



THE  
**Zambakari** ADVISORY

## Policy Brief

### **Men's Participation in Combating Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in Zimbabwe**

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## Executive Summary

Perpetrators of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) are predominantly male, with women constituting the majority of its victims. The resultant association of victimhood with women places the responsibility of combating SGBV on women and excludes men. Gender discourses and policies in Zimbabwe continue to be framed around fighting male dominance or the fact that men wield power and influence in a societal hierarchy which enables them to control women. This focus alienates men who often construe policies on gender equality as disempowering them. They accordingly resist them which exacerbates SGBV instead of reducing its incidence. Yet, social relations do not necessarily divide men and women into irreconcilable binaries whose interaction lacks common interest and shared values. Relations between women and men in the context of kinship structures and the public arena in Zimbabwe are as much characterized by the congruence of interest as they are by contestation. The single story of men perpetrating violence against women excludes other stories between the genders that portray affection, care, shared objectives, and mutual interest. So far, policies intended to promote gender equality have not explored policy alternatives that channel male dominance into efforts to eliminate SGBV in Zimbabwe. There is a need to harness these areas of common interest and utilize them to combat SGBV. Efforts at combating SGBV are likely to succeed with men as partners rather than adversaries. Recent research on men, violence and peacebuilding in Zimbabwe shows that men believe that they are in a better position than women to convince other men to refrain from violence (Jaji forthcoming).

## Context

SGBV remains a serious problem in Zimbabwe in spite of laws such as the Domestic Violence Act of 2006. One in three women aged between 15 and 49 has experienced physical violence, and one in four in the same age bracket has experienced sexual violence.<sup>1</sup> Fourteen percent of women in the 15-49 age group have experienced sexual violence at least once in their lifetime.<sup>2</sup> Women's membership in parliament constitutes only 35 percent<sup>3</sup> and most of these women rarely raise the issue of SGBV and gender equality for fear of being denigrated as prostitutes.<sup>4</sup> In this context, it is highly unlikely that SGBV can be addressed effectively when men who constitute 65% of members of parliament do not actively get involved. While data are increasingly showing that women are engaging in domestic violence,<sup>5</sup> men continue to be the dominant perpetrators. The fact that men perpetrate more violence on women than vice versa and cultures that stigmatize male victims have rendered them reluctant to report abuse which feeds into assumptions that men are not affected by violence. These factors obscure the role that men can play in combating SGBV. The dominant male perpetrator-female victim narrative has created the impression that men and

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<sup>1</sup> UNFPA Zimbabwe, 2016. <http://zimbabwe.unfpa.org/topics/gender-based-violence-0> (accessed on April 1, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Demographic and Health Survey 2015, <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR322/FR322.pdf> (accessed on April 1, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> UN Women Africa, <http://africa.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/eastern-and-southern-africa/zimbabwe> (accessed on May 6, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Priscilla Misihairambwi-Mushonga, a female member of parliament who often champions gender equality usually faces a backlash in the form of personal attacks and accusations that she is an attention seeker.

<sup>5</sup> There is increasing coverage in Zimbabwean media of male victims of domestic violence. A local newspaper, The Chronicle, (Harare, December 19, 2015) placed the number of men who had approached the magistrates' court in 2015 suing for domestic violence at 2,414, <http://www.chronicle.co.zw/2400-male-victims-report-domestic-violence/> (accessed March 24, 2018).

women do not have areas of common interest where men can use their dominant position in the Zimbabwean society to end SGBV. Much is said about how Zimbabwean cultures condone male violence against women but very little is said about how the same cultures also expect men to protect women. What gets lost in the male perpetrators-female victims binary is the fact that violence against women also affects men in the sense that SGBV casts victims' sons, fathers and brothers who are culturally expected to protect their mothers, wives, sisters, and women in general as failing to discharge their duties. Kinship structures and social organization in Zimbabwe form a complex web which challenges the assumption that women and men have dichotomous relationships that render relations between them adversarial. For instance, Zimbabwe's cultures censure men who disrespect, insult or beat their mothers. If a son beats his mother, he is expected to pay compensation directly to her or indirectly to her family of birth. In contrast, sons who beat their fathers may be expected to apologize but they are not culturally required to compensate them. Zimbabwean cultures predominantly trace descent through the male line and in the logic of this system, mothers are regarded as outsiders who should be pacified when aggrieved while fathers are expected to forgive their children by virtue of being one with them. Men are not only perpetrators of much of SGBV violence; they also have affectionate relationships with women that can be utilized to promote their participation in efforts to stop SGBV. It is thus important to consider men's specific relationships with women based on kinship structures in Zimbabwean cultures and acknowledge the role that they can play in the fight against SGBV. Men already have the platform but what is lacking is the use of this platform to combat SGBV. An active role by men in the fight against SGBV would also dispel the myth that women who are actively engaged in this area are anti-culture or purveyors of "Western" culture.

### **Policy Alternatives**

Ending SGBV will remain a challenge in Zimbabwe as long as it excludes men and continues to be regarded as a female occupation, which is denigrated as anti-culture. Placing the responsibility of combating SGBV solely on women's shoulders as the majority of its victims will not eliminate SGBV. Fighting SGBV needs to include men who are the dominant perpetrators of domestic violence. There is a need for the Ministry of Women and Youth and women's organizations to collaborate with men's organizations. This would enable the country to address SGBV holistically instead of the current fragmentary approaches that separate female and male victims. It is important to transform the advantages that men have in a male-dominated society into a resource that can be channeled towards combating SGBV. This can be achieved by:

1. Imbedding efforts to combat SGBV in men's gender roles so that they embrace it as part of their responsibility in society.
2. Engaging precolonial Zimbabwean cultures which, contrary to the prevailing assumption, required men to respect women in spite of their dominance in society. This would address the tendency among many Zimbabwean men to label the promotion of women's rights as "Western" and express hostile views towards women who are involved in the fight against SGBV.
3. Formulating policies that acknowledge male victims of SGBV and mainstream their narratives on SGBV, instead of confining them to the periphery which perpetuates the erroneous view that current policies to combat SGBV are intended to disempower men.

### **Policy Recommendations**

In view of the current focus on women as victims of SGBV, this policy brief recommends that the Ministry of Women and Youth and women's organizations:

- Work closely with men's organizations such as Padare in order to transcend the male perpetrator-female victim binary which overlooks male victims, and also address the concern that the existence of a women's ministry, when there is none for men, is discriminatory against men. This concern could be addressed by renaming the Ministry by replacing women with gender.
- Channel men's sociocultural dominance in Zimbabwe towards the fight against SGBV. This can be achieved by drawing men's attention to areas of common interest with women and utilizing local kinship structures that create affectionate relationships and mutual respect between women and men.
- Promote policies against SGBV that harness local cultures by engaging traditional leaders who are regarded as custodians of local cultures in Zimbabwe. This would address the claim that women's organizations are influenced by foreign cultures — a claim which has led to resistance by men who feel alienated by efforts to combat SGBV. In line with this recommendation, the Ministry and women and men' organizations need to acknowledge areas of common interest between women and men and utilize them for the benefit of both male and female victims of violence.
- Recognize and address SGBV against both women and men in recognition of the fact that gender equality is not only about protecting women but also vulnerable men. This can happen if the various stakeholders whom this policy brief addresses synchronize their activities and work together to dispel mutual suspicion. In order to put into action this recommendation, stakeholders should ensure that domestic violence against men is not trivialized so that male victims can seek the protection provided for in Zimbabwe's Domestic Violence Act.