violence and support survivors in rural settings.

3.4 Data Analysis Tools

Qualitative research was used in the study. Content analysis method was used to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within data. It involves systematically scrutinizing the text to identify themes patterns, and trends within the context. It also allows a researcher to explore and understand the underlying meanings and patterns within the data, providing rich and detailed insights into the research topic.

3.5 Summary

The research employed a phenomenological research design to explore the impact of gender-based violence in Matapa Village, Lilongwe District, Malawi. A purposive sampling was used to select 40 respondents. This help to ensure that the sample is diverse and representative of the population being studied leading to more meaningful and comprehensive findings. In terms of data collection through a qualitative research method, in-depth interviews and key informant's interviews was done. These allowed the researcher to delve deeply into the thoughts, experiences, and perspectives of individuals, providing valuable insights that may not be captured through other research methods as well help to inform research findings. Key informants involved individuals who have expert knowledge or experience. Content analysis was used for data analysis to identify patterns and themes in the data, allowing them to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied. This research method prioritized understanding the subjective experiences, perspectives, and meanings that individuals provided in line with the topic.

4.0 Data Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

This is whereby research findings are presented and interpreted. It helps to answer the research questions and provides insights into the phenomenon being studied. The data analysis section involved organizing and categorizing the data collected through coding, identifying themes or patterns, and making connections between different pieces of information. On discussion, the findings were interpreted in relation to the research questions and existing literature. This

involves explaining the significance of the findings, discussing any unexpected results, and considering the implications of the findings for theory, practice, or policy. It is an important part of the research project as it helps to demonstrate the rigor and validity of the study and contributes to the existing body of knowledge in the field.

Demographic Data

In relation to the study which is impact of gender-based violence among women in rural settings it includes information such as the age, race education level, income level, and marital status of the women affected by this issue. The age group of 25-35 of women reveal that they are more likely to experience gender-based violence in rural settings, also those with lower levels of education are at higher risk. This can help to inform the development of targeted prevention programs, support services, and policy initiatives to address the unique needs of these populations.

Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence among women in Rural Settings

There is a significant problem that has far-reaching impacts on women's physical, sexual, emotional and economic abuse. According to a study conducted by the Lilongwe District Health Office, GBV is alarmingly common in rural areas, with a prevalence rate of 65% among women. This high prevalence can be attributed to various factors, including traditional gender norms that perpetuate the subordination of women, limited access to education and economic opportunities, and a lack of awareness about women's rights. Intimate partner violence (IPV), with 1 in 3 women reporting experiencing physical or sexual violence from their partners. This has not only immediate physical and psychological consequences for women but also perpetuates a cycle of violence that can have long-lasting effects on families and communities.

Women in these settings also face other forms of GBV, such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation, and sexual harassment. These forms of violence not only violate women's rights but also have serious implications for their health and well-being. Therefore, there is a need to raise awareness about the issue, provide support services for survivors, and advocate for policy changes to protect women's rights. However, more needs to be done to effectively combat GBV and create a safer environment for women in rural areas.

Factors Contributing to Gender-Based Violence among Women in Rural Settings

The study founded that socioeconomic factors contributes as women in rural settings often face higher levels of poverty and limited access to resources, which make them vulnerable. Economic dependence on their partners or family members also make it difficult for women to leave abusive relationships. Cultural norms and practices which involve traditional gender roles and expectations in rural communities perpetuate attitudes that condone violence against women. These norms also discourage women from seeking help or speaking out about their experiences of abuse. Lack of awareness and education which involve limited access to education and information about gender-based violence prevent women in rural areas from recognizing and addressing abusive behavior. This lack of awareness also contributes to a culture of silence.

Limited access to support services, in rural areas often have fewer resources and support services for survivors of gender-based violence, such as shelters, counselling, and legal assistance. This lack of support makes it difficult for women to escape abusive situations and seek help. Power dynamics, gender-based violence is often rooted in unequal power dynamics between men and women. In rural settings, traditional patriarchal structures may reinforce these power imbalances, making it easier for men to exert control over women through violence.

Alcohol and substance abuse. Substance abuse, particularly alcohol, contribute to gender-based violence in rural areas. Alcohol consumption is often normalized in many rural communities, and it exacerbate existing tensions and lead to violent behavior. Limited access to justice, women in rural areas face barriers to accessing the justice system, such as long distances to courts, lack of legal representation, and fear of retaliation from their abusers. This prevent women from seeking legal recourse for gender-based violence.

Overall, addressing these factors requires a multi-faceted approach that includes raising awareness about gender-based violence, providing support services for survivors, promoting gender equality, and strengthening the justice system to hold perpetrators accountable. By addressing the root causes of gender-based violence in rural settings a safer and more equitable communities for women can be created.

Barriers of survivors to seeking support

The study found that in Matapa Village in Lilongwe District, Malawi there is lack and limited awareness of the support services available to them for gender-based violence, hence preventing them to seek help when they need it. Stigma and shame, women who have experienced gender-based violence feel ashamed or stigmatized, which prevent them from seeking support. In rural communities where traditional gender norms are prevalent, survivors may fear judgment or exclusion from their community. Limited access to services, there are limited resources and support services available for survivors of gender-based violence hence makes it difficult for women to seek help and support. Economic barriers, such as lack of transportation or financial resources to access services. While cultural beliefs and practices discourage these women, for example domestic violence is believed to be a private matter that should be resolved within the family. Fear of retaliation from their abusers hence preventing them from reaching out for support. Lack of trust in authorities such as the police, social services hence the survivor is unable to seek support.

Conclusion

According to the Results, the Researcher draws the following Conclusions:

- Gender-based violence continues to have a devastating impact on women in rural settings, such as Lilongwe District in Malawi.
- The physical, emotional, and psychological consequences of such violence are profound and long-lasting, affecting not only the individual women but also their families and communities.
- It is imperative that comprehensive and culturally sensitive interventions are put in place to address this issue and provide support to survivors.
- By raising awareness, promoting gender equality, and holding perpetrators accountable. Together we are able to work towards creating a safer and more equitable society for all women.

Recommendations

The researcher suggests that there is need:

- To advocate for increased funding and resources for programs that specifically target gender-based violence in rural settings.
- Emphasize more on the importance of education and awareness-raising initiatives to challenge harmful attitudes and beliefs that contribute to gender-based violence in rural communities. This can be done through community workshops, radio programs, and outreach programs.
- Provide training for healthcare providers and social workers on how to identify and support survivors of gender-based violence.
- To improve access to support services for survivors, such as counselling, legal assistance, and safe housing options.
- Create safe spaces for survivors to seek help and support, such as women's shelters or community centers.
- Encourage survivors to speak out and seek help by reducing stigma and shame associated with being a victim of gender-based violence.
- Provide ongoing support and follow-up care for survivors to ensure their safety and well-being in the long term.
- To highlight successful strategies and best practices for preventing and responding to gender-based violence in rural settings, such as community mobilization and empowerment programs.
- Sharing of stories and testimonials from women in rural areas who have experienced gender-based violence, to raise awareness and amplify their voices.
- To call for policy changes and legal reforms to better protect women in rural areas from gender-based violence, and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable.
- To encourage collaboration and partnerships between government agencies, NGO's, and local community organizations to address gender-based violence in rural settings effectively.

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